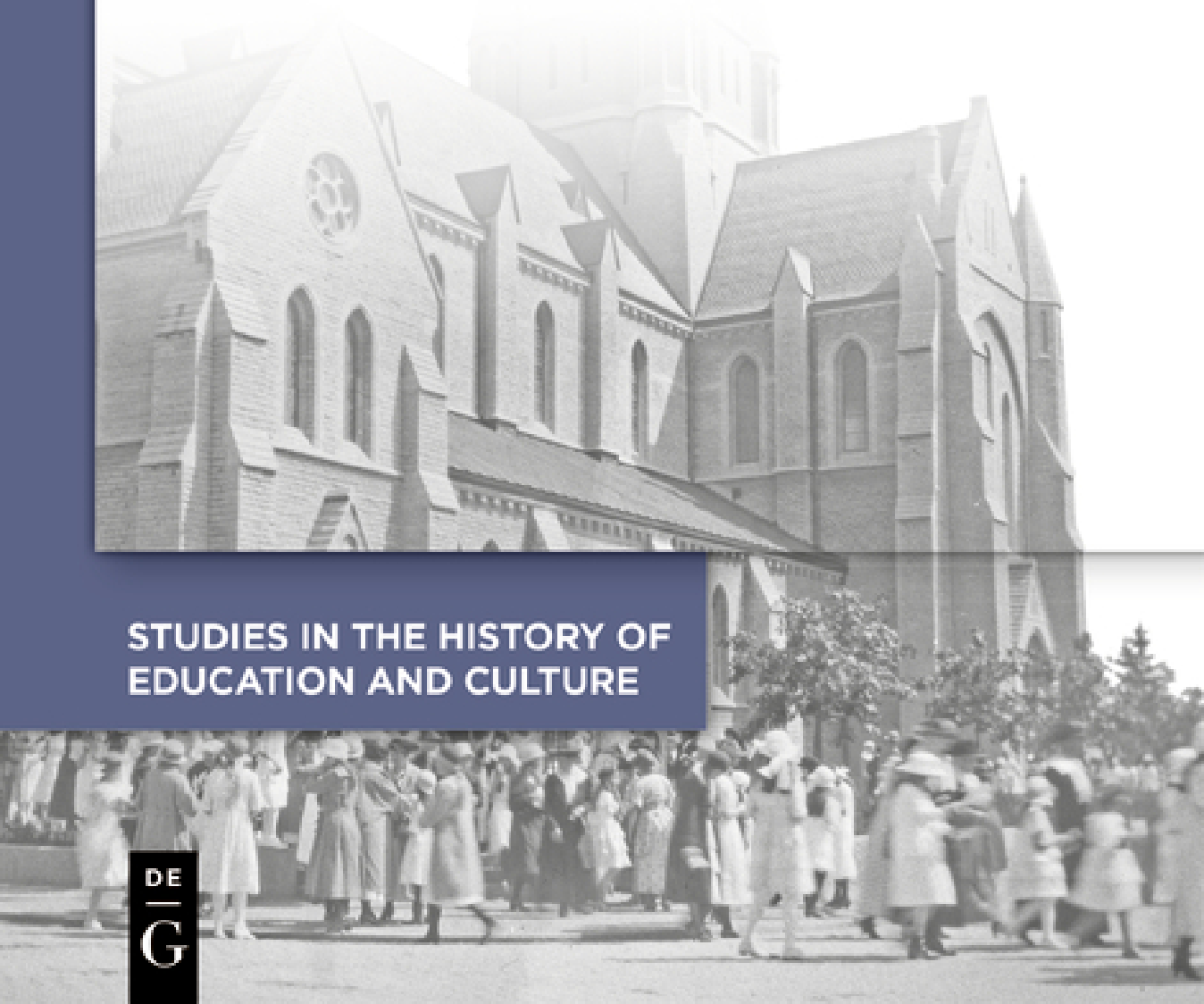
DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

# SECULAR SCHOOLING IN THE LONG TWENTIETH CENTURY?

## CHRISTIANITY AND EDUCATION IN NORWAY, SWEDEN, AND THE NETHERLANDS

*Edited by Merethe Roos, Johannes Westberg, and Henrik Edgren*



STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE

DE G

**Secular Schooling in the Long Twentieth Century?**

# Studies in the History of Education and Culture

Edited by
Meike Sophia Baader, Elke Kleinau, and Karin Priem

## Volume 5

# Secular Schooling in the Long Twentieth Century?

Christianity and Education in Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands

Edited by
Merethe Roos, Johannes Westberg, Henrik Edgren

DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

This open access publication is funded by the University of South-Eastern Norway, Uppsala University, and the University of Groningen.

ISBN 978-3-11-108243-1
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-115257-8
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-115300-1
ISSN 2748-9531
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. For details go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2024939504**

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

© 2024 with the author(s), editing © 2024 Merethe Roos, Johannes Westberg, Henrik Edgren, published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston. This book is published with open access at www.degruyter.com.

Cover image: Graduation at Olaus Petri Church, June 1921, photo: Waldemar Tegner / Örebro Stadsarkiv, CC-BY.
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

# Table of Contents

Merethe Roos
**Education, National Identity, and Religion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century: The Diversity of Three European Nations —— 1**

## Norway

Karl Christian Alvestad
**The Middle Ages and the Papacy in Norwegian Education 1860 – 1939 —— 19**

Hege Roll-Hansen
**The Meaning of a Christian Education: Priests, Pedagogues, and Politicians Negotiating the Norwegian Curriculum —— 37**

Merethe Roos
**Towards a New Understanding of Education: Perspectives on the Debate of the Purpose clause for the Norwegian Schools around 1960 —— 55**

Jørn Varhaug
**The Norwegian White Paper "Identity and Dialogue," 1995, as Part of Gudmund Hernes's Reform Strategies —— 73**

## Sweden

Johan Wickström
**The Transition from Paganism to Christianity in History Textbooks from 1900 to 1930 —— 91**

Emma Hellström
**Christian Education and the Creation of Democratic Citizens: Presentations of Christianity in Swedish Textbooks during the 1930s and 1940s —— 109**

Janne Holmén
**Social Democracy, Confessional Pluralism, and Value Indoctrination: Swedish Textbooks on Christianity and Religion, 1945 – 1974 —— 131**

Henrik Edgren
**Post-Christian Perspectives in Swedish Upper Secondary School Textbooks 1990 – 2018 —— 151**

## The Netherlands

Sjaak Braster
**From National School to Societal Pillar: The Secularization of Public Education in the Netherlands (1801 – 1920) —— 173**

John Exalto
**Bridge between Tradition and Situation: Titus M. Gilhuis and the Changes in Confessional Education in the Netherlands, 1945 – 1985 —— 201**

Tina van der Vlies
**History Textbooks as Discursive Mediators: The Case of Dutch Tolerance, 1920 – 1990 —— 223**

Paul Vermeer
**Religious Education as Latent Secularization in the Netherlands: An Analysis of Two Contemporary and Widely Used Textbooks —— 245**

Mette Buchardt
**Epilogue: Textbooks as a Prism for the Politics of Secularization and "Cultural Heritage" —— 269**

**Author presentations —— 279**

Merethe Roos

# Education, National Identity, and Religion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century: The Diversity of Three European Nations

What can school textbooks and curricula tell us about the values and cultural identity in a country, and how do textbooks and curricula reflect the country's religious heritage? These questions form the basis of the chapters in this present volume. Their point of departure is the recent turn focusing on the roles of education and educational systems and practices in the phenomena of nation-building and national identity, a turn that might be seen as a response to the strong focus on globalization observed in recent decades. Daniel Tröhler, who has made substantial contributions in this field, emphasizes that the popularity of globalization theories, including within educational research, has resulted in less attention towards the question of how the nation can be an identity-forming principle in everyday life.[1] Tröhler underlines that the concept of "nation" must be distinguished from the concept of "state." While "state" points towards loyalty to one's country (state), "nation" should be defined as allegiance to an ethnic group or to given values. In this sense, "nation" is close to Benedict Anderson's definition of the term *imagined communities*, to coin a phrase from his acclaimed 1984 volume.[2] Nationalism is thus to be understood as a discursive formation or a discourse, as a sense of belonging or as inclusion.[3] Thus, nationalism is also closely related to forming citizens and citizen education. In this book, we will provide examples of how interpretation of religion and religious values can also contribute to the question of national identity and citizenship, and shed light upon the extent to which the school's teaching reflects the secularization that many believe characterizes the society's teaching in general.

The book can be seen in light of a recently increased focus on how curricula and teaching materials can contribute to creating national mindsets. A number of examples can be seen in Tröhler's recent edited book, where educational scholars

1 Daniel Tröhler, "Introduction: Understanding Nationalism through the Lens of Education," in *Education, Curriculum and Nation-Building: Contributions of Comparative Education to the Understanding of Nations and Nationalism*, ed. Daniel Tröhler (New York: Routledge, 2023), 1–6.

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

3 Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-001

from different countries shed light on the relationship between nationalism and education.[4] In the book's introduction, Tröhler also highlights earlier examples of texts that illuminate the connection between schools' teaching materials and nationalism, such as Rebekka Horlacher's analysis of Swiss curricula and Elisabeth King's investigations of textbooks in Rwanda.[5] A focus on the role of religion, and particularly Christianity, in the process of creating national mindsets adds further value to the work already carried out in these studies.

The chapters in this book all shed light upon three Northern European countries – Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands – and the chapters thematize the time span from the start of the twentieth century up to the present day. Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands are all modern welfare states, with comparatively efficient tax-benefit systems, employment protections, and active labor-market policies, as well as equitable social contracts. These countries are also characterized by relatively small gaps in income, strong economies, gender equality, and stable political systems, and they share liberal values, for instance in relation to LGBTQ+ rights. Moreover, there is a high degree of trust among the population and between the population and the political authorities.[6] According to the Danish Social Capital project (SoCap), Norway and Sweden rank as the second and third among the most trustworthy countries in the world, while the Netherlands is considered as the fifth most trustworthy country outside the Nordic region.[7] The Scandinavian perspective in this book is complemented by a concluding commentary written by the Danish theologian Mette Buchardt. These Danish viewpoints may contribute to shedding an even brighter comparative light upon the countries studied in this book.

In addition to these structural similarities between the countries studied in this book, there are also strong cultural and historical ties between the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. Shipping and trade have connected Scandinavia and the Netherlands for centuries and, particularly during the Dutch Golden Age, a large number of Scandinavians settled in the European metropole of Amsterdam.[8] Today, the circulation often goes in the opposite direction. Scandinavia

**4** Tröhler, "Introduction: Understanding Nationalism."

**5** Rebekka Horlacher, "Civics in the Curricular Construction of the Loyal National Citizens: A Comparative View of Switzerland," *Croatian Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (2020): 83–99; Elisabeth King, *From Classroom to Conflict in Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

**6** Gert Tinggard Svendsen, *Trust* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2018), 17.

**7** Svendsen, *Trust*, 17.

**8** Sølvi Sogner, *Og skuta lå i Amsterdam: Et glemt norsk innvandrersamfunn i Amsterdam 1621–1720* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2012), and "Scandinavian Women to Amsterdam in the Dutch Golden Age: Migratory Stage," in *Femmes sans frontières. Stratégies transnationales féminines face à la mondialisation (XVIIIe–XXIe siècles)*, ed. Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga et al. (Bern: Peter Lang,

(particularly Norway and Sweden) has become an attractive travel destination for the Dutch. They are tempted by untouched nature and significantly more space than they have in their own country. The languages also bear stamps of these strong and historically rooted connections. Dutch words have become a natural part of the Scandinavian languages, while Scandinavian words have entered the Dutch language as well. There has also been a strong cultural exchange between the countries. The great Dutch school reformer Jan Ligthart, for example, gained great influence in Norway and Sweden at the beginning of the twentieth century.[9] Conversely, writers such as the Swede Selma Lagerlöf and the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen became important in the Netherlands.[10]

## Religious Differences

Despite these similarities, there are also remarkable social, cultural, and political differences between Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands. A significant issue concerns the question of religion, and religion's place in society and education. Although the Scandinavian countries have consisted of various unions and geopolitical tensions throughout the centuries (Norway, for instance, was a part of Denmark from 1380 to January 1814; in August 1814, Norway entered into a personal union with Sweden that lasted until 1905), the Scandinavian countries have been characterized by a strong unity. This unity can be seen through a homogenous and constitutionally enshrined religious identity, linked to Evangelical Lutheran theology. Norway and Sweden have traditionally had strong ties between state and church, with a history that can be traced back to the Reformation, when absolute monarchs required their subjects to pledge alliance to the Lutheran religion.[11] The state church system has extended into our own time. The Church of Sweden was separated from the state in 2000, while the Norwegian church became a legal and independent entity in 2017. Norway and Sweden have also had uniform national

2011), 31–48. See also Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad: Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17e-eeuuws Amsterdam* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), 22.

**9** Willy Aagre, *Folkeopplyseren: Anna Sethne og den norske reformpedagogikken* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016), 74–76; Anna Larsson, "Skolämnet hembygdskunskap 1919–1980: Tillkomst och karriär i läroplanhistorisk perspektiv," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9, no. 1 (2022): 74.

**10** Janke Klok, "Ibsen in Dutch Theatres and the Sustainability of Nora," *Nordlit* 34 (May 2015): 445–64; Suzan van Dijk, ed., and Jo Nesbitt, trans., *"I Have Heard of You": Foreign Women's Writing Crossing the Dutch Border: From Sappho to Selma Lagerlöf* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004).

**11** Hallgeir Elstad and Per Halse, *Norsk Kristendomshistorie* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2021), 86; and Martin Berntson, Beril Nilsson, and Cecilia Wejryd, *Kyrka i Sverige: introduktion till svensk kyrkohistoria* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2012).

school systems, in which the Bible and the church's confessional writings were mandatory parts of the statutory education. The first educational act was approved in Norway in 1739 (Lov om Almueskolen paa Landet), while the first Swedish law on common education (Folkskolestadgan) was enacted in 1842. There were also strong ties between the church and the school, and confessional teaching dominated in schools until well into the twentieth century.

The Netherlands lacks this confessionally conditioned identity seen in the Scandinavian countries. The country – or perhaps more correctly, the provinces that today make up the country of the Netherlands – has been characterized by a religious diversity and a high degree of religious tolerance ever since the establishment of the Dutch Republic in 1579. The Union of Utrecht, adopted in 1581, stated that everyone had the right to decide their own religion and that no one would be prosecuted because of their faith.[12] This tolerant policy continued after the Dutch Republic of the United Provinces was formally recognized in 1648. During its heyday in the seventeenth century and in the first half of the eighteenth century, the Republic had a strong Reformed ethos, with several privileges for the members of the Reformed Church.[13] But no one was forced to change his or her religion, and the Dutch Republic became a safe haven for many religious minorities from other countries who were persecuted at home because of their faith.[14] Nevertheless, Catholics were second-rate citizens until the Dutch constitutional reform in 1848.[15]

The invasion of the French and the establishment of the Batavian Republic in 1795 led to a strengthening of the position of the Catholic Church, eventually causing the separation of the church and the state in 1796. The 1815 constitution, and its revision in 1848, contributed to giving space to the existing diversity, and the freedom of ecclesiastical organization introduced with the constitutional reform in 1848 allowed the Catholic Church to reestablish the episcopal hierarchy. This mobilized the country's Catholic population and challenged the perceived notion of the Netherlands as a Protestant nation. However, the Catholic mobilization also contributed to an increased awareness among the country's different Protestant

**12** Sophie Christine den Dekker-van Bijsterveld, *De verhouding tussen kerk en staat in het licht van de grondrechten* (Zwolle: Tjeenk-Villink, 1988), 10.

**13** Joris van Eijnatten and Fred van Lieburg, *Nederlandse Religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005).

**14** Hans Knippenberg, "The Changing Relationship between State and Church/Religion in the Netherlands," *GeoJournal* 67 (2006): 317–30; Knippenberg, "The Political Geography of Religion: Historical State-Church Relations in Europe and Recent Challenges," *GeoJournal* 67 (2007): 253–65.

**15** Gerlof D. Homan, "Catholic Emancipation in the Netherlands," *The Catholic Historical Review* 52, no. 2 (1966): 201–11.

groups, and towards the end of the nineteenth century the reformed church was strongly divided, with liberal and orthodox groups organizing themselves in different organizations.[16] The organization of school and education strongly increased the tensions between the religious groups in the country. Freedom of education had been introduced with the constitutional reform of 1848, and the liberal educational act of 1857 allowed religious groups the rights to establish private schools of an explicitly religious nature. This contributed to strengthening group identity and ensured that the different organizations increased their power. Thus, with respect to religion, the history of the Netherlands paints a rather complex picture: the country has been open to competing religious currents from the outside world, and the religious diversity seen in our time is hardly recent. From within, the Netherlands is characterized by a fragmented landscape.[17]

This fragmented religious landscape laid the ground for the vertical separation that characterized Dutch society from the end of the nineteenth century, known as pillarization (*verzuiling*). The pillars – Protestants, Roman Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals – had their own social organizations and ensured political and social segmentation. Thus, if you were a Protestant, you married a Protestant, sent your children to a Protestant school, went to a Protestant university, read Protestant newspapers, voted for Protestant political parties, were a member of a Protestant trade union, were looked after by a Protestant healthcare system if you fell ill, and so on. The same held true for the other pillars. Historians James Kennedy and Jan P. Zwemer have argued that this segmentation had a strong integrative effect: it strengthened the subcultures and increased the discipline within each of the groups.[18] At the beginning of the 1920s, the Roman Catholics and the orthodox Protestants had gained a strong social position: their schools were financed by the state, and in the political sense they constituted a majority that lasted for close to half a century. However, the general narrative on Dutch history has been that the pillarization ceased in the 1970s, and that the Netherlands became depillarized (*ontzuild*), that is, secularized and individualized. Taken as a whole, one can view the religious history of the Netherlands as historian of religion Peter van Rooden has done: it consists of radical breaks in the relationship between religion and society.[19] According to Rooden, the Netherlands changes from a confessional state model to a state with an ecumenical Protestant identity at the end of the eight-

**16** A. J. Rasker, *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795*, 3rd. ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1986).

**17** James P. Kennedy and Jan P. Zwemer, "Religion in the Modern Netherlands and the Problems of Pluralism," *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* 125, nos. 2–3 (2010): 237–68.

**18** Kennedy and Zwemer, "Religion in the Modern Netherlands," 253.

**19** Peter van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes: Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland 1570–1990* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996).

eenth century, and then to a pillarized society a hundred years later. Around 1970, another change occurred, and the Netherlands changed from a pillarized to a de-pillarized or de-Christianized regime.

## Differences in Educational Systems

The topic of religion aside, the educational systems in the Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands are strikingly different. Since the Dutch constitution was revised in 1848, there has been a dual school system in the Netherlands, with faith-based schools existing side by side with the public schools, all of them equally funded by the state. The vertical social stratification is still present in the Dutch school system, and in 2019 there were about twice as many faith-based schools in the Netherlands as there were state schools.[20] The Dutch private schools have three basic liberties: freedom of establishment, freedom of conviction, and freedom of organization. The freedom of establishment allows religious congregations or organizations representing an ideology that is acknowledged by the political authorities the right to establish a school and apply for state funding; the freedom of conviction allows the private schools to express their religious convictions in schools, for instance by offering confessional Religion and Ethics education; while the freedom of organization admits private schools the right to organize themselves according to their own convictions.

This differs substantially from the situation in Norway and Sweden, where the state school system is dominant. In both countries, the vast majority of schools are run by public authorities, although independent schools run by other actors are far more frequent in Sweden than in Norway. In 2022, about 16 percent of the pupils in compulsory education received training in private schools, while the number in Norway at the same time was just under 5 percent. The private schools in Norway and Sweden may be driven by religious congregations or organizations representing a particular life view, such as the Catholic schools, or they may be pedagogical alternatives, such as the Waldorf schools. In both countries' curricula, it is stated that the public school should promote democratic ideas and basic human rights. Both Norwegian and Swedish public schools offer compulsory religious education, but the religious education is taught according to academic standards, that is, non-confessional and objective. Another important difference is the tracking of the Dutch educational system. In the nineteenth and early twentieth

**20** Leni Franken and Paul Vermeer, "Deconfessionalising RE in Pillarised Education: A Case Study of Belgium and the Netherlands," *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 3 (2017): 272285.

centuries, all three countries were marked by a segmented school system. That is, the children of the laboring classes attended primary school, while a minute portion of the population had access to secondary and higher education. In the 1960s and the 1970s, this educational system was radically reformed in Sweden and Norway. Compulsory nine-year schooling was introduced for all children, implying the same education for all up to the age of sixteen. This differs from the Netherlands, were all children attend primary education up to the age of twelve. At that age, they attend either a preparatory vocational secondary education (*VMBO*), a senior general secondary education (*HAVO*), or a university preparatory education (*VWO*).

## Secularization

Even if the vertical division in the Dutch school system seems to have survived a general depillarization, there is no doubt that religion plays a less important role in today's society than it previously did, including in the Netherlands. Just like in the Scandinavian countries, there has been a gradual decline in the importance of the institutional church in society, especially during the last fifty years. The number of people who visit church regularly is continually decreasing; the Norwegians, for example, are among the least active churchgoers in the world.[21] Thus, there is evidence to state that these societies have been characterized by an institutional, a societal, and an individual secularization. In the Scandinavian countries the societal development has, among other things, resulted in a far weaker connection between church and the school. In this way, it is believed that an increasingly heterogeneous society can be accommodated, in which different religions and philosophies of life live side by side. The Netherlands is, according to Dutch-American sociologist Frank Lechner, a "nation without a God."[22] Like other countries in Western Europe, the Netherlands has, says Lechner, been the subject of a rapid secularization, a process which is still ongoing.[23] Frank Lechner's statement can be seen as a counter-argument against Rodney Stark's well-known *R.I.P Secularization*–thesis – the idea that secularization has never been consistent with empirical reality. This thesis is not in accordance with Dutch data, says Lechner, who adds that the theoretical rationale used by Stark and his co-writer Laurence Iannaconne in

**21** See Norwegian Church Statistics: Den norske kirke (ssb.no).

**22** Frank Lechner, *The Netherlands: Globalization and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

**23** Frank Lechner, "Secularization in the Netherlands," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 3 (1996): 252–64.

order to interpret the role of religion in European societies had several weaknesses.[24]

Lechner's thesis triggered a massive debate among sociologists and religious scholars, which has so far lasted for more than three decades.[25] However, although the discussion is still ongoing, the issue of secularization has attained a new focus, just as the interest in the formative power of religion in society has been reawakened.[26] This also pertains to the Scandinavian countries as well as the Netherlands. It is now argued that the countries' religious heritage is too significant to be simply erased as a prerequisite for social change and social development. Rather, one can talk about a transformation: religion may have lost its importance as a dogmatic system and as a normative power, but as a cultural and structural driving force, it still has a strong and unavoidable societal effect.

A pertinent example of this shift is seen in the understanding of how the welfare state in the Nordic countries has developed. In recent decades, several scholars have argued that the welfare state in the Nordic countries is conditioned by the countries' common Protestant heritage. Danish historian Uffe Østergaard, for example, has claimed that the Nordic welfare state should be seen in a long historical perspective of a homogenous state Lutheranism rather than of specific social structures.[27] Norwegian church historian Dag Thorkildsen has seen the welfare state in light of Luther's understanding of work as vocation.[28] Østergaard and Thorkildsen thus illuminate one of the main arguments in Øystein Sørensen's and Bo Stråth's pioneering (and still highly relevant) edited work *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (1997): Norden is characterized by a "deep and enduring culturally conditioned individual orientation." Moreover, as they continue: "Success lay not only in innovation but in the extraordinary balance of tradition and innovation, in a Christian ethos combined with a rational-pragmatic agenda, in religious norms on the one

**24** Rodney Stark and Lawrence R. Iannaconne, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization of Europe," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (1994): 230–52.

**25** Lechner has published a number of texts on this topic, and the debate goes back several decades. See, for instance, Frank Lechner, "Catholicism and Social Change in the Netherlands: A Case of Radical Secularization," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 2 (1989): 136–47; and Timothy Crippen, "Further Notes on Religious Transformation," *Social Forces* 71, no. 1 (1992): 219–23.

**26** Frank Lechner, "Law and Religion in an Age of Rapid Secularisation," *Canopy Forum: On the Interactions of Law and Religion* (June 29, 2023), accessed February 26, 2024, https://canopyforum.org/2023/06/29/law-and-religion-in-an-age-of-rapid-secularization/.

**27** Uffe Østergård, "The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity," in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 25–71.

**28** Dag Thorkildsen, "Lutherdom, vekkelse og de nordiske velferdsstater," *TEMP: tidsskrift for historie* 1, no. 1 (2010): 131–44.

hand and liberal aspirations on the other."[29] Consequently, one can say, as the Italian historian Paolo Borioni recently has, that the Evangelical Lutheran heritage in the Nordic countries is socially reinterpreted and challenged by twentieth-century social democratic reformers.[30]

This strong Lutheran heritage is also evident in school and education, and this seems to come to the fore even if the school, according to the law, should be value-neutral. Danish church historian Mette Buchardt has argued that the history of Nordic Protestantism has contributed to a model of religious education in which secularization is combined with sacralization: the church is divorced from the state, but at the same time, Protestant Christianity is at the nation's inner core.[31] This can be seen not least in the significant place that Christianity occupies in religious education in all Nordic countries. In central policy documents, Christianity is still framed as an important part of the nations' culture and values. Thus, it is meaningful to talk about a Nordic DNA that permeates all social practice, not least in relation to the significant role the Lutheran churches have played in the Nordic national project.[32] Historically, this can, for example, be seen through smooth transitions between Lutheran theology and the surrounding social, intellectual, and cultural contexts. Central twentieth-century school politicians were born and raised in a Protestant tradition, and as school politicians and influential pedagogues they carry, consciously or unconsciously, the tradition which has surrounded them since their childhood into their political work and their work as educational strategists.[33] This can certainly be seen in the career of the influential Norwegian school politician Helge Sivertsen. Sivertsen, who was a driving force behind important school reforms after the Second World War, was born into a tradition strongly influenced by Danish theologian, poet, and educationalist N. F. S.

---

**29** Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth, "Introduction: The Cultural Construction of Norden," in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. Sørensen and Stråth, 21.

**30** Paolo Borioni, "Danish Welfare Reform and Lutheran Background in the Mid-Twentieth Century," *Journal of Church and State* 1 (2014): 128–50.

**31** Mette Buchardt, "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model," *NorDidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 2 (2015): 131–65. See also her article "Lutheranism and the Nordic States," in *Luther zeitgenössisch, historisch, kontrovers*, ed. Uwe Puschner and Richard Faber (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 285–95.

**32** Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola, and Heli Valtonen, "Introduction in the Making of the Welfare State," in *Education, State and Citizenship*, ed. Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola, and Heli Valtonen, NordWel Studies in Historical Welfare State Research 4 (Helsinki: Nordic Centre of Excellence, NordWel, 2013), 7–30.

**33** Merethe Roos, *The Quest for a New Education: Social Democracy, Educational Reforms and Religion in Norway after the Second World War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024).

Grundtvig, and Sivertsen brought Grundtvig's ideas into his reform work.[34] In this way, Protestant ideology is allowed to permeate important school reforms.

In the Netherlands, the thesis of an abrupt societal break in the 1960s or 1970s, or the transition from a pillarized to a depillarized or de-Christianized society, has been challenged from several angles, for instance by Dutch historian Peter van Dam.[35] Van Dam points out that the thesis of a depillarized society, or the perception of the past as "the other," has contributed to a loss of understanding of how continuity and transformation characterize Dutch society. Van Dam's point of departure is that "neither the social formations, nor the role of religion, nor the political arrangements belonging to the so-called pillarized society have been annulled since the 1960s, when depillarization supposedly took off."[36] Instead of banishing religion to remote corners of society, religious communities redefined and reoriented their belief in the last decades of the twentieth century, van Dam says. On the one hand, one could observe an individualization of the faith, in which conventional Christianity was replaced by a more personal belief. Books like *Honest to God*, written by the Anglican bishop John Robinson, and the theologian Willem Hendrik van de Pol's *The End of Conventional Christianity* were all widely read in the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s. These books were both inspired by twentieth-century Protestant theologians like Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all known for adapting theology to modern society and the needs of the twentieth century. This new theological orientation called for a social engagement as a fruit of personal belief; religion and faith were channeled towards society rather than towards religious institutions. On the other hand, the society was not as de-Christianized as the defenders of a depillarized society would have it. At the time when van Dam wrote his article, around 45 percent of the population were still members of a Christian church.[37] Moreover, Islamic and African Christian groups had become more visible, which again challenged the thesis of a secular society. The increasing presence of Islam caused a Christian mobilization: Muslims were perceived as a threat and, for many, this triggered a need to underline the Christian roots of European, including the Dutch, societies.

**34** Nina Volckmar, "Fra solidarisk samværskultur til kunnskapssolidaritet. Det sosialdemokratiske prosjekt fra Sivertsen til Hernes" (PhD diss., Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, 2005).

**35** Peter van Dam, "Constructing a Modern Society through Depillarization. Understanding Post-War History as Gradual Change," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, no. 3 (2015): 291–313.

**36** Van Dam, "Constructing a Modern Society," 292.

**37** Van Dam refers to Joep de Hart, *Zwevende gelovigen. Oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit*, published in 2011.

This complexity points to a new societal situation which also includes the school. According to the law scholar Sophie van Bijsterveld, this increasing degree of religious visibility has revealed important challenges concerning the relationship between the church and state in the Netherlands.[38] Although freedom of religion is a fundamental principle in the provinces, and has been for centuries, the principle of separation of church and state lacks a legal basis, she says. Neither is there a system for judicial review for parliamentary legislation. This must be viewed as a problem, not least when considering the importance of the principle of separation of church and state. The Dutch constitution opens up for a diversity of religions, and it allows confessional organizations to receive subsidies, as long as they fulfil certain objective criteria. The private or public sector is not allowed to make distinctions between the inhabitants on basis of their religion, and the constitution is also a guarantor for the presence of private confessional schools, which in the Netherlands stand on equal footing with public schools. Freedom of education is, like freedom of religion, a constitutional principle, and this freedom includes the freedom to fund a school, to administer a school, and to determine the confessional identity of a school and its education. This also means that a school and a school management are free to determine the school's confessional character, and equally whether they may require loyalty to the religious denominations by staff or pupils. However, Dutch schools will always have to take rules of citizenship and citizenship laws, as well as the principles of constitutional democracy, into consideration. In this way, freedom of education is limited.

Van Bijsterveld's argument for the necessity of giving the relationship between church and the state (or religious community and the state) a better legal foundation is built upon a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between religion and the state in the Netherlands, and her arguments are also relevant for the questions around what the school's societal role should be. As a law expert, she wants to ensure that the religious diversity is enshrined in the most fundamental of all societal institutions, the law. Because religion has gradually become more important in society, people have also become more aware of the importance and existence of religious values. As non-Western religions, and in particular Islam, can increasingly be seen in everyday life, religious values have become a source of discussion. The unfamiliarity with Muslim belief and Muslim values have increased the complexity of the discussion. Moreover, as the constitution allows Muslim believers the right to establish Muslim schools, this might be a good reason for dis-

**38** Sophie van Bijsterveld, "Religion and Law in the Netherlands," *Insight Turkey* 17, no. 1 (2015): 121–41, and *State and Religion: Reassessing a Mutual Relationship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

cussing whether these schools are an obstacle to integration into society or whether they function as a vehicle for such integration. Moreover, in a time in which radicalization increasingly is a problem, what is done to counter this threat?

## This Volume

This brings us back to the point at which we started this short opening section, and back to the subject of this volume. The chapters that follow will provide examples of how school and education relate to major societal changes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and contribute to a discussion about how the school can take part in conveying values and shaping the nation's citizens. We will shed light on three countries that have many common features, but also fundamental differences. The chapters will address the differences between the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, but also the differences between two closely related (and formerly united) Scandinavian countries. The contributions in this volume will also examine the question of how religion constitutes a formative influence in one of society's core institutions, and to what extent the role of religion, as a basic value, is changing in a period where autonomy and individuality characterize the development.

This volume is divided into three sections, each focusing on one of the three countries under consideration. In the Norwegian section, Karl Christian Alvestad's chapter thematizes how the Middle Ages is represented in Norwegian textbooks between 1860 and 1939. Hege Roll-Hansen's chapter discusses how Christian education was debated among politicians and priests in the late 1930s in Norway. Merethe Roos's chapter emphasizes the debate on the school's purpose clause around 1960, and finally, Jørn Varhaug sheds light upon the Norwegian politician and strategist Gudmund Hernes's educational reforms in the 1990s.

The Swedish sections consists of chapters written by Henrik Edgren, Janne Holmén, Emma Hellström, and Johan Wickström. Wickström's chapter highlights the transition from paganism to Christianity in history textbooks from 1900 to 1930. Hellström's text sheds light upon how Christianity was presented in textbooks during the 1930s and 1940s. Holmén discusses how majority values were transmitted in Swedish primary and secondary education in the postwar decades. Edgren's chapter thematizes the question of how post-Christian ways of interpreting Christianity are reflected in Swedish curricula and upper secondary school textbooks.

In the Dutch section, Sjaak Braster examines how public education has been defined and has changed over time, as well as the consequences of these changes. Tina van der Vlies, on her part, sheds light upon how the narrative of Dutch na-

tional tolerance was constructed, adapted, and perpetuated in twentieth-century textbooks. John Exalto discusses how confessional education changes during the period between 1945 and 1985. Finally, Paul Vermeer highlights how two textbooks used in denominational schools are marked by secularization.

The book is concluded by a short commentary written by Mette Buchardt.

## References


Aagre, Willy. *Folkeopplyseren. Anna Sethne og den norske reformpedagogikken.* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006.

Berntson, Martin, Beril Nilsson, and Cecilia Wejryd. *Kyrka i Sverige: introduktion till svensk kyrkohistoria.* Skellefteå: Artos, 2012.

Bijsterveld, Sophie Christine den Dekker-van. *De verhouding tussen kerk en staat in het licht van de grondrechten.* Zwolle: Tjeenk-Villink, 1988.

Borioni, Paolo. "Danish Welfare Reform and Lutheran Background in the Mid-Twentieth Century." *Journal of Church and State* 1 (2014): 128 – 50.

Buchardt, Mette. "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model." *NorDidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 2 (2015): 131 – 65.

Buchardt, Mette. "Lutheranism and the Nordic States." In *Luther zeitgenössisch, historisch, kontrovers*, edited by Uwe Puschner and Richard Faber, 285 – 95. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017.

Buchardt, Mette, Pirjo Markkola, and Heli Valtonen. "Introduction in the Making of the Welfare State." In *Education, State and Citizenship*, edited by Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola, and Heli Valtonen, 7 – 30. NordWel Studies in Historical Welfare State Research 4. Helsinki: Nordic Centre of Excellence, NordWel, 2013.

Calhoun, Craig. *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream.* New York: Routledge, 2007.

Crippen, Timothy. "Further Notes on Religious Transformation." *Social Forces* 71, no. 1 (1992): 219 – 23.

de Hart, Joep. *Zwevende gelovigen: Oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit.* Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011.

Elstad, Hallgeir, and Per Halse. *Norsk Kristendomshistorie.* Oslo: Samlaget, 2021.

Franken, Leni, and Paul Vermeer. "Deconfessionalising RE in Pillarised Education: A Case Study of Belgium and the Netherlands." *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 3 (2017): 272 – 85.

Homan, Gerlof D. "Catholic Emancipation in the Netherlands." *The Catholic Historical Review* 52, no. 2 (1966): 201 – 11.

Horlacher, Rebekka. "Civics in the Curricular Construction of the Loyal National Citizens: A Comparative View of Switzerland." *Croatian Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (2020): 83 – 99.

Kennedy, James P., and Jan P. Zwemer. "Religion in the Modern Netherlands and the Problems of Pluralism." *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* 125, nos. 2 – 3 (2010): 237 – 68.

King, Elisabeth. *From Classroom to Conflict in Rwanda.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Klok, Janke. "Ibsen in Dutch Theatres and the Sustainability of Nora." *Nordlit* 34 (May 2015): 445 – 64.

Knippenberg, Hans. “The Changing Relationship between State and Church/Religion in the Netherlands.” *GeoJournal* 67 (2006): 317 – 30.

Knippenberg, Hans. “The Political Geography of Religion: Historical State-Church Relations in Europe and Recent Challenges.” *GeoJournal* 67 (2007): 253 – 65.

Kuijpers, Erika. *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17e-eeuuws Amsterdam.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2005.

Larsson, Anna. “Skolämnet hembygdskunskap 1919 – 1980: Tillkomst och karriär i läroplanhistorisk perspektiv.” *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9, no. 1 (2022): 61 – 83.

Lechner, Frank. “Catholicism and Social Change in the Netherlands: A Case of Radical Secularization.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 2 (1989): 136 – 47.

Lechner, Frank. “Law and Religion in an Age of Rapid Secularisation.” *Canopy Forum: On the Interactions of Law and Religion*, June 29, 2023. Accessed February 26, 2024. https://canopyforum.org/2023/06/29/law-and-religion-in-an-age-of-rapid-secularization/.

Lechner, Frank. *The Netherlands: Globalization and National Identity.* New York: Routledge, 2008.

Lechner, Frank. “Secularization in the Netherlands.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 3 (1996): 252 – 64.

Norwegian Church Statistics: Den norske kirke (ssb.no).

Rasker, A. J. *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795*, 3rd. ed. Kampen: Kok, 1986.

Roos, Merethe. *The Quest for a New Education: Social Democracy, Educational Reforms and Religion in Norway after the Second World War.* Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024.

Sogner, Sølvi. “Scandinavian Women to Amsterdam in the Dutch Golden Age: Migratory Stage.” In *Femmes sans frontières: Stratégies transnationales féminines face à la mondialisation (XVIIIe – XXIe siècles)*, edited by Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, Diana Burgos-Vigna, and Mercedes Yusta, 31 – 48. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.

Sogner, Sølvi. *Og skuta lå i Amsterdam: Et glemt norsk innvandrersamfunn i Amsterdam 1621 – 1720.* Oslo: Aschehoug, 2012.

Stark, Rodney, and Lawrence R. Iannaconne. “A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the “Secularization of Europe.” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (1994): 230 – 52.

Svendsen, Gert Tinggard. *Trust.* Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2018.

Sørensen, Øystein, and Bo Stråth. “Introduction: The Cultural Construction of Norden.” In *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, edited by Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth, 1 – 24. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997.

Thorkildsen, Dag. “Lutherdom, vekkelse og de nordiske velferdsstater.” *TEMP: tidsskrift for historie* 1, no. 1 (2010): 131 – 44.

Tröhler, Daniel. “Introduction: Understanding Nationalism through the Lens of Education.” In *Education, Curriculum and Nation-Building: Contributions of Comparative Education to the Understanding of Nations and Nationalism*, edited by Daniel Tröhler, 1 – 6. New York: Routledge, 2023.

van Bijsterveld, Sophie. “Religion and Law in the Netherlands.” *Insight Turkey* 17, no. 1 (2015), 121 – 41.

van Bijsterveld, Sophie. *State and Religion: Reassessing a Mutual Relationship.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

van Dam, Peter. “Constructing a Modern Society through Depillarization: Understanding Post-War History as Gradual Change.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, no. 3 (2015): 291 – 313.

van Dijk, Suzan, ed., and Jo Nesbitt, trans. *“I Have Heard of You”: Foreign Women’s Writing Crossing the Dutch Border: From Sappho to Selma Lagerlöf.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2004.

van Eijnatten, Joris, and Fred van Lieburg. *Nederlandse Religiegeschiedenis.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2005.

van Rooden, Peter. *Religieuze regimes. Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland 1570 – 1990.* Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996.

Volckmar, Nina. "Fra solidarisk samværskultur til kunnskapssolidaritet. Det sosialdemokratiske prosjekt fra Sivertsen til Hernes." PhD diss., Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, 2005.

Østergård, Uffe. "The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity." In *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, edited by Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth, 25 – 71. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997.

## Norway

Karl Christian Alvestad

# The Middle Ages and the Papacy in Norwegian Education 1860–1939

## Introduction

Studies in Norwegian history of education agree that the evolution of formal education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincides with an age of nationalism in Norway. This historical context has led many to explore the role of textbooks and textbook content in the furthering of the nation. Svein Lorentzen[1] and Alfred Oftedal Telhaug[2] have convincingly demonstrated how the growth of the education system coincides with an age of Norwegian nation-building and nationalism. Within the study of history textbooks in Norway a dominant trend of enquiry has been the examination of the national past and the aspects of it found in textbooks published by different authors and at different times.[3] As such, textbooks concerned with the history of Norway have received a fair bit of attention as regards their treatment of the Vikings, the medieval period, gender, the Norwegian constitution, the coverage of national minorities and indigenous populations, the Second World War, and other topics. In my own work I have explored nineteenth- and early twentieth-century depictions of the Vikings,[4] the Norwegian North Sea realm of the high medieval period, and the depictions of Queen Margaret,[5] as well as the role of otherness and national identity in textbooks of

1 Svein Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker-: skolebøkene som nasjonsbyggere 1814–2000* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2005).

2 Alfred Oftedal Telhaug and Odd Asbjørn Mediås, *Grunnskolen som nasjonsbygger: fra statspietisme til nyliberalisme* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2003).

3 Dagrun Skjelbred, et al.,. *Norsk lærebokhistorie: allmueskolen, folkeskolen, grunnskolen: 1739–2013* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), 187–198.

4 Karl Christian Alvestad, "Kings, Heroes and Ships: The Use of Historical Characters in 19th- and 20th-Century Perceptions of the Early Medieval Scandinavian Past" (PhD thesis, University of Winchester, 2016).

5 Karl Christian Alvestad, "Here be Vikings: Ethno-National Narratives in Late Nineteenth Century Norwegian Textbooks," in *Exploring Textbooks and Cultural Change in Nordic Education 1536–2020*, ed. Merethe Roos et al. (Leiden: Brill|Sense, 2021), 159–173; Alvestad, "Mighty Lady and True Husband: Queen Margaret of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in Norwegian Memory," in *Memorialising Premodern Monarchs: Medias of Commemoration and Remembrance*, ed. Gabrielle Storey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 245–264.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-002

Norwegian history between the 1890s and 1910.[6] Far fewer studies have been completed that explore non-national histories – by which I mean regional, continental, or international history – within the textbooks in Norway. This applies especially to the narratives of pre-Enlightenment cultures and societies, such as early modern England and its political evolution, the European maritime empires, the ancient Greeks, and Romans, and especially the Middle Ages.

To some extent, this chapter will follow in this tradition, examining the inclusion of European medieval history in Norwegian history textbooks in an age of nationalism. The basic assumption inherited from earlier studies of textbooks in this period is that nationalism and nation-building influence the content of textbooks: this chapter will therefore test this hypothesis by examining the coverage of medieval history in history textbooks books from this period. In so doing, my aim is to explore the extent to which contemporary cultural sentiments such as nationalism and anti-Catholicism in Norway are reflected in textbooks and what this tells us about Norwegian educational history of the period. As the American historian Robert Kelley argued in 1980,[7] textbooks can be a window into cultural ideas and values while also offering insight into the educational history of the time they are used. The focus of this chapter is on the way European medieval history is presented in textbooks. This chapter will examine to what extent nationalism influenced the representation of the "other" (in this case, the wider European historical past), in Norwegian textbooks and consequently in Norwegian education. In other words, the research question of this chapter is: to what extent do contemporary nationalism and cultural values influence the way European medieval history is presented in Norwegian textbooks at the beginning of the twentieth century?

The beginning of the twentieth century is a bit misleading as a temporal focus, since the turn of the century did not see a significant change in educational policy in Norway. Therefore, this chapter will take a longer perspective on the evolution of Norwegian textbooks and education by examining textbooks from the period 1860–1939. One may argue that this timeframe is somewhat arbitrary. However, this period offers opportunities to better illustrate the evolution of ideas and stories taught in Norwegian schools. The year 1860 marks a significant educational reform in Norway that regulated educational provisions in Norway's rural parishes, and it is after this reform that we see a marked increase in the production of textbooks in Norway. Furthermore, the cut-off point of 1939 is chosen as it is the date of a major curriculum reform, the "Normalplanen," which set a new standard for

**6** Alvestad, "Kings, Heroes and Ships."

**7** Robert Kelley, "The History the Masses Learn, and Historians Ignore," ed. Frances FitzGerald, *Reviews in American History* 8, no. 3 (1980): 296–303.

Norwegian education, thus representing a clear break with the earlier traditions in Norwegian educational history. The 1939 reform was, according to Harald Thuen, the breakthrough of Reform Pedagogy in Norway,[8] which reshaped Norwegian education in the twentieth century. This periodization is also inspired by Liv Kari Bondevik Tønnessen, who convincingly demonstrates a historical continuity in the Norwegian education system from 1860 – 1940.[9]

In order to explore medieval European history in Norwegian textbooks in this period, I seek to do three things: (1) to map out the overarching narratives of the Middle Ages as they are presented in textbooks and consider how they change over time; (2) undertake reading of key episodes such as the emergence of the papacy, feudalism, and the Investiture Contest, and through this unpick how key medieval institutions and narratives were presented to the readers of these books; and finally, (3) consider how religious reformers of the late medieval period are presented. I have chosen to focus here on the cultural and religious history of medieval Europe, but it could have been equally fruitful to chart the history of different polities, individual kings, wars, or reform movements within these books, as they help to shape the overall understanding of the period and are key in framing shared understandings of the medieval past and the evolution of Europe. Before I start exploring these topics, however, it is beneficial to establish the historical and educational context in which they are published so that we might see how they relate to broader historical and cultural trends.

## The Historical Context

During most of the nineteenth century, Norway was in a personal union with Sweden until 1905. During this time, there was tension between the Norwegian parliament, the ruling elites, and the Swedish king. Efforts to unify Norway into one kingdom were among the many tasks undertaken by the parliament in this period.[10] Among the unification efforts were the creation and strengthening of a national community. This was facilitated through the construction of infrastructure, like the telegraph, and the expansion and reform of education. These efforts also continued into the twentieth century. At the same time, the nineteenth century

**8** Harald Thuen, *Den norske skolen: utdanningssystemets historie* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2017).
**9** Liv Kari Bondevik Tønnessen, *Norsk utdanningshistorie: en innføring med fokus på grunnskolens utvikling*, 2nd ed. (Bergen: Fagbokforlag, 2011).
**10** Merethe Roos, *En kort introduksjon til Norge på 1800-tallet*, 1st ed., En kort introduksjon (Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2020).

also saw the rise of Norwegian nationalism.[11] I have previously argued that there is a continuity from the nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century when it comes to the nature of Norwegian nationalism.[12] Although Norwegian independence in 1905 changed the conditions of the political landscape in Norway, much of the cultural landscape looks longer to change. Ideas of national identity in the first four decades of the twentieth century to a great extent represented continuity with the nineteenth century in form and fashion.[13] Kristin Bliksrud Aavitsland has demonstrated how the Middle Ages held a special place in Norwegian nationalism in this period.[14] She furthermore argued that, unlike on the continent, where the Middle Ages often is perceived as a "dark age," the medieval period in is Norway a "golden age" of national independence and cultural distinctiveness. Drawing on ideas of national distinctiveness based on folk culture, medieval and Viking history, and the cultural remains that embodied a distinctive Norwegian identity the culture of nationalism in the twentieth century is in many ways the culmination of processes begun in the nineteenth century. Key among these processes were the construction of the native or national, and the distinction between the national and foreign. One aspect used to delineate between the local/national and the "other" was religion. Although Norway constitutionally recognized religious freedom, Frode Ulvund has shown that a culture of anti-Catholicism was prevalent in Norway in the first half of the twentieth century, highlighting that the nation was Protestant.[15]

## Norwegian Education 1860 – 1939

During the period 1860 – 1939, the Norwegian parliament introduced six new educational laws as well as the first two national curricula reforms, one in 1922 and1925 and another reform in 1939. The legal reforms in 1860, 1869, 1889, and 1936 frame the context of the textbooks examined in this chapter, so I will briefly

**11** Roos, *En kort introduksjon*; Øystein Sørensen et al., *Jakten på det norske: perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet*, (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1998).

**12** Alvestad, "Kings, Heroes and Ships."

**13** Svein Ivar Angell and Utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet (prosjekt), *Frå splid til nasjonal integrasjon: norsk nasjonalisme i mellomkrigstida*, Nasjonal identitet, 4th repr. (Oslo: Noregs forskingsråd, 1994).

**14** Kristin Bliksrud Aavitsland, "Middelalder Og Norsk Identitet: Litterære Og Visuelle Eksempler På Norsk Medievalisme," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 75, no. 1 (2006): 38 – 49.

**15** Frode Ulvund, *Nasjonens antiborgere: forestillinger om religiøse minoriteter som samfunnsfiender i Norge, ca. 1814 – 1964*, (Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2017).

outline their content and its significance for history education. Similarly, the 1922/1925 curricula were the foundation for teaching in the years leading up to 1939, so it is worth examining how they describe history education and which parts of European medieval history are highlighted in the curriculum. Other scholars have produced excellent studies of these laws and the work that led to their acceptance so I will therefore not go into details about this here.[16] 1860 saw the introduction of one educational law: *Lov om Almueskolevæsenet paa Landet* to parallel the 1848 *Lov om Almueskolevæsenet i Kjøbstæderne.* Together these laws regulated the educational provisions in rural and urban areas of Norway, guaranteeing education for children in the kingdom. Furthermore, they stipulated what the education was meant to include. Both laws stated what this education was, the rural schools were meant to "provide the knowledge and skills all members of the society should have,"[17] while the urban schools aimed at "supporting the general education of the youths in so doing bringing forth a true Christian enlightenment and help them acquire the knowledge and skills all members of society should have."[18] Both laws give an overview of the subjects that are meant to be subjects taught in schools, with a particular focus on reading, writing, and religious education. In the law for rural education the authors specify that within literacy education, students are meant to read about topics from natural sciences, geography, and history.[19] Unlike the 1860 laws, the 1889 laws for rural and urban schools present history as a separate subject that requires separate educational resources.[20] This marks a shift in the legal status of history education in Norway, which is also reflected in a significant increase in books available on the market, which contributes to the rich empirical base of this chapter. The two laws differ in their description of when students are old enough to learn history. In urban schools, history is introduced in primary education (aged seven to ten); while in rural schools, history

**16** See Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker*; Telhaug and Mediås, *Grunnskolen som nasjonsbygger*; Skjelbred et al., *Norsk lærebokhistorie.*

**17** "[F]remskaffe de kundskaber og færdigheder, som ethvert medlem af samfundet bør besitte." *Lov om Almueskolevæsenet paa Landet*, 1986, https://www.nb.no/items/312292b4ead45fa53d4f47967742b595?page=0, §1; Alvestad, "Here be Vikings," 162.

**18** "[A]t understøtte den huuslige opdragelse I at bibringe ungdummen en sand christelig oplysning og derhos at forskaffe den se kundskaber og færdigheder, som ethvert Medlem av Statssamfundet bør beside." *Lov om Almueskolevæsenet i Kjøbstæderne*, 1986, https://www.nb.no/items/c3bcc6982607960415af2ee7340bbfb1?page=0, §1.

**19** *Lov om Almueskolevæsenet paa Landet*, § 5; Alvestad, "Here be Vikings," 162.

**20** Norge, *Lov om Folkeskolen paa Landet: Stockholms Slot den 26de Juni 1889*, Skolehistoriske aktstykker Volume 8 (Kristiania: P.T. Mallings Boghandels Forlag, 1889), § 6; Norge, *Lov om Folkeskolen i Kjøbstæderne: Stockholms Slot den 26de Juni 1889*, Skolehistoriske aktstykker Volume 7 (Kristiania: Malling, 1889), §4.

is introduced in secondary education (aged ten to fourteen). The key difference here is not that the politicians believed the students in rural areas were unable to learn history at an earlier age – rather that they received fewer hours of instruction in earlier years than their urban counterparts, so it was likely slightly longer before their literacy skills were on a par with those of the urban students.

Students who sought secondary education above the minimum requirement outlined in the 1860 laws could seek education in middle schools [*Middelskole*] and upper secondary schools [*Gymnasium*] aiming at a higher level. This educational provision was reformed in 1869 with *Lov om offentlige skoler for den høiere almendannelse*, which outlines the content and structure of these provisions. History also makes an appearance here and is an integral part of this education.[21] This law stipulates that students in history should "have attained a clear overview of world history and a more complete knowledge Nordic history, and especially that of the fatherland."[22] This demonstrates the focus of history education in the second half of the nineteenth century. The laws of 1848, 1860, 1869, and 1889 shaped education for much of the period this chapter is concerned with, but in 1922 and 1925, at the tail end of the period, a national curriculum was introduced by the Church and Education Ministry. In addition, these curricula were divided between rural (1922) and urban schools (1925). Within these curricula teachers, students, and other readers can find a detailed breakdown of the topics to be explored in class, and at what age they should be taught. Both the 1922 and 1925 curricula suggest fourth and fifth grade as the stage to cover both Norwegian and European medieval history.[23] But these plans also explicitly highlight what the students are expected to be familiar with. Here it is apparent that the ministry expected students, regardless of where they were educated, to learn about and be familiar with the Catholic Church in Europe, churches and monasteries, the development of the German Cities, the Hanseatic League, the Black Death, The Kalmar Union, and the Reformation.[24] However, in urban schools, students also needed to know about the Migration Period in Europe, the relationship between the pope and emperor (often referring to the Investiture Contest), the Crusades, feudalism, and the rise of chiv-

**21** *Lov om offentlige skoler for den høiere almendannelse*, *Norsk lokalhistorisk institutt*, Skolehistoriske aktstykker Volume 18 (Oslo: Norsk pedagogisk studiesamlings venner, 1963), § 9, 11a, 11b.
**22** "[A]t han besidder klar oversight over den almindelige verdenshistorie og fuldstendigere kundskab i Nordens, fornemmelig Fædrelandets historie." *Lov om offentlige skoler for den høiere almendannelse*, § 14.7.
**23** *Normalplan for landsfolkeskolen*, (Kristiania: J. M. Stenersens forlag, 1922), 38 – 39; Norge: Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, *Normalplan for byfolkeskolen*, (Oslo: Stenersen, 1925), 34 – 35.
**24** Normalplan for landsfolkeskolen, 38 – 39; Normalplan for byfolkeskolen, 34 – 35.

alry, as well as the "Great Discoveries."[25] These texts thus show the expected learning outcomes for students in the 1920s and 1930s, and one may therefore posit that textbooks would, to a great extent, match these stipulations for the content of the subject. The ideas of standardization of education that are represented by the national curricula of 1922 and 1925 were developed further in the 1936 school laws, and again in the 1939 curricula. The 1936 laws drew on the work of the curricula of the 1920s and paved the way for the 1939 national curriculum.[26] The 1939 curriculum was in many ways the culmination of many years of work by numerous school reformers and their work with reform pedagogy, inspired by, among others, John Dewey. Their ideas put the child at the center of learning aims, rather than the knowledge, the teacher, and the textbook. The new pedagogy that, according to Lorentzen,[27] had its national breakthrough with the 1939 plan, sought to move away from the textbook and knowledge reproduction. Diminishing to some extent the importance and significance of textbooks. Lorentzen also argued that the 1936 laws and the 1939 curriculum brought about a change in history education in Norway in that it brought about an integration between world history and national history into one subject.[28] This is evident in some of the textbooks discussed below, where the books cover both Norwegian and world history in one volume.

## The Textbooks

The books I will draw on in this chapter span almost eighty years and are produced by a total of eighteen different authors. Among the books examined in this chapter are books that have multiple editions, such as Siegwart Petersen's *Verdenshistorie* (World history; 1860 – 1922), Jonas Vellesen's *Verdenshistorie med Kirkehistorie* (World history with church history; 1897–1923), Nordahl Rolfsen's *Verdenshistorie* (World history; in different formats, 1904 – 1929), John Utheim's *Liden verdenshistorie* (Small world history; 1892 – 1924). In addition, I have also drawn upon textbooks authored by H. Schjøth, J. Utheim, A. Kjær, J. Ottesen and A. Ræder, J. Raabe, O. Kristensen, O. I. K. Lødøen, H. Christie and S. Mundal, S. Eskeland, P. Kleppen, and S. Høst. Many of these authors were schoolteachers when they wrote their books, and from the 1880s onwards there is a general trend that the manuscripts are proofread by historians and educated men to ensure

**25** Normalplan for byfolkeskolen, 34 – 35.
**26** Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker*, 77.
**27** Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker*, 76.
**28** Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker*, 102.

the quality of the content. The names of these readers are often stated on the front matter of the books so that those purchasing the books could be guaranteed the quality of the work. Furthermore, Siegwart Petersen's books were considered of such quality that they were republished decades after he died in 1878; the manuscript was then edited and updated by, among others, the historian Gustav Storm. This suggests that there is a general conservativism in the market with regard to what books were used.

European medieval history is, as the book titles above may suggest, presented within books focused on world history. These books often, but not always, consist of three parts: ancient history focused on the Ancient Near East, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire; medieval history, which will be discussed below; and post-medieval history, which focuses on the rise of the European empires and states. The focus of these books is on the development of European history, with episodic references to other parts of the world seen through a European lens. It is difficult to reconstruct today how these books were used by contemporaries, but Lorentzen's argument about the move away from the books following the introduction of reform pedagogy with the 1936 laws and 1939 curriculum suggests that there must have been an extensive reliance on the books in the first part of the twentieth century.[29] At the same time, the books authored by Pål Kleppen,[30] O. I. K. Lødøen,[31] Jonas Vellesen,[32] and A. Kjær, whose titles translate to Norwegian history with excerpts of world history,[33] suggest there is an integration of world and national history. On the other hand, one may also argue that presenting Norwegian and world history in one book contributed to creating an even clearer divide between "us" and "them" within each book when recounting the national and international history side by side.

## Overall Narratives of the Middle Ages

Over the eighty years covered in this chapter, the conception of the history of the Middle Ages evolved and the nuances shifted slightly in focus. Yet the overarching

**29** Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker*, 102.

**30** Pål Kleppen, *Norges historie: med avsnitt av verdens historie: for folkeskolen*, 3rd ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934).

**31** O. I. K. Lødøen, *Verdens- og norgeshistorie: i fortellinger for skole og hjem*, (Oslo: Cappelen, 1925).

**32** Jonas Vellesen and Lars Eskeland, *Heimssoge med kyrkjesoge åt folkeskulen*, *Auresamlingen*, 3rd ed., with introduction by Lars Eskeland (Bergen: Beyer, 1923).

**33** A. Kjær, *Lærebog i historie: verdenshistorie – kirkehistorie – Norges historie*, 2nd rev. ed. (Kristiania: I kommission hos T. O. Brøgger, 1899).

narratives of the period stayed the same with the fall of the Roman Empire, the rise of the papacy, and feudalism, the evolution of European kingdoms and states such as England, France, and the Holy Roman Empire dominated, along with stories of the Crusades, the Hanseatic League, and the Hundred Years' War. Most books have some variations on these overarching themes, with different levels of detail depending on the title, focus, and length of the book. Some of the books, like those by Lødøen, Vellesen, Kleppen, and Kjær, cover both Norwegian and world history,[34] with Kjær and Vellesen also incorporating what the authors call *Kirkehistorie* (church history).[35] It is somewhat interesting to note that the 1920s saw a greater emphasis on cultural aspects of the past and interest in the history of knowledge. For example, Eskeland (1927) offers his readers an introduction to Chaucer and the ideas of Wycliffe,[36] while Lødøen (1925) goes into detail on the ideas of the Humanists,[37] and Høst (1927) provides a biography of the twelfth-century scientist and monk Roger Bacon.[38] Furthermore, the historical individuals and role models included in the books change over the period 1860 – 1939, with the early books dedicating space to individual Roman and Byzantine emperors, some select popes, as well as Charlemagne, and occasionally Alfred the Great.[39] Later books predominantly include Charlemagne, Pope Innocent III, and Joan of Arc.[40] Regardless of the date of the books, most books also contain an introduction to the Swiss independence struggle, and to religious reformers and thinkers such as Wycliffe and Jan Hus. In combination, the inclusion of all these individuals contributes to creating a narrative of the Middle Ages dominated by kings and popes. These individual stories help exemplify the overarching narratives presented in the books. Thus, the biographies function as a pedagogical tool for learning the

**34** Lødøen, *Verdens- og norgeshistorie*; Vellesen and Eskeland, *Heimssoge med kyrkjesoge åt folkeskulen*; Kjær, *Lærebog i historie*; Kleppen, *Norges historie*, 1934.

**35** Vellesen and Eskeland, *Heimssoge med kyrkjesoge åt folkeskulen*; Kjær, *Lærebog i historie.*

**36** Arne Bergsgård and Severin Eskeland, *Lærebok i heimssoge. 2: Soga um millomalderen og den nye tidi*, *Lærebok i heimssoge* (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1922 – 1926, 1926).

**37** Lødøen, *Verdens- og norgeshistorie.*

**38** Sigurd Høst, *Lærebok i verdenshistorie for middelskolen*, 8th ed. (Oslo: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1927).

**39** Siegwart Petersen, *Verdenshistorie: Læse- og Lærebog for Almue- og Borgerskoler, Norbok* (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1860); Hans Schjøth et al., *Lærebog i Verdenshistorien for Middelskolen. II: Middelalderen* (Kristiania: Malling, 1883); J. (John) Utheim, *En liden verdenshistorie for folkeskolen*, (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1892); Jonas Vellesen, *Verdenshistorie med kirkehistorie for folkeskolen* (Bergen: Dreyer, 1897).

**40** Bergsgård and Eskeland, *Lærebok i heimssoge. 2*; Nordahl Rolfsen et al., *Verdenshistorien fortalt for barn: en lesebok i verdenshistorie*, 10th ed., rev. and ill. (Oslo: Dybwad, 1929); Vellesen and Eskeland, *Heimssoge med kyrkjesoge åt folkeskulen*; Oskar Kristiansen, *Lærebok i Historie: (Verdenshistorie og Norges Historie) for Folkeskolen og Smaaskolen*, 3rd ed. (Kristiania: Brøgger, 1911); Pål Kleppen, *Norges historie: med avsnitt av verdens historie: for folkeskolen*, 4th ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1939).

grand narratives of the development of the world. In the next two sections of this chapter, I will look more closely at the representation of two aspects of the medieval period in these books to examine the changes more clearly within these texts over time. As such, I will focus on the institutional structures of the papacy and feudalism and their clash in the Investiture Contest, before moving over to the late medieval decline of the Papacy, religious reforms, and forerunners of the reformation.

## Papacy, Feudalism, and the Investiture Contest

Petersen's textbook from 1860, as well as later versions of the book, offer a brief introduction to the rise of the papacy by integrating it into three stories: one from the late antique world, one from the life of Gregory the Great, and one from the rise of the Carolingians. Petersen briefly recounts the story of the meeting between Attila and Pope Leo I, but in this story, he refers to Leo as the bishop of Rome, not as Pope.[41] The explanation for this choice comes a few pages later when Petersen briefly touches on the missions sent out by Pope Gregory I the Great. Petersen states that: "Around the year 600 Gregory the Great was bishop in Rome; from that time it became custom to call the bishop of Rome for Pope, which means Father,"[42] and proceeds to recount the rise of the Carolingians. In 1860, as in the subsequent editions of the text, Petersen gives an account of the different successor kingdoms to the Western Roman Empire; one of the kingdoms, Frankia, receives more attention than the others, and part of this coverage is the story of the elevation of Pepin the Short, who became King of the Franks. Here, Petersen presents the oft-repeated story from 750 in the Frankish Royal Annals about how Pepin was told by Pope Zacharias "that one should be king, who had the real power,"[43] which according to the Annals legitimized Pepin's usurpation of the last Merovingian king. The text continues to explain how the Frankish conquest of the Lombard kingdom led to the establishment of the Papal States, and

**41** Petersen, *Verdenshistorie* (1860), 65; Siegwart Petersen, *Verdenshistorie: Læse- og Lærebog for Almue- og Borgerskoler*, 2nd ed. (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1863), 59; Siegwart Petersen, *Verdenshistorie: Læse- og Lærebog for Almue- og Borgerskoler*, 5th ed. (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1877), 58; Siegwart Petersen and A. (Anton) Ræder, *Heimssoge for ungdomsskulen*, *Auresamlingen*, 2th ed. (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1922), 65.

**42** "Omtrent aar 600 var Gregory den Store biskop i Rom; fra den tid blev det skik at klade romerbispen for Pave, der er Fader"; Petersen, *Verdenshistorie,* 77.

**43** Paul Edward Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004), 12; Petersen, *Verdenshistorie*, 72–73.

how this gift inspired the pope to crown Charlemagne Roman Emperor.[44] These stories are the first times Petersen refers to the bishop of Rome as the pope, a title he uses consistently in subsequent chapters, such as the one called "The Pope in Rome: Gregory VII."[45] This chapter, repeated mostly unchanged in subsequent editions, opens with an explanation that the pope originally had been one of the five patriarchs of the Christian church, but that the papacy has considered itself the foremost of the patriarchs due to its descent from Saint Peter. Petersen notes that many of the popes who succeeded Gregory were "ungodly" and one of them was a woman known as "Papess Johanna."[46] He goes on to blame these popes for the corruption of the Christian faith by introducing the worship of saints and the Virgin Mary. The legend of Pope Johanna is a fairly common anti-papal myth that has been widely documented across the centuries.[47] By the 1922 edition, the reference to Johanna is removed, but the rest of the text remains the same.[48] Later authors were not quite as critical as Petersen when it came to presenting the history of the papacy. For example, Utheim offers a compressed story of the papacy and emphasizes instead the conflict with the patriarch in Constantinople, arguing that this was due to the competition for supremacy over the church.[49] In 1924, Utheim offered some comments on the introduction of Purgatory to explain the late medieval reform attempts and Martin Luther's argument against indulgences.[50] Like Petersen, Utheim and other later authors like Kjær, Vellesen, Rolfsen, Kleppen, and Kristiansen all outline how Gregory the Great holds a key position in the evolution of the papacy. Gregory's story evolves over the decades, with some twentieth-century books including versions of the story of how Gregory came to send missionaries to England around the year 600.[51] In Kjær's textbook (which combines Norwegian history and world history), this story, along with the story of how Olaf Tryggvason brought Christianity from England to Norway,

**44** Petersen, *Verdenshistorie*,77.

**45** Petersen, *Verdenshistorie*, 77.

**46** "Pavinde Johanna"; Petersen, *Verdenshistorie*, 77.

**47** Craig Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan: Deploying the Popess Legend in Early Modern England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

**48** Petersen and Ræder, *Heimssoge for ungdomsskulen*, 75.

**49** Utheim, *En liden verdenshistorie for folkeskolen*, 42 – 43.

**50** J. (John) Utheim and Jens Hæreid, *En liten verdenshistorie* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1924), 33, 59 – 60.

**51** Jonas Vellesen, *Verdenshistorie med kirkehistorie for folkeskolen*, 2nd ed. (Bergen: F. Beyers Forlag, 1912); Nordahl Rolfsen et al., *Verdenshistorien for børn. 1: Oldtid og middelalder*, *Verdenshistorien for børn*, abbr. ed. *Verdenshistorien for de unge* (Kristiania: Kristiania : Dybwad, 1904); Rolfsen et al., *Verdenshistorien fortalt for barn*; Lødøen, *Verdens- og norgeshistorie.*

contributes to positioning the Norwegian church's relationship to the papacy in the Middle Ages.[52]

Similarly, Petersen's explanation of the creation of the Papal States contributes to introducing the readers to the complex system of social loyalties and ties of obligations that existed in the Middle Ages – that is, the feudal system. In his 1860 book, Petersen briefly touches on feudalism in his account of chivalry. But here, his focus is on the cultural side of aristocratic chivalry,[53] while in the 1922 edition, Petersen's text also includes a description of the rise of fiefdoms in the ninth century, how they became hereditary, and how counts and barons could enfeoff their supporters on their land.[54] Following Petersen's lead, all but one of the other books in this study offer some sort of explanation of the feudal system and its terminology. The exception is Rolfsen's 1929 edition, where the closest the text gets to this topic is to say that William the Conqueror divided English lands between his supporters after his victory in 1066.[55] Compared to this, Eskeland, Lødøen, and Høst dedicate quite a lot of space to examining the feudal system with its economic, military, and political aspects, as well as tying it to chivalry, knights, and tournaments. Eskeland's account even outlines the difference between crown vassals and other vassals and explores, using examples from France, how an individual could be both king and vassal at the same time.[56] Furthermore, he explains also that ecclesiastical lands were parts of this system and that bishops and abbots could operate like lay lords by enfeoffing and being enfeoffed.[57] In so doing he sets the stage for the Investiture Contest between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor.

As mentioned above, bishops, abbots, and others could be vassals of lay lords in the Middle Ages. This situation contributed to what today is called the Investiture Contest.[58] The chapter "Keiser og Pave" (Emperor and pope) in Høst introduces the contest by exploring the ideas and policies of Pope Gregory VII and the realities of religious leaders as feudal lords and vassals, which formed the backdrop to the conflict.[59] Høst asserts that it all came to a head when Gregory announced that only the pope, and not lay lords like Emperor Henry IV, could appoint and ap-

**52** Kjær, *Lærebog i historie*, 78–79.
**53** Petersen, *Verdenshistorie*, 79–81.
**54** Petersen and Ræder, *Heimssoge for ungdomsskulen*, 73.
**55** Rolfsen et al., *Verdenshistorien fortalt for barn*, 71–72.
**56** Bergsgård and Eskeland, *Lærebok i heimssoge. 2*, 54–55.
**57** Bergsgård and Eskeland, 59.
**58** Sverre Bagge, *Europa tar form: år 300 til 1350*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 2004), 186–87.
**59** Høst, *Lærebok i verdenshistorie for middelskolen*, 100.

prove bishops and priests.[60] He details how Gregory excommunicated Henry and forced him to beg for mercy at Canossa, as well as how Henry later took his revenge on the pope. Unlike Høst, Utheim (1892) does not go into detail about the contest and only notes that the pope and the emperor disagreed,[61] while Eskeland (1926) goes into great detail, including an explanation of how the contest only ended with the Concordat of Worms in 1122, long after the two protagonists had died.[62] In so doing, Eskeland also explains how feudalism had caused the challenges and complexities in loyalties and relationships between lay lords and clergy. Eskeland, like the other authors, highlights how this event and the later election of Innocent III greatly elevated the papacy in the medieval period, but that it was not to last.

## The Decline of the Papacy, Reformers, and the Precursors of the Reformation

The power and wealth the Catholic Church had amassed during its rise to power – through feudalism, the Investiture Contest, and beyond – was often considered to have corrupted the church and its leaders, leading to critiques and calls for reform, and eventually led to the reformation. As the Reformation is a watershed moment in both European and Norwegian history, the representation of these events in textbooks and the narrative presented within them about the events leading up to the Reformation tell us a lot about how medieval Christianity and the Middle Ages were presented and perceived during this period. Raabe's textbook provides one of many examples of how authors chose to represent these events. Raabe notes that the Crusades were the start of people questioning the church,[63] but that it was the Black Death that was the catalyst for extensive critique of the church and its actions, as the populace were emboldened to "lay the blame [for the plague] on a sinful church."[64] He goes on to highlight how the Avignon popes' sale of church offices and indulgences, along with the period of schism (1378 – 1415) during which popes were elected in both Avignon and Rome, laid the church open to attacks from "religious and righteous humans who became angry at this ungodliness

**60** Høst, *Lærebok i verdenshistorie for middelskolen*, 101.

**61** Utheim, *En liden verdenshistorie for folkeskolen.*

**62** Bergsgård and Eskeland, *Lærebok i heimssoge. 2.*

**63** Jens Raabe, *Verdenshistorie for middelskolen. 1: For 1ste og 2den klasse* (Kristiania: Cammermeyer, 1909), 191.

**64** "De la skylden paa den syndefulde kirke." Raabe, *Verdenshistorie for middelskolen*, 192.

and fraud that was committed in the name of the church."[65] Among the men Raabe holds up as critics of the church are John Wycliffe and Jan Huus; he gives his readers a succinct introduction to the ideas and lives of these men and how some of their ideas were found to be heretical.[66] In so doing he mirrors the historical narrative found in each of the books in this study. But unlike the other authors, Christie and Mundal (1925) do not name the reformers, but instead state that "in England, France, and Bohemia there were brave men who wrote and spoke about the popes' inventions [of doctrines not based on the bible], and they gained many followers. But it was dangerous to speak up against the pope, and it went ill for those who tried."[67] This is the end of Christie and Mundal's chapter on the Middle Ages. The next page turns to the "Newer Time," which opens the chapter on the post-medieval world, starting with the Reformation and Martin Luther. Consequently, to their readers, the end of the Middle Ages is represented by the critique of the papacy and the argument that the popes had corrupted the faith and caused all Christians following their doctrines to lapse into heresy, a situation that demanded a reformation of the faith. These sentiments are also reflected in the other texts in this study in the way authors describe Wycliffe and Huus – as the forerunners of the Reformation who readied the ground for Luther's critiques and later break with Rome.

## Conclusion

Most of these books, however, also highlight how the late medieval period saw the rise of national kingdoms and how kings emerged as stronger political players, at the papacy's expense. This story, and that of the rise of the Humanists and the Renaissance, could have been represented an alternative narrative emphasis in the reading of these books. However, as this collection of essays is interested in the role of Christianity within education, and since the story of the papacy and its role in the evolution of the Church is a key narrative of the Middle Ages, I believe my emphasis is justified. Seen in the light of the educational reforms, according to which history and historical knowledge are meant to have a key role, it becomes

**65** "Religiøse og agtværdige menneske blev harme over al denne gudløshet og det bedrageri som blev drevet i religionens navn." Raabe, *Verdenshistorie for middelskolen*, 192.

**66** Raabe, *Verdenshistorie for middelskolen*, 192–94.

**67** "I England, Frankrike og Bøhmen var det modige menn som skrev og talte mot pavens påfund, og de fikk mange med seg. Men det var farlig å sette sig op mot paven, og det gikk ille med dem som forsøkte det." Hartvig Christie and Sylfest Muldal, *Norges historie med verdenshistorie*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen, 1925), 133.

apparent that the story of the Middle Ages presented in these books – a story of the papacy, feudalism, and heretics – frames how the modern world could be understood at the time as it helped to contextualize how different parts of Europe had evolved. Over the almost eighty years focused on in this study, these narratives and discourses of the Middle Ages persisted over time. The persistence of the rise and fall of the Papacy in these books contributed to a narrative of "us," the Lutherans, and "them," the heretical Catholics whose faith had been corrupted and not reformed. In telling the stories of the pre-Reformation reformers Huus and Wycliff, these books present a narrative of the Middle Ages as an age of corruption of the faith, reinforcing narratives of national exceptionalism observed in textbooks on Norwegian history as discussed by Johnsen et al.,[68] Telhaug and Mediås, and Lorentzen.[69] The strong nationalist and religious sentiments in Norway at the time thus can be seen reflected in the books examined above, and the critique of the papacy can be seen as a reflection of contemporary anti-Catholic sentiments in Norway. Read in the light of contemporary nationalism and anti-Catholic sentiments, the image of the Middle Ages constructed in these books presents a European medieval "dark age" to the readers. This dark age thus contributes to reiterating in Norwegian education notions of national exceptionalism through its contrast to the Norwegian medieval experience of a golden age. The influence of nationalism in Norwegian education in this period is thus clearly an influence on the ways Norwegian students were introduced to European medieval history.

# References

## Primary references

Bergsgård, Arne, and Severin Eskeland. *Lærebok i heimssoge. 2: Soga um millomalderen og den nye tidi. Lærebok i heimssoge.* Kristiania: Cappelen, 1926. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2010070605156.

Christie, Hartvig, and Sylfest Muldal. *Norges historie med verdenshistorie.* 2nd ed. Oslo: Cappelen, 1925. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2013121108039.

Høst, Sigurd. *Lærebok i verdenshistorie for middelskolen.* 8th ed. Oslo: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1927. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2013010408084.

**68** Egil Børre Johnsen et al., *Kunnskapens tekster: jakten på den gode lærebok* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1997).

**69** Alvestad, "Kings, Heroes and Ships"; Alvestad, "Here Be Vikings"; Alvestad, "Mighty Lady and True Husband"; Telhaug, *Grunnskolen som nasjonsbygger*; Lorentzen, *Ja, vi elsker.*

Kjær, A. *Lærebog i historie: verdenshistorie – kirkehistorie – Norges historie.* 2nd rev. ed. Kristiania: I kommission hos T. O. Brøgger, 1899. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2008121001030.

Kleppen, Pål. *Norges historie: med avsnitt av verdens historie: for folkeskolen.* 3rd ed. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2008121100034.

Kleppen, Pål. *Norges historie: med avsnitt av verdens historie: for folkeskolen.* 4th ed. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1939. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2017112448103.

Kristiansen, Oskar. *Lærebok i Historie: (Verdenshistorie og Norges Historie) for Folkeskolen og Smaaskolen.* 3rd ed. Kristiania: Brøgger, 1911. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2012102108023

Lødøen, O. I. K. *Verdens- og norgeshistorie: i fortellinger for skole og hjem. Norbok.* Oslo: Cappelen, 1925. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2008102200015.

*Lov om Almueskolevæsenet i Kjøbstæderne*, 1986. https://www.nb.no/items/c3bcc6982607960415af2ee7340bbfb1?page=0.

*Lov om Almueskolevæsenet paa Landet*, 1986. https://www.nb.no/items/312292b4ead45fa53d4f47967742b595?page=0.

*Lov om offentlige skoler for den høiere almendannelse: Norsk lokalhistorisk institutt.* Skolehistoriske aktstykker Volume 18. Oslo: Norsk pedagogisk studiesamlings venner, 1963. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2010112406076.

Norge. *Lov om Folkeskolen i Kjøbstæderne: Stockholms Slot den 26de Juni 1889.* Skolehistoriske aktstykker Volume 7. Kristiania: Malling, 1889. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2011052004030.

Norge. *Lov om Folkeskolen paa Landet: Stockholms Slot den 26de Juni 1889.* Skolehistoriske aktstykker Volume 8. Kristiania: P. T. Mallings Boghandels Forlag, 1889. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2011050604009.

Norge: Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet. *Normalplan for byfolkeskolen.* Oslo: Stenersen, 1925. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2016060348120.

*Normalplan for landsfolkeskolen.* Kristiania: J. M. Stenersens forlag, 1922. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2016101929003.

Petersen, Siegwart. *Verdenshistorie: Læse- og Lærebog for Almue- og Borgerskoler.* Kristiania: Cappelen, 1860. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2009072801103.

Petersen, Siegwart. *Verdenshistorie: Læse- og Lærebog for Almue- og Borgerskoler.* 2nd ed. Kristiania: Cappelen, 1863. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2017091807022.

Petersen, Siegwart. *Verdenshistorie: Læse- og Lærebog for Almue- og Borgerskoler.* 5th ed. Kristiania: Cappelen, 1877. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2008091800029.

Petersen, Siegwart, and A. (Anton) Ræder. *Heimssoge for ungdomsskulen: Auresamlingen.* 2nd ed. by Dr A. Ræder. Kristiania: Cappelen, 1922. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2013110508110.

Raabe, Jens. *Verdenshistorie for middelskolen. 1: For 1ste og 2den klasse. Verdenshistorie for middelskolen.* Kristiania: Cammermeyer, 1909. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2016040508164.

Rolfsen, Nordahl, Alexander Bugge, Hans Olrik, and Henrik Schück. *Verdenshistorien fortalt for barn: en lesebok i verdenshistorie.* 10th ed., rev. and ill. Oslo: Dybwad, 1929. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2016030308029.

Rolfsen, Nordahl, Hans Olrik, Henrik Schück, and Alexander Bugge. *Verdenshistorien for børn. 1: Oldtid og middelalder. Verdenshistorien for børn*, abbr. ed. *Verdenshistorien for de unge.* Kristiania: Dybwad, 1904. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2008100801034.

Schjøth, Hans, Ludvig Daae, and R. Tønder Nissen. *Lærebog i Verdenshistorien for Middelskolen. II: Middelalderen. Lærebog i Verdenshistorien for Middelskolen.* Kristiania: Malling, 1883. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2014072208250.

Utheim, J. (John). *En liden verdenshistorie for folkeskolen.* Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1892. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2009070700052.

Utheim, J. (John), and Jens Hæreid. *En liten verdenshistorie.* Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1924. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2009070204056.

Vellesen, Jonas. *Verdenshistorie med kirkehistorie for folkeskolen.* 2nd ed. Bergen: F. Beyers Forlag, 1912. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2010070206166.

Vellesen, Jonas. *Verdenshistorie med kirkehistorie for folkeskolen.* Bergen: Dreyer, 1897. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2009020600003.

Vellesen, Jonas, and Lars Eskeland. *Heimssoge med kyrkjesoge åt folkeskulen. Auresamlingen.* 3rd ed. introduced by Lars Eskeland. Bergen: Beyer, 1923. https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2009020500126.

## Secondary references

Alvestad, Karl Christian. “Here Be Vikings: Ethno-National Narratives in Late Nineteenth Century Norwegian Textbooks.” In *Here Be Vikings: Ethno-National Narratives in Late Nineteenth Century Norwegian Textbooks*, ed. by Merethe Roos, Kjell Lars Berge, Henrik Edgren, Pirjo Hiidenmaa, and Christina Matthiesen, 159 – 73. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Alvestad, Karl Christian. “Kings, Heroes and Ships: The Use of Historical Characters in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Perceptions of the Early Medieval Scandinavian Past.” PhD diss., University of Winchester, 2016. https://winchester.elsevierpure.com/en/studentTheses/kings-heroes-and-ships.

Alvestad, Karl Christian. “Mighty Lady and True Husband: Queen Margaret of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in Norwegian Memory.” In *Memorialising Premodern Monarchs*, ed. Gabrielle Storey, 245 – 64. Queenship and Power. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021.

Angell, Svein Ivar, and Utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet (prosjekt). *Frå splid til nasjonal integrasjon: norsk nasjonalisme i mellomkrigstida.* Oslo: Noregs forskingsråd, 1994.

Bagge, Sverre. *Europa tar form: år 300 til 1350.* 2nd ed. Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 2004.

Bliksrud Aavitsland, Kristin. “Middelalder Og Norsk Identitet. Litterære Og Visuelle Eksempler På Norsk Medievalisme.” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 75, no. 1 (2006): 38 – 49.

Dutton, Paul Edward. *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader.* Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004.

Johnsen, Egil Børre, Svein Lorentzen, Staffan Selander, and Peder Skyum-Nielsen. *Kunnskapens tekster: jakten på den gode lærebok.* Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1997.

Kelley, Robert. “The History the Masses Learn, and Historians Ignore.” Edited by Frances FitzGerald. *Reviews in American History* 8, no. 3 (1980): 296 – 303.

Lorentzen, Svein. *Ja, vi elsker-: skolebøkene som nasjonsbyggere 1814 – 2000.* Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2005.

Roos, Merethe. *En kort introduksjon til Norge på 1800-tallet.* 1st ed. Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2020.

Rustici, Craig. *The Afterlife of Pope Joan: Deploying the Popess Legend in Early Modern England.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Skjelbred, Dagrun, Norunn Askeland, Eva Maagerø, Bente Aamotsbakken. *Norsk lærebokhistorie: allmueskolen, folkeskolen, grunnskolen: 1739 – 2013.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017.

Sørensen, Øystein, Ruth Hemstad, Kultur- og tradisjonsformidlende forskning, and Utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet påtallet. *Jakten på det norske: perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet.* . Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1998.

Telhaug, Alfred Oftedal. *Grunnskolen som nasjonsbygger: fra statspietisme til nyliberalisme.* Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2003.

Thuen, Harald. *Den norske skolen: utdanningssystemets historie.* Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2017.

Tønnessen, Liv Kari Bondevik. *Norsk utdanningshistorie: en innføring med fokus på grunnskolens utvikling.* 2nd ed. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011.

Ulvund, Frode. *Nasjonens antiborgere: forestillinger om religiøse minoriteter som samfunnsfiender i Norge, ca. 1814 – 1964.* Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2017.

Hege Roll-Hansen

# The Meaning of a Christian Education: Priests, Pedagogues, and Politicians Negotiating the Norwegian Curriculum

## Introduction

On January 28, 1937, a large public meeting was held in the main church of the Norwegian capital, Our Savior's Church (Vår frelsers Kirke). The event was initiated by parents, members of the clergy, and teachers, deeply troubled by a proposed reform in the local schools. The object of concern was the approximately 30 percent reduction in weekly lessons dedicated to the subject "Knowledge of Christianity" (*Kristendomskunnskap*). The architect behind the new plans was Bernhof Ribsskog (1883–1963), school inspector of the city of Oslo. At stake was the supposed undermining of the religious education of the children of Oslo, but the broader picture needs to be taken into consideration: Ribsskog was the leading figure of a very influential pedagogical reform movement of the period, and had been put in charge of the comprehensive reformation of the new national curriculum, *Normalplanen* (the Normal Plan) which was to be presented a few years later in 1939, following the revised educational legislation of 1936. The progressive new curriculum later immensely influenced the Norwegian educational system in the postwar era and was also, prior to its launch, the subject of intense and divergent attention.

The public meeting resulted in a signed manifest of protest, and a massive dispute during the following weeks in newspapers all over the country. The voices and viewpoints involved represented different professional branches and political positions as well as different theological orientations. The temperature of the discussions following the proposed reform must be understood as proof of its relevance to several of the acute political, cultural, and ideological issues of the time – most importantly, the purpose and scope of public education, in which "Knowledge of Christianity", Christian ethics, and related content had held a prominent role.

The status of religion in society and the authority of the church was highly debated in the turbulent 1920s and 1930s in Norway. These discussions often aligned with party-political divisions: the conservative party advocated for traditional Christian values and defended the church's influence, while the radical labor movement contested both. The church itself was, however, also struggling with deep conflicts between the conservative and the developing liberal theological in-

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-003

terpretative traditions. The continuing processes of school development and curriculum reform responded to both the political and the theological discussions. Predictably, the educational system served as a major arena for the cultural battles of the period. Scholars in the fields of educational history, history of science, and broader cultural and political history have explored these battles extensively, providing valuable insights into the complex dynamics that unfolded during this era.[1]

This article aims to trace the different interests, understandings, and positions in the 1937 discussion regarding the distribution of lesson hours for different teaching subjects in the schools of Oslo, taking account of the overarching discussions, and demonstrating the intertwining of pedagogical, political, and confessional opposition. The interwar years saw profound changes in the educational system, not least connected to the establishment of pedagogy as an academic discipline. The deep and evolving theological differences of the period influenced the opinions of the clergy regarding the scope and content of education – above all in the subject "Knowledge of Christianity". The adaption of the progressive pedagogical ideals to the teaching of religion presented interesting didactical challenges concerning the imperative to align teaching with the needs of the child. As will be demonstrated, the political identification of the different positions in the pedagogical and theological debates is perhaps more ambiguous than it might appear.

The chapter draws on the extensive scholarly literature both on educational reforms of the early twentieth century and on the cultural and political struggles of the period, concerning the role of religion. This approach will, it is hoped, shed some light on the overarching discussion of this volume as to the validity of the widely acknowledged narrative of secularization as having characterized the modernizing process of the Norwegian state and society since the end of the Danish-Norwegian autocratic state. The development of educational policies – from being mainly confessionally motivated to incorporating a far broader understanding of the practical and theoretical knowledge and skills necessary for democratic participation and a modern economy – forms a main trajectory of this understanding of Norwegian history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recent histor-

**1** Kim Helsvig, "Kristendom og dåpsopplæring i norsk skole 1739–2003," *Kirke og kultur* 108, no. 5–6 (2003): 447–61; Kim Helsvig, *Pedagogikkens grenser: Kampen om norsk pedagogikk ved Pedagogisk forskningsinstitutt 1938–1980* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2005); Nils Ivar Agøy, *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen: spenninger, skuffelser, håp: tiden fram til 1940* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011); Erling Lars Dale, *De strategiske pedagoger: pedagogikkens vitenskapshistorie i Norge* (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1999); Harald Jarning, "Reform Pedagogy as a National Innovation System: Early Twentieth-Century Educational Entrepreneurs in Norway," *Paedagogica historica* 45, no. 4/5 (2009): 469–84; Fredrik Thue, "Lærerrollen og den pastorale maktens demokratisering," *Uddannelseshistorie: årbog fra Selskabet for Dansk Skolehistorie* 54 (2020).

ical scholarship suggests that this process of secularization was indeed supplemented by the opposite tendency: the sacralization of the state.[2]

## Disputing Theology: The Content of "Knowledge of Christianity"

To understand the pedagogical discussions as to the outlines and purpose of the subject "Knowledge of Christianity", it is necessary to take into account the large theological differences of the period.[3] The authority of the church was challenged both internally and by critical cultural and scientific forces.[4] Among the issues in dispute were the organization of the state church and the possible liberation of the church from the political government, and the formal education of the clergy, which since 1811 had been one of the chief responsibilities of the University of Oslo. Intense conflicts concerning the appointment of a new professor in theology resulted, in 1907, in a second institution for the education of priests, rooted in the more conservative theological milieu, which also tended to support a division of church and state. In 1920, critics of the liberal tendencies observed within the church called a meeting, mobilizing almost a thousand people who signed an agreement not to collaborate with the proponents of liberal theology.[5] The feared consequences for religious education were a very important part of their concern. The practical principles expressed in this agreement (commonly called "the Calmeyer street approach" or *Kalmeyergatelinjen*, referring to the address of the mission house in which the meeting took place) impacted on Norwegian church-political discussions for a long time.

Supporters of a more liberal approach to theology and religious questions contributed to the book *År 1928 efter Kristus* (The year 1928 after Christ), published in 1928 by the organization Norges landslag for frilynd kristendom (Norwegian liber-

**2** See, for instance, Merethe Roos, "Sekularisering eller modernisering? Offentlig og politisk debatt om kristendomsfaget i 1946," *Teologisk tidsskrift* 10, no. 4 (2021): 178–89; Helsvig, "Kristendom og dåpsopplæring i norsk skole 1739–2003"; Mette Buchardt, "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model," *Nordidactica* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 131–65; Steinar Bøyum et al., *En forskningsbasert skole?: forskningens plass i lærerutdanning og skole* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2024).

**3** Knut Dørum and Helje Kringlebotn Sødal, *Mellom gammelt og nytt: kristendom i Norge på 1800- og 1900- tallet* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016).

**4** See, for instance, Bernt T. Oftestad, Tarald Rasmussen, and Jan Schumacher, *Norsk kirkehistorie*, 3rd ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2005), 231ff.

**5** Oftestad, Rasmussen, and Schumacher, *Norsk kirkehistorie*, 254.

al Christian society). The writers included the brothers Kristian Schjelderup (1894–1980), on theology, and Harald Schjelderup (1895–1974), on psychoanalysis, alongside natural scientists, priests, and teachers. The chapter on religion in schools was written by Olav Andreas Eftestøl (1863–1930), a Social Democrat and, from 1907, school director in the inland counties of Hedmark and Oppland. Eftestøl was one of the first school directors without a degree in theology, which itself signaled a new era. His article opens rather polemically: Eftestøl stated that the number of weekly lessons in "Knowledge of Christianity" in the Norwegian primary school by far exceeded the equivalents in neighboring Denmark and Sweden. In most other countries, according to Eftestøl, the schools were either teaching religion in a non-confessional manner, or not at all.

Religion, or "Knowledge of Christianity", represented for Eftestøl an important part of the curriculum and was essential to fulfill the constitutional obligation to ensure a Christian education. A minority in the recent parliamentary school commission had indeed suggested taking religion out of the curriculum; this would, however, mean repealing the second paragraph of the constitution and in 1928 this was not a realistic political goal.[6] The current practice of teaching "Knowledge of Christianity", however, was, according to Eftestøl, far from ideal. His main objections concerned the focus on catechism and explanations, which according to traditional practice in Norwegian schools were supposed to be learned by heart. Furthermore, Eftestøl claimed that the Old Testament content, which was quite comprehensive, should be dramatically reduced in order to ensure an education in line with current pedagogical insights. The large majority of Norwegian teachers and priests still relied on the works of Luther and the famous book of explanations by the Danish priest Erik Pontoppidan (1698–1764), in use in Norwegian schools from the mid-eighteenth century.[7]

According to Eftestøl and other proponents of a more liberal theology, the stories of the New Testament and the history of the church should be given the leading role in the teaching of religion, since these elements represented the true religious and moral content of Christianity. Indeed, this change was necessary for schools to fulfill the constitutional obligation to provide a "Christian education."[8] Representing the tradition of liberal and modernized Christianity, Director Eftestøl had no problems in 1928 in combining Social Democratic politics and Christian educational ideals. This understanding was not shared by all.

---

**6** Norges landslag for frilynd kristendom, *År 1928 efter Kristus* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1928).

**7** Hans-Jørgen Dokka, *En skole gjennom 250 år: den norske allmueskole, folkeskole, grunnskole 1739–1989* (Oslo: NKS-forlaget, 1988).

**8** Norges landslag for frilynd kristendom, *År 1928 efter Kristus*, 153.

## Socialism, Religion, and Education

The Norwegian Workers' Party in the years after the First World War held a more radical revolutionary position than socialist parties of many other countries. Their view of the role of religion in society followed suit: the church was seen as a major counterrevolutionary societal force and an enemy of the working class. The importance of the issue is demonstrated by the fact that the second paragraph of the 1918 party program dealt with school politics. A central claim was that "Christian studies should be taken out of the school curriculum. The necessary knowledge of church and religious history is to be imparted in the teaching of history."[9] Professor of history at the University of Oslo Edvard Bull (1881–1932) played an important role in formulating the school politics of the Norwegian Workers' Party. In 1919 he wrote an article on this topic in the socialist magazine *Det tyvende århundrede* (The twentieth century), of which he was the editor. A total revision of the educational system was required, he claimed, in order to defeat the capitalist spirit and ethics which were permeating both the religious education and the system at large.[10] In his pamphlet *Kommunisme og religion* (Communism and religion) in 1923 he left no doubt that the struggle against the church was above all to be fought in the schools:

> The real stronghold of the church in our society lies in the school. Through the subject Knowledge of Christianity, it gets hold of practically all the country's children, in their most impressionable years. If it is the case that the church is our enemy, it becomes clear that the fight above all must be fought in our school policy

At the point the pamphlet was published, Edvard Bull was appointed to the parliamentary school commission, which operated between 1922 and 1927. Against this background it is not surprising that suggested changes or reductions in the teaching of "Knowledge of Christianity" tended to be associated with the socialist party and the labor movement, which held an important position in Norwegian politics in the 1920s and 1930s, entering the government offices in 1935.

This picture, however, needs to be nuanced. For various reasons Edvard Bull's uncompromising line was adjusted over the years. As the historian Nils Ivar Agøy shows, the Labor Party was not unanimous on the question of religion either; forces within the labor movement, in fact, propagated the idea of joining socialist

**9** DNA, arbeidsprogram 1918: https://www.arbeiderpartiet.no/om/historien-om-arbeiderpartiet/historiske-partiprogrammer/

**10** Agøy, *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen*, 449.

ideology and Christian belief.[11] At a meeting in Oslo Arbeidersamfund (the working-class society of Oslo) in 1929, the priest and Labor Party member of parliament Ole Konrad Steinholt (1881–1955) debated the issue with prominent socialist representatives. The meeting was broadly covered in the newspaper of the movement, *Arbeiderbladet* (The workers' paper), under the title "The working class and religion."[12] Steinholt claimed in his speech that the Norwegian working class, generally speaking, must be said to be religiously inclined. Further, he held that the moral and social values immanent in the Christian faith represented an important basis for a healthy society. Hence, a highly relevant question for a socialist worker was this: "How can I, without betraying my religious ideals, join the struggle for the emancipation of the working class?" According to Steinholt, the party needed to redefine its views on religion as well as on the church; this was also necessary to avoid the dominance of the most reactionary religious groups.

Also present at the meeting was Martin Tranmæl (1879–1967). Tranmæl was the editor of *Arbeiderbladet* and held a leading position in the party. His influence was strongly connected to the revolutionary line, and he was a fierce opponent of religion. However, in his view, the power of the church was to be fought with enlightenment, not with attacks on people's faith.[13] Even if he did not agree with Steinholt's point of view regarding religion and socialism, he admitted that compromises in the questions of the state church had been necessary. As to the position of Christianity in the schools, the standpoint of the Labor Party remained the same – "teaching should be historically oriented and non-confessional."

## Reform Pedagogy and the Concept of "the Working School"

School inspector Bernhof Ribsskog was a major figure in the developing scientification of pedagogy, contributing to the field of experimental pedagogy and psychology of learning.[14] His dual role as both a school bureaucrat and a scientist was typical and a key factor in explaining the great influence of reform pedagogy of the Norwegian educational system.

The origins of the movement of pedagogical reform are diverse; it can partly be traced back to the American tradition of pragmatic philosophy and the thinking

**11** Agøy, *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen.*
**12** *Arbeiderbladet*, April 15, 1929, p. 1.
**13** Agøy, *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen*, 138.
**14** B. Ribsskog, *To pedagogiske undersøkelser* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934).

of John Dewey (1859–1952), but it also owes a debt to European pioneers of pedagogical philosophy. A strong impulse to take the point of view of the child and build the educational system around the needs of the child is a common denominator. According to the influential Swedish pedagogue Ellen Key (1849–1926), the twentieth century was envisioned as the century of the child.[15] The importance of childhood for adult life was an idea that was also important to earlier pedagogical thinking, which gained new impact in this period. Although the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) were later disputed and partly refuted, there is no doubt that the fundamental ideas of psychoanalysis deeply impacted a broad field of academic disciplines, of which pedagogy was one. Alongside Bernhof Ribsskog, Anna Sethne (1872–1961) was one of the leading figures in this movement and, as we shall see, also took a leading part in the 1937 debate.[16]

The idea of *arbeidsskolen* (the working school) formed a decisive part of the new pedagogy of the early twentieth century, and was incorporated into the Norwegian educational policies and practices of the 1930 to some degree. Einar Sigmund (1874–1951), former school director in the municipality of Drammen and later head of Holmestrand teacher seminar, published "The working school: Problems of modern childrearing" in 1923, which was to be hugely influential.[17] According to Sigmund, the consequences of the new ideas for teaching and learning Christianity were indeed extensive. Interestingly, he did not use the common term "Knowledge of Christianity" for this subject, but rather *Religion.* In the modern working school, Sigmund held, education in religion would be closely related to the methods and concepts of the subject of history, "the only rational solution when religious education shall meet the needs of the child and not any external considerations, i. e. the church." In this respect, Sigmund recommended that Norwegian educators should look to Sweden, where after years of struggle pedagogical arguments had defeated the interests of the church.

The focus on the child, the needs of the child, and the cultivation (*Bildung*) of the possibilities and personality of each individual child are fundamental characteristics of the reform pedagogical movement. The practical consequences of this for the outlines of the school system, however, were still a matter of negotiation. According to the school historian Harald Thuen, three distinct discourses of education can be identified in the school politics and reform of the 1930s, all originating from the new scientific interest in childhood: the discourse of activity, typical of

**15** Erik Hauglund, *Barnets århundre og Ellen Key* (Oslo: Akribe, 2001).

**16** Willy Aagre, *Folkeopplyseren: Anna Sethne og den norske reformpedagogikken* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016).

**17** Einar Sigmund, *Arbeidsskolen* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1923).

the reform pedagogical tradition; the discourse of health, inspired by social medicine and the hygiene movement; and lastly, the discourse of normality, which informed the pedagogic-psychological research of the period.[18]

A few months prior to the church meeting in January 1937 Bernhof Ribsskog, together with Anathon Aall (1867–1943), professor of psychological philosophy, had published an extensive report on the rather depressing results of teaching in Norwegian schools in the subjects classified as subjects of orientation, as opposed to the subjects of skills.[19] Counted in this group of subjects were geography, natural sciences, and history, as well as "Knowledge of Christianity". This duality – skills and orientation – is interesting, as is the categorization of religion alongside the secular subjects. To the reform pedagogical movement, the strengthening of *skills* as an educational goal was a key issue.[20]

By way of a thorough and systematic procedure of standardized knowledge tests, the report by Ribsskog and Aall documented a dramatic lack of what was popularly considered standard knowledge, but also of history, geography, and biblical history and the Christian faith. To Ribsskog and the pedagogical reformists, the concept of standard knowledge was in itself an object of dispute. In their opinion the main purpose of the school system was not so much the transfer of standard knowledge as the cultivation of the individual child. The findings of the report, they claimed, demonstrated with all possible clarity the failure of traditional education.[21] Hence, the report was used as an argument for the need for extensive pedagogical reform, based on the principles of the working school, to be partially realized in the Normal Plan two years later, at the dawn of the Second World War. As stated above, the Normal Plan of 1939 would deeply influence the postwar development of the Norwegian school system.[22]

The expansion of physical exercise and handicrafts in the curriculum, at the expense of catechism and "Knowledge of Christianity", was in this way scientifically legitimized. The discussion of reducing the lesson hours for "Knowledge of Christianity" tended to be linked closely to the campaign for gymnastics. Fifteen years earlier, on the occasion of the 1922 national plan for primary schools (*Normalplan for landsfolkeskulen*), the question of body culture, gymnastics, and hygiene had already been among the main points of discussion.[23] Teacher Johannes Øvstedal

**18** Harald Thuen, *Den norske skolen* (Abstrakt forlag, 2017), 117 ff.

**19** B. Ribsskog, *Undervisningsplanene i folkeskolen*, ed. A. Aall (n.p.: Gyldendal, 1936).

**20** Thuen, *Den norske skolen*, 116 ff.

**21** Dokka, *En skole gjennom 250 år*. 134 ff.

**22** KUD. (1939). Kim Helsvig, *Reform og rutine: Kunnskapsdepartementets historie 1945–2017* (Oslo: Pax, 2017).

**23** *Skolebladet*, February 3, 1923, p. 1; *Dagbladet*, June 2, 1923, p. 12.

wrote several articles in newspapers and magazines for teacher professionals. The new plan had many promising qualities, he claimed, but it did not go far enough considering the new scientific insights into the psychological and physiological development of the child. This he blamed above all on the influence of the clergy and their determination to keep the subject "Knowledge of Christianity" in its ancient form.

A central point of objection for Øvstedal was the failure to meet the child's interests – the current way of teaching was characterized as no less than a "gross mistreatment of the children's souls. The child is forced to fill his brain with the thoughts – and systems of thought – of adults! [...] *Paul did not write for children* – his letters are addressed to adults!"[24]

An obvious answer, according to Johannes Øvstedal, was to expand and improve the teaching of gymnastics. A healthy soul was unthinkable in an unhealthy body. At this point, the modernization of schools could indeed look to the past for inspiration: "The new school needs to go back to the school of Athens, and also to child rearing in Norway a thousand years back. There we can find a healthy view on the development of body culture."[25]

Consequently the modern school had to make room for the active child – intellectual training and religion were not sufficient. The situation was alarming: according to Øvstedal, the health of Norwegian youngsters aged between fifteen and twenty was poorer than anywhere else in Europe, and there could be no doubt that the old-fashioned school system, with far too little emphasis on baths and body culture, was to blame for this. "To make primary education fulfill the needs of society, we cannot settle for the old reading school; we need to get to the working school that gives the child the opportunity to use its hands and body."[26]

Body culture and the pedagogical principles of the progressivists were closely linked. With reference to the proposed reform of the Oslo curriculum in 1937, Anna Sethne wrote in *Vår Skole* (the periodical of the Norwegian female teacher association) an article with the heading "Body culture in the school: a status" (*Kroppskulturen i skolen. Hvor står vi?*) Interestingly, the same issue proudly presents Elisa Platou (1885–1964), then newly appointed as the first inspector of girls gymnastics in the public schools of Oslo. To Anna Sethne the issue of gymnastics was of uttermost importance, and the appointment of Platou was thus very positive news: "there is a bright light on the horizon, can we see the sunrise? Let us hope so."[27] Her optimism, however, was not shared by everyone.

---

**24** *Dagbladet*, June 2, 1923.
**25** *Skolebladet*, February 3, 1923, p. 66.
**26** *Skolebladet*, February 3, 1923, p. 67.
**27** *Vår skole*, December 19, 1936, p. 476.

## The Protest Meeting in Our Savior's Church

Tuesday, January 26, a short announcement was printed in the newspapers of the Norwegian capital, stating the seriousness of the proposed revision of the teaching plans, inviting readers to a protest meeting in Our Savior's Church.[28] The announcement was signed by prominent clergy, teachers and headmasters, and parents. According to the later newspaper reports, 1,400 people were mobilized, and a fierce resolution against inspector Ribsskog's proposed reform was decided upon, with only eight votes against.

Dean (*Domprost*) Johannes Hygen (1876–1965) was a driving force behind the initiative. The day before the meeting he explained his view in an article in the conservative paper *Aftenposten.* If Ribsskog's planned revision was to be realized, this would be "the hardest blow against Christianity in our century."[29] The pretext of the revisions, in which the number of weekly hours dedicated to "Knowledge of Christianity" was to be reduced by a third, was to expand physical education and handicraft lessons. Important subjects, Hygen agreed, but "to rate them highly enough as to reduce Christianity knowledge would, according to a Christian world view, be to turn the value system upside-down." The Swedish argument did not convince Hygen – quite the opposite: Norway had been independent from Sweden for more than two decades. The educational system in Sweden had for some time systematically undermined Christian education by subordinating the confessional (faith) education (catechism) under historical content (biblical history). The situation was indeed alarming, and should concern good Christians not only in Oslo, but in all parts of Norway, as the leading reformist Ribsskog was also central to the forthcoming national revisions. Indeed, Hygen suggested that the foreshadowed reforms, integrating the catechism into biblical history, probably challenged the Norwegian constitution as well.

Hygen was amongst the most outspoken opponents of the proposed reforms, representing the church against the school authorities. His theological position is interesting and important for understanding the complexity of the discussion on Christian education. The dean of Oslo belonged to the liberal theological faction and he was a staunch critic of, among other things, the role the Old Testament still played in religious education. In September 1937 the dean was cited in an article on the new curriculum for "Knowledge of Christianity": "For long enough, the

**28** For a comprehensive analysis of the curriculum reform and the debate of 1936/37, see Njål Skrunes, "Kristendomskunnskap for barn: en fagplanhistorisk undersøkelse av kristendomsfagets utvikling 1889–1939" (Norsk Lærerakademi, 1995).

**29** *Aftenposten*, morning edition, Wednesday January 27, 1937, p. 7.

Jewish mythology about the creation of the world and humanity, about the fall into sin and the ancient history of humanity, a mythology whose narratives contradict all science, has been allowed,to disturb the contemplation of thinking children."[30]

The meeting in Oslo was organized as a parental initiative, and the question was activated alongside the concern for the Christian upbringing of the next generation, a related concern for the parental authority and the autonomy of the families. The periodical *Norsk Kirkeblad* (Norwegian church magazine) also engaged in the debate. An article printed on the front page of their edition of January 29, 1937, claimed that the weakened contact between the church and families was to blame for the unhappy reform, which threatened to seriously damage the Christian upbringing: "Our children do not belong to the school board or the state." The educational authorities had clearly got the impression that Norwegian parents had abdicated from their custody – to reverse this process, new organizations were needed to ensure contact between the church, families, and the state. To emphasize the gravity of the situation, the writer reminded the readers of *Norsk Kirkeblad* of what was currently happening in other states in Europe: "we know how ruthlessly parents' interests are set aside in totalitarian states."[31]

Inspector Ribsskog's initial response was printed in *Aftenposten* the day after Hygen's attack on the planned reforms. He maintained that it was absolutely necessary to take an overall view of the timetables and the contents of the primary school teaching, because religious education was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a whole. His and Anathon Aall's recent research into what school children learned in the current system clearly showed that a large part of the prescribed learning content – above all in "Knowledge of Christianity" – was far too difficult and not at all suitable for children in the lower grades.[32] This was a documented fact that could not be argued, he claimed. Drawing on the same research, Ribsskog meant to prove that the children's favorite subject was not "Knowledge of Christianity" and certainly not catechism, as Hygen had written in his prior article, but training in practical skills. His mission was to reform the school system so it would align with the true needs and wishes of the children it was supposed to serve. Like Sigmund fifteen years earlier, Ribsskog was eager to stress that the educational system should be designed to serve the children, not the state, or indeed the church.

The duality of body and soul was also thematized in the liberal paper *Dagbladet*'s coverage of the meeting. According to the parents' representative, Alf Jacob-

**30** *Arbeiderbladet*, September 23, 1937, p. 5.
**31** *Norsk kirkeblad*, January 29, 1937, p. 1.
**32** *Aftenposten*, morning edition, Thursday January 28, 1937, p. 2.

sen, "Knowledge of Christianity" was by far the most important subject at school, because of the need to open the eyes of the pupils to the views that could make them into happy Christians – "Jesus is able to fulfill all their demands."[33] The bishop of the diocese of Oslo, Johan Peter Lunde (1866–1938), shared this concern – in his view, the reduction of the subject of "Knowledge of Christianity" would make it impossible for it to retain its place as the most important of subjects. In the view of the bishop, the situation was linked to what he considered a growing material culture, cultivating the body and neglecting the soul: "Bishop Lunde warns against decay in a body culture that is detached from a strong spiritual culture." The bishop held a far less optimistic interpretation of the ancient ideals than, for instance, Johannes Øvstedal had, fifteen years earlier: If the future of the Norwegian people was to live on Olympic medals, it was doomed to destruction like ancient Athens.

The meeting in Oslo was causing concern all over the country. The newspaper *Vestfinnmarken*, published in Honningsvåg, was one of several that linked the threat to the Social Democrats and socialist forces in politics. Under the heading "Christianity knowledge and the Workers' Party," the paper expressed deep concern, and reminded its readers that the forces behind this recent attack on Christianity were known to support the Soviet system, hinting at the grotesque revelations of the Moscow processes, which were starting to be made known to the Norwegian public.[34] Moreover, the paper did not at all approve of the logic of the school inspector, according to which young children's preferences for gymnastics over catechism should be the deciding factor in these serious matters.

## Anna Sethne vs. Augusta Schjelderup

As stated above, the esteemed pedagogue Anna Sethne actively participated in the debate, offering her full support to Inspector Ribsskog.[35] In her view it was hard to believe that even professional teachers, who were expected to be more knowledgeable, appeared to be completely unaware of the true nature of the child and their inclination for activity. According to Sethne, modern teaching and learning methods emphasizing pupils' active learning had proven successful: "We all know plenty of children, indulged in lethargy and uninterested in book subjects, who become lively, interested, and happy when gymnastics and singing and hands-on subjects

**33** *Dagbladet*, January 29, 1937, p. 10.

**34** *Vestfinnmarken*, February 16, 1937, p. 1.

**35** See Skrunes, "Kristendomskunnskap for barn: en fagplanhistorisk undersøkelse av kristendomsfagets utvikling 1889–1939," for a detailed discussion of her role in the reform process and the debate.

brighten up the school day."[36] Drawing on her forty years of experience teaching "Knowledge of Christianity", Sethne confidently asserted that two hours a week "with a good, Christian teacher" were sufficient for providing children with a proper Christian education. Instead of instigating a religious war, all good forces ought to unite to "create a pedagogically and hygienically healthy school, expedient for the child's development and growth, both physical and spiritual." In her view the current methods of teaching both "Knowledge of Christianity" and other subjects were in dire need of reform. In a Christian country like Norway, children should certainly get to know the basic Christian doctrine and the stories of the New Testament, but in a childlike and simple manner – "we are dealing with children who do not have the prerequisites to understand the same as experienced and developed adults."

Sethne expressed no understanding for the fear that the rather dramatic reduction of lesson hours for "Knowledge of Christianity" would lead to a reduction in the quality of teaching in the subject. Although the logic of this argument may seem somewhat strange, as pointed out by the opposing side, it can be better understood in the context of the broader discussion on the organization and content of the subject. Sethne's vision of "Knowledge of Christianity" can be meaningfully linked to Eftestøl's programmatic article from 1928.[37]

Taking a somewhat sarcastic tone, Anna Sethne referred to the January meeting in Our Savior's Church, where "a bishop, a bookholder, and a primary school teacher" had predicted the collapse of Christianity. The primary school teacher mentioned was Augusta Schjelderup (1883–1966) who, as Sethne cynically pointed out, was paradoxically allowed by the bishop to speak out in public despite being a woman. Schjelderup was a prominent voice in the public debate and the author of several textbooks on "Knowledge of Christianity" for primary education. It is noteworthy that Schjelderup was the elder sister of the psychologist and philosopher Harald Schjelderup – who was central to introducing psychoanalysis in a Norwegian context – and of the radical and critical theologian Kristian Schjelderup.[38] Schjelderup and Sethne had been publicly discussing the fate of Christianity Studies only weeks prior to the church meeting.

The consequences of this development for the teaching of Christianity Studies were addressed in the same periodical in early January. Teacher Mimi Gleditsch (1892–1971) shared Augusta Schjelderup's deep concern about the plans of Inspector Ribsskog. Even if two hours a week were sufficient to ensure the knowledge of

**36** *Arbeiderbladet*, February 5, 1937, p. 4.

**37** Norges landslag for frilynd kristendom, *År 1928 efter Kristus*, 149.

**38** Håvard Nilsen, "Resistance in Therapy and War: Psychoanalysis in Norway 1920–1945" (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2016).

the content, it was far from enough to fulfill the more important task: to give the children a daily encounter with the sacred word. Anna Sethne responded to this by providing a detailed presentation of the plan and comparing the consequences with the current situation in other countries. The amount of time dedicated to "Knowledge of Christianity" in Norwegian primary schools was far greater than in most other countries, while the time allotted to Physical Education was soon to be below "all other cultural states."[39]

Augusta Schjelderup responded to this in the next issue, asserting that Religion was not to be understood merely as one of the main subjects in school but, indeed, as the most important subject of all. "It shall not only help and guide the children to be good and useful persons in this life but also prepare them to meet the only thing we know for certain is our common fate: death." Both Anna Sethne and Bernhof Ribsskog himself answered Schjelderup in the same issue, emphasizing the necessity to meet the children's needs and wishes, essential tenets of the progressive pedagogical movement. The reformists upheld the view, strengthened by the findings of Ribsskog and Aall in their survey, that current teaching in the subject of religion had to undergo deep revision, and that two hours a week, in fact, served this purpose *better* than three. Ribsskog claimed, referring to the survey, that the content of the subject was far too difficult and not suited for young children. This could no longer be denied, he claimed, and "old manners of talking do not help us the least in solving this cause."[40]

Given their serious disagreement, it may seem surprising that Augusta Schjelderup, five years earlier, had been chosen to write the volume on Religion in the series of handbooks for teachers edited by Bernhof Ribsskog and Nils Wiborg.[41] The handbooks were published in the first half of the 1930s and described the principles of modern reform pedagogy, as applied in the concrete teaching of different subjects. Given that she was a leading defender of traditional "Knowledge of Christianity", it is also interesting that Schjelderup's volume in the series is called "Religion" and not "Knowledge of Christianity". This can perhaps be seen as an expression of compromise or as a conviction of the integration of the ideas of the pedagogic reform movement and the belief in an education system permeated by Christian faith and values.

In the introduction to her volume, Schjelderup expressed her worries that Christianity was increasingly losing its grip on the Norwegian population. The faith did not permeate the people and society as it should, in her view. She argued

**39** *Vår skole*, January 9, 1937, p. 15.

**40** *Vår skole*, January 16, 1937, p. 31.

**41** Augusta Schjelderup, *Religion* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1932).

that the responsibility for this lay with the schools, particularly teachers of religion. However, in her view the main problem was that the teaching of religion took place in isolation from the rest of the subjects and content of education.[42] The subject needed to be kept closer to the everyday experiences of the child, in concert with the ideals of the working school and progressive pedagogics. Augusta Schjelderup's position and arguments are yet another interesting and important reminder that the lines of conflict in the didactical and political debates concerning the subject "Knowledge of Christianity" are complicated. Both Sethne and Schjelderup held that the subject was of crucial importance, and that the educational system should be built upon a strong foundation of Christian ethics and beliefs. Interestingly, despite holding opposite positions in the discussions of the teaching hours for "Knowledge of Christianity", they also agreed that both the curriculum and the didactic practices needed to be reformed in order for the subject to meet the present challenges and remain relevant for school children.

The multifaceted encounter between progressive scientific pedagogy and traditional religion-based educational thinking has been discussed by several scholars. The Norwegian educational historian Harald Jarning, in an article from 2009, points to the rather different positions within the progressive movement: Bernhof Ribsskog's experimental and empirical surveys deflected in many important ways, for instance, from Erling Kristvik's (1882–1969) approach, influenced by national and liberal Christian ideology.[43] Historian of ideas Martin Marciuch discusses in a recent article the shifting regimes of authority in Norwegian teacher education, pointing out interesting continuities. Without underscoring the importance of the new psychological and science-based pedagogical tradition in teacher education in the early twentieth century, he questions the identification of this development as one of secularization.[44] By identifying parallels between the subject-oriented, pietistic theological tradition and the child-centered individualism of scientific reform pedagogues, Marciuch contends that the dichotomy between educational philosophies rooted in Christian values and modern psychology is less evident than commonly assumed. His analysis, focused on teacher education institutions, can be meaningfully extended to discussions about the curriculum, as well as the scope and purpose of Christianity studies. Internationally, the Swiss historian Meike Sophia Baader has made comparable observations, drawing on concrete historical

**42** Schjelderup, *Religion*, 7.

**43** Jarning, "Reform Pedagogy as a National Innovation System."

**44** Martin Marciuch, "Pedagogiske brytninger i mellomkrigstidens lærerutdanning: sekularisering, vitenskapeliggjøring, akademisering – frigjøring?," in *En forskningsbasert skole? Forskningens plass i lærerutdanning og skole*, ed. Sølvi Mausethagen, Steinar Bøyum, Joakim Caspersen, Tine Sophie Prøitz, and Fredrik Thue (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2023), 237–71.

examples to highlight the religious dimensions of pedagogical practices within the progressive tradition. Although her examples are rooted in a vitalist/spiritual continental *lebensreform* movement, distinct from both the liberal and conservative Christian traditions in Norway, her argument about the proximity of reform pedagogy and religion remains relevant.[45]

This chapter took as its starting point the massive protests in 1937 against a proposed reform of the curriculum drastically reducing the lesson hours for "Knowledge of Christianity", threatening its dominant role in the educational system. The broad mobilization of parents, teachers, and clergy against the school inspector Bernhof Ribsskog and his new plans has been presented and explained as an expression of acute ideological, political, and theological issues of the period. A key purpose of the text has been to shed some light on the dialectical relationship between the very influential progressive pedagogics and the deeply rooted Christian ideals and educational practices, suggesting that the traditions interacted in important ways, despite the obvious differences of interests in concrete political questions. The temperature and dynamics of the curriculum discussions were indeed triggered by the fierce ideological climate of the interwar years and the backdrop of international political divisions.

## References

Agøy, Nils Ivar. *Kirken Og Arbeiderbevegelsen: Spenninger, Skuffelser, Håp: Tiden Fram Til 1940.* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011.

Buchardt, Mette. "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers Behind the Nordic Welfare State Model." *Nordidactica* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 131–65.

Bull, Edvard. *Kommunisme Og Religion.* Kristiania: Det norske arbeiderpartis forlag, 1923.

Bøyum, Steinar, Joakim Caspersen, Sølvi Mausethagen, Tine Sophie Prøitz, and Fredrik W. Thue. *En Forskningsbasert Skole?: Forskningens Plass I Lærerutdanning Og Skole.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2024.

Baader, Meike Sophia. "Erziehung Als Erlösung: Religiöse Dimensionen Der Reformpädagogik." *Zeitschrift für pädagogische Historiographie* 8, no. 2 (2002): 89–97.

Dale, Erling Lars. *De Strategiske Pedagoger: Pedagogikkens Vitenskapshistorie I Norge.* Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1999.

Dokka, Hans-Jørgen. *En Skole Gjennom 250 År: Den Norske Allmueskole, Folkeskole, Grunnskole 1739–1989.* Oslo: NKS-forlaget, 1988.

Dørum, Knut, and Helje Kringlebotn Sødal. *Mellom Gammelt Og Nytt: Kristendom I Norge På 1800- Og 1900- Tallet.* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016.

Hauglund, Erik. *Barnets Århundre Og Ellen Key.* Oslo: Akribe, 2001.

45 Meike Sophia Baader, "Erziehung als Erlösung: religiöse Dimensionen der Reformpädagogik," *Zeitschrift für pädagogische Historiographie* 8, no. 2 (2002): 89–97.

Helsvig, Kim. “Kristendom Og Dåpsopplæring I Norsk Skole 1739 – 2003.” *Kirke og kultur* 108, no. 5 – 6 (2003): 447 – 61.

Helsvig, Kim. *Pedagogikkens Grenser: Kampen Om Norsk Pedagogikk Ved Pedagogisk Forskningsinstitutt 1938 – 1980.* Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2005.

Helsvig, Kim. *Reform Og Rutine: Kunnskapsdepartementets Historie 1945 – 2017.* Oslo: Pax, 2017.

Jarning, Harald. “Reform Pedagogy as a National Innovation System: Early Twentieth-Century Educational Entrepreneurs in Norway.” *Paedagogica historica* 45, no. 4/5 (2009): 469 – 84.

Marciuch, Martin. “Pedagogiske Brytninger I Mellomkrigstidens Lærerutdanning: Sekularisering, Vitenskapeliggjøring, Akademisering – Frigjøring?” In *En Forskningsbasert Skole? Forskningens Plass I Lærerutdanning Og Skole*, edited by Sølvi Mausethagen, Steinar Bøyum, Joakim Caspersen, Tine Sophie Prøitz, and Fredrik Thue, 237 – 71. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2023.

Nilsen, Håvard. “Resistance in Therapy and War: Psychoanalysis in Norway 1920 – 1945.” PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2016.

Norges landslag for frilynd kristendom. *År 1928 Efter Kristus.* Oslo: Gyldendal, 1928.

Oftestad, Bernt T., Tarald Rasmussen, and Jan Schumacher. *Norsk Kirkehistorie.* 2nd ed. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2005.

Ribsskog, B. *To Pedagogiske Undersøkelser.* Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934.

Ribsskog, B. *Undervisningsplanene I Folkeskolen.* Edited by A. Aall. Gyldendal, 1936.

Roos, Merethe. “Sekularisering Eller Modernisering? Offentlig Og Politisk Debatt Om Kristendomsfaget I 1946.” *Teologisk tidsskrift* 10, no. 4 (2021): 178 – 89.

Schjelderup, Augusta. *Religion.* Oslo: Gyldendal, 1932.

Sigmund, Einar. *Arbeidsskolen.* Oslo: Cappelen, 1923.

Skrunes, Njål. *Kristendomskunnskap for Barn: En Fagplanhistorisk Undersøkelse Av Kristendomsfagets Utvikling 1889 – 1939.* Norsk Lærerakademi, 1995.

Thue, Fredrik. “Lærerrollen Og Den Pastorale Maktens Demokratisering.” *Uddannelseshistorie: årbog fra Selskabet for Dansk Skolehistorie* 54 (2020), 44 – 62.

Thuen, Harald. *Den Norske Skolen.* Abstrakt forlag, 2017.

Aagre, Willy. *Folkeopplyseren: Anna Sethne Og Den Norske Reformpedagogikken.* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016.

Merethe Roos

# Towards a New Understanding of Education: Perspectives on the Debate of the Purpose clause for the Norwegian Schools around 1960

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will shed light upon the debate on the purpose clause or the Norwegian school, or the question of what the school should be, around 1960. The year 1959 proved to be an important one in Norwegian educational history, as the educational act passed in that year gave the local authorities the right to extend compulsory education from a total of seven to nine years (for pupils aged seven to sixteen). This reform has been described as the "largest and most important project of educational policy in the early postwar decades."[1] The curriculum presented in 1960 heralded a new era, and ensured that all pupils in each age cohort would receive similar learning content, until they were in their mid-teens.[2] Previously, schooling in Norway had led to two different possibilities after the seven years of compulsory education: Framhaldsskolen (Continuation school), which offered a theoretical education with a practical bias, and Realskolen (Real school), which served as a preparation for the gymnasium. The final decision to enshrine nine years of compulsory education in Norway was taken in 1969.[3] The introduction of nine years of schooling must be seen against the development of the welfare state, characteristic of Norway after the Second World War, and it appears as part of the social democratic equality project that was also typical of Norway at that time. This chapter builds on and summarizes some of the main findings in my book *The Quest for a New Education.*[4]

The debates on the purpose clause arising in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Norway, both in political life as well as in the public sphere, fit well with the theme

1 Harald Thuen and Nina Volckmar, "Postwar School Reforms in Norway," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–30, accessed February 20, 2024, DOI:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1456.

2 Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, *Norsk skoleutvikling etter 1945* (Oslo: Didakta, 1982), 74.

3 *Lov om grunnskolen* (Lower Secondary Educational Act) (Oslo, 1969).

4 Marethe Roos, *The Quest for a New Education: Social Democracy, Educational Reforms, and Religion in Norway after the Second World War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-004

of this anthology. As I will show in the following chapter, the discussions demonstrated a tension between the secularization of society and the sacralization of the state, thus highlighting how secularization of society can be defended within a Christian – or specifically Evangelical-Lutheran – perception of reality. Of particular importance are texts written by the prolific author and pedagogue Eva Nordland (1921–2012). Nordland contributed substantially to this debate, both with articles printed in the daily newspapers and essays in professional journals. She has been described as one of the most important mediators between education and the practical political life, and school bureaucracy and public debate in Norway in the latter half of the twentieth century.[5] During her long career as an academic connected to the research environment at the University of Oslo, Nordland had close ties to the Norwegian Labor Party, and she acted as, among other things, a professional advisor to the influential politician Helge Sivertsen (1913–1986), who served first as a deputy minister and then later as Minister of Church and Education in the postwar period.

In this essay, I examine in particular the papers Nordland authored for the periodicals *Kirke og Kultur* in 1957 and *Norsk Skoleblad* in 1961, as well as her article on the preamble in the newspaper *Arbeiderbladet* in January 1959.[6] I will argue that Nordland advocated for a so-called *external* approach to Christianity; here I adopt the terminology with which the Norwegian political scientist Svein Tuastad defined the different approaches to religion in Norwegian politics after the Second World War.[7] In his PhD dissertation, Tuastad argued that the political landscape in postwar Norway was divided between an external and an internal approach to Christianity: those who supported the internal approach assumed that the Christian message should be as widespread as possible; the defenders of an external approach, on their part, viewed the Christian influence on society primarily as a historical and cultural fact, without Christianity being given a normative position. In the articles mentioned above, Nordland demonstrates how an external approach to Christianity can be carried over into pedagogical practice. At the same time, as I will argue, the view of humankind on which she bases her pedagogy is closely related to ethical theories that are also found in Scandinavian Protestantism at

**5** Harald Jarning, "Eva Nordland: mellom psykologi og samfunnsrettet pedagogikk," in *Pedagogiske profiler: norsk utdanningstenkning fra Holberg til Hernes*, ed. Sveinung Vaage and Harald Thuen (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2004), 324.

**6** See "Oppdragelse til menneske: To ulike syn i vår tid," *Kirke og Kultur* 5 and 6 (1957); "Skolens formålsparagraf i lovtekst," *Arbeiderbladet*, January 13, 1959; "Skolens allmenndannelse i søkelyset" and "Formålsparagrafen: en subjektiv tolkning," *Norsk Skoleblad* 25 (1961).

**7** Svein Tuastad, "Skulen og statsmaktsspørsmålet: stortingsdebattar 1945–2005 om religion i skulen og om private skular i lys av normativ teori" (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2006), 195.

that time, not least in the works of Danish theologian Knud E. Løgstrup (1905–1981).[8] Nordland thereby shows how Christianity is integrated as an important culture bearer into societal structures, and she demonstrates how contemporary Protestantism allows for universal human perspectives. As a pedagogue with strong ties to the Norwegian Labor Party, she constituted a connection between pedagogy and political life, thereby also allowing the ideas she represented to enter politics.

Nordland's ideas can also be seen as an extension of the theological reforms which Danish theologian and historian Mette Buchardt has argued took place in Scandinavia up to the Second World War.[9] According to Buchardt, the idea of Christianity as a culture, and as a value that permeates society and is connected to the state, can be traced through to the religious education in the Nordic countries in the present day. According to Buchardt, these ideas are rooted in early twentieth-century Cultural Protestantism, a point of view related to a suggestion Norwegian historian Kim Gunnar Helsvig had already made in 2004. In an article studying Christianity and baptismal instruction in Norwegian schools in the period 1739–2003, Helsvig claimed that, over the past fifty years, Christianity's position had not weakened in Norwegian society, but rather, had appeared with renewed strength, albeit in a slightly different form.[10] According to Helsvig, it can be argued that there is a prevailing social democratic understanding of Christianity that is adapted to school and education, in which a confessional Lutheran foundation is combined with openness and respect for other views on life. Thus Buchardt and Helsvig have a different approach to the postwar educational landscape than that of most previous research in Norway, not least among church historians and theologians.[11] The Labor Party's dominance in Norway is traditionally seen in line with a process of secularization, in which the church loses its previous social significance. My argument in this chapter, however, will be in accordance with Buchardt's and Helsvig's lines of reasoning.

**8** Primarily his book *Den etiske fordring*, first published in Copenhagen, 1956.

**9** Mette Buchardt, "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model," *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 2 (2015): 131–65.

**10** Kim Gunnar Helsvig, "Kristendom og dåpsopplæring i norsk skole 1739–2003," *Kirke og Kultur* 108, no. 5–6 (2004): 447–461. See also Helsvig's PhD dissertation, "Pedagogikkens grenser: Kampen om norsk pedagogikk ved Pedagogisk Forskningsinstitutt 1938–1980" (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2005).

**11** See, for instance, Bernt Oftestad, *Den norske statsreligionen: Fra øvrighetskirke til demokratisk statskirke* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 1998).

# The Discussion on Religious Education in Norway: Background, Historical Lines, and the Post-War Period

The topic of this chapter must be viewed against the position of Christian education in Norway, particularly in the years after the Second World War. Since the first educational act was signed in Norway in 1739, the school subject Knowledge of Christianity (Kristendomskunnskap) had taken a central position in the Norwegian educational system.[12] The Norwegian church had belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran branch of the Christian church since the sixteenth century and was a state church until 2017, when it became a distinct legal entity. Schools functioned as an extended arm of the church, and even though nineteenth-century school acts challenged the dominance of Christianity, and the ecclesiastical school board was eventually replaced by a secular board of education, Christian education in schools was seen as an extension of the church's baptism and as a preparation for confirmation. It was not until 1969 that an educational act stated that religious education should no longer be confessionally rooted in Lutheran Christianity, and Knowledge of Christianity was separated from the church's baptismal instruction.[13] In the textbooks for Knowledge of Christianity used in the years after the Second World War, Christianity was still presented as superior to all other religions, and the school subject was characterized by preaching, thus also underlining the need for missionary activities.[14]

The interwar period in Norway is distinguished by significant disputes between the church and the Labor movement.[15] The historian Nils Ivar Agøy, who has written the standard work on the church's relationship to the labor movement in Norway, has outlined two phases in this relationship: (1) a time of confrontation (1918–1933); and (2) a new orientation (1933–1940).[16] In the first period, the Labor

**12** Alfred Oftedal Telhaug and Odd Asbjørn Mediås, *Skolen som nasjonsbygger: Fra statspietisme til nyliberalisme* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2003), 36.

**13** Bengt Ove Andreassen, "Religion Education in Norway: Tension or Harmony between Human Rights and Christian Cultural Heritage," *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 49, no. 2 (2014): 137–64.

**14** Dagrun Skjelbred, Norun Askeland, Eva Maagerø, and Bente Aamotsbakken, *Norsk lærebokhistorie: Allmueskolen – folkeskolen – grunnskolen 1739–2013* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), 209 ff.

**15** Aud V. Tønnessen, *"Et trygt og godt hjem for alle?" Kirkelederes kritikk av velferdsstaten etter 1945*. KIFO perspekiv 7 (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2000), 75.

**16** Nils Ivar Agøy, *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen: spenninger, skuffelser, håp: tiden fram til 1940* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011), 611 ff.

Party came across as hostile to religion, not least because the pamphlet *Kommunisme og kristendom* (Communism and Christianity), published by Edvard Bull (1881–1932) in 1923, was regarded as representing the Labor Party's official view on religion. This pamphlet rejected traditional Christian beliefs. In the second period, the attitudes towards religion were far more friendly, and when the party came into government, their politics was characterized by efforts to avoid conflicts with the church and Christians. At the same time, the Labor Party wanted to retain control over the church in matters of church organization and to keep the church outside the domain of schooling and church politics. Among Christians, the Labor Party was seen as a major threat, and mobilizing against the labor movement became a matter of importance. As a result of this mobilization, the political party Kristelig Folkeparti (the Christian Democrats) was founded in 1933.[17]

After the liberation of Norway from German occupation in 1945, the church and the labor movement had two different objectives. For the labor movement, the fight against poverty was regarded as a priority, and this battle required a planned economy and a strong national state. In the church's narrative, materialism was regarded as the enemy, and Christianity as the solution to the country's problems. Moreover, the war was seen as a consequence of the idolatry that characterized the Labor Party.[18] Increased church attendance during the wars had given the church an increased confidence, and Christians saw this as a sign of the re-institutionalization of the church as a national community. The war also strengthened the unity among Norwegian Christians and created alliances between parents and the church, particularly geared towards promoting a Christian upbringing.

As a result of this increased confidence, a number of Christian initiatives were implemented immediately after the Second World War. Among these was a society for the promotion of Christian education, already established in Oslo in 1945 with the aim of influencing political authorities in respect to education and school policy issues.[19] The society came to be called Kristelig Pedagogisk Kontor (Christian pedagogical office). In 1948, the name was changed to Institutt for Kristen Oppseding (Institute for Christian upbringing), or IKO, which remains its name today. IKO was supported by the largest voluntary Lutheran organizations, by the Norwegian church, and by the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway. The society had an Evangelical-Lutheran profile and was clearly opposed to liberal theology. Its goal was to contribute to securing, strengthening, and renewing the position of Christianity in schools, and to ensure that a Christian spirit permeated all educa-

**17** Arne R. Lomeland, *Kristelig Folkeparti blir til* (Oslo, Bergen, and Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1971).

**18** Tønnessen, *Et trygt og godt hjem*, 116.

**19** Kristin Norseth, "IKO gjennom 75 år," *Prismet: Religionspedagogisk tidsskrift* 71, no. 3 (2020): 217.

tion. This could be achieved through the work of teachers professing Christianity, as well as through a pedagogical and methodological renewal of Knowledge of Christianity.[20] IKO gained considerable influence in postwar Norway, not least thanks to strong ties to the pedagogical research environment at University of Oslo (PFI, or Institute for pedagogical research).[21]

For an organization whose main goal was to strengthen Christian values and combat the secularization of school and society, this may have seemed ambitious enough in the period immediately after the Second World War. In 1939, a new national curriculum (*Normalplanen*, the Normal Curriculum) for the seven-year compulsory schooling program (*folkeskolen*) was adopted. This curriculum was regarded as a pedagogical manifesto, and as a normative text for the school system in coming generations.[22] The Normal Curriculum reduced the number of weekly lessons in Knowledge of Christianity and promoted a religious pluralism that could be perceived as a threat to the idea of schools' Christian education being an extension of baptismal education, and thus also preparing for confirmation.[23] Among Christians, the Normal Curriculum was viewed as highly problematic and as a substantial threat to the Christian values upon which schools should be built.[24] The threat of secularism constituted by the Normal Curriculum became an important reason for the establishment of IKO. On the political level, the strong Christian alliance that had been created during the war aroused sharp opposition, both from representatives at the Storting (Parliament) as well as from members of the government. New proposals were raised in order to limit Christian influence, and high-profile politicians again raised questions on the legitimacy of having Knowledge of Christianity as a compulsory school subject. They were opposed by representatives from the political right-wing and representatives from the Christian Democrats. Yet, although there were sharp contradictions between the political wings at the Storting, the debate in the contemporary newspapers was far greater. The debate was particularly evident in the newspaper *Verdens Gang* [The Course of the World] after World War II. Among the readers' letters in 1946, there were several writers who used this newspaper to speak up for the idea of removing compulsory Christian

**20** Bjarne Hareide, "Ein kristen innsats i skulen," in *Protokoll for styremøter* [minutes of the board] (Oslo: KPK, 1948).

**21** Helsvig, "Kristendom og dåpsopplæring," 170.

**22** Hans-Jørgen Dokka, "Normalplanen foran en revisjon," *Prismet* (1958): 12–22.

**23** Helsvig, *Kristendom og dåpsopplæring*.

**24** Torstein Harbo, "1940–1960 Kirken, foreldrene og skolen i møte med staten," in *Kirke – skole – stat 1739–1989*, ed. Brynjar Haraldsø (Oslo: IKO-forlaget, 1989), 105–31.

education from schools' curricula.[25] Their opponents replied instantly, both in *Verdens Gang* and in other newspapers.

The discussions in the public sphere in the years after the Liberation pointed forward to even more turbulent times. During the first half of the 1950s, the criticism against the dogmatic Evangelical-Lutherans became even more evident, and IKO sympathizers had to defend themselves from attacks and criticism from several angles. On one side, radical intellectuals flaunted their rejection of Christianity, and questioned the place of religious education in schools' curricula. One of them was the high-profile journalist Torolf Elster (1911–2006), who published several articles in periodicals and newspapers in which he claimed that religious teaching in schools was equal to abuse of power and was in conflict with modern childrearing ideas.[26] August Lange (1907–1970), a well-known philologist who worked eagerly to improve Norwegian teacher education, referred to the purpose clause as a revenant from the past, and viewed its underlining of the necessity of a Christian and moral upbringing as "dangerous, because it invited abuse."[27] Others argued that Sweden should be used as a model for the task of religious education.[28] In Sweden, a statute for the freedom of religion had recently been introduced. Unlike in Norway, where the teacher of religious education was obliged to belong to the Evangelical-Lutheran church in accordance with the Dissenter Act, the recently introduced freedom of religion in Sweden acknowledged the teacher's right not to belong to any denomination.

On the other hand, the church experienced increasing discord in the 1950s. On January 25, 1953, Ole Hallesby (1879–1961), professor of theology at the Free Faculty of Theology, delivered an astounding speech on Norwegian radio, proclaiming to the non-religious that if they dropped dead at that moment, they would at the same time fall directly into hell. Hallesby's speech was a reaction against liberalizing tendencies in the church, not least those of Kristian Schjelderup (1894–1980), bishop of the diocese of Hamar, who in the coming weeks and months became the foremost spokesperson for the liberal faction.[29] The radio speech caused a major debate in Norway on the existence of hell, and criticisms were raised against the

**25** Merethe Roos, "Sekularisering eller modernisering. Offentlig og politisk debatt om kristendomsfaget i 1946," *Teologisk tidsskrift* 10, no. 4 (2021): 178–89.

**26** See, for instance, Torolf Elster, "De vergeløse," *Arbeiderbladet*, October 23, 1954.

**27** August Lange, "Folkeskolelovens formålsparagraf," *Arbeiderbladet*, April 26, 1954.

**28** Carl Bonnevie, "Religionsfriheten må sikres med lov," *Dagbladet*, November 9, 1954.

**29** See "Professor Hallesbys radiotale: Biskop Schjelderup uttaler seg," *Aftenposten*, January 31, 1953.

Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation (NRK) for hosting Hallesby's speech.[30] Within the church, there was a clear distinction between those who argued for a literal interpretation of the Bible and those who defended a liberal interpretation.

Even the dissenters protested against the strong Evangelical-Lutheran dominance. At around the same time as the debate on the existence of hell was raging in the public sphere, members of dissenter congregations were protesting against the law excluding dissenters from teaching religion in public schools. In the daily press, both in local newspapers around the country and in national journals, articles frequently appeared claiming that this exclusion of members of dissenter congregations could be seen as a sign of lack of religious freedom. The Norwegian organization of dissenters, the so-called "Dissenterting," had been working with questions related to the Dissenter Act since their establishment in 1902, but their arguments had been wilfully ignored , according to the Christian newspaper *Vårt Land.*[31] Thus, the newspaper writer continued, Norway had obtained only a second-rate position compared to other civilized nations. This claim was supported by the important volume *Religious Liberty: An Inquiry*, written by M. Searle Bates and published by the International Missionary Council in 1945, which had listed Norway in the same category as countries like Argentina, Bolivia, the French colonies, Paraguay, and Venezuela. Hence, in accordance with true democracy and generally accepted human rights, it was now time to repeal the Dissenter Act and replace it with a law on religious freedom, the paper concluded.

The Evangelical-Lutheran foundation of school and education in Norway was subject to pressure from several fronts during the postwar years. In the 1950s, it became an important political issue to improve and modernize schools. The coordinating committee for the Norwegian educational system was founded in 1947, and in their final report, submitted in 1952, they underlined that a modern society required a longer period of compulsory education than had been the case thus far: as business and industry had become more specialized, the claims for vocational knowledge and general education were sharpened, and the enhanced democracy challenged individuals and gave greater opportunities to an increased number of people. As a consequence of these conclusions, the Council for Pilot Schemes in Education (Forsøksrådet for skoleverket) was established in 1954.[32] In their report on schools (1955–56), they listed six different goals for their enterprise: (1) to

**30** See, for instance, "Hallesby truer med helvete gjennom Norsk Rikskringkasting," *Dagbladet*, January 26, 1953.

**31** "Norge har annenrangs religionsfrihet," *Vårt Land*, February 25, 1953.

**32** This advisory council continued their work until 1984. See Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, *Forsøksrådet for skoleverket 1954–1984: en sammenfattende framstilling* (Trondheim: Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, 1989).

establish a general education for everyone up to the age of sixteen to seventeen, in accordance with the aptitudes and interests of the pupils; (2) to aim for conditions ensuring the students could make a natural choice when it came to decisions about education; (3) to adjust the differences between the urban and the rural parts of the country in respect to secondary education; (4) to promote an increase in the status of practical and aesthetic school subjects and activities; (5) to create a common school for young people up to the age of sixteen to seventeen, which could be seen as a miniature democratic society; and (6) to provide an introduction to the practical working life youth were expected to enter after they had completed their education.[33] In addition to the report, the council reported that Eva Nordland had published a supplement, in which she explained the "intellectual, aesthetic and ethical-social tasks for a new school."

A couple of years later, in 1958, the Ministry of Church and Education put forward a proposal for a new educational act for the Norwegian primary schools, one of the main goals of which was to introduce the possibility of undertaking a compulsory nine-year period of schooling in Norway.[34] In this proposal, the paragraph underlining the importance of Christian education, as seen in the previous school act (§ 9c, 1936), had been excluded. This omission was met by a massive response in the public sphere and was viewed as an attack against the statutory purpose of schools. When the new educational act (Loven om Folkeskolen) was ratified one year later, the importance of Christian education was implemented in § 7. The Committee of Church and Education declared in this regard that the first and second paragraphs in the Norwegian constitution were a sufficient guarantee for maintaining the status that Christian education had previously held in schools. There was also a shift in what should be regarded as the highest goal of schools: by using different terms and expressions from the previous school act, there was now an emphasis on the personal and humanitarian aspects, rather than on effectiveness and socioeconomic growth. Thus, according to the Norwegian pedagogue Torstein Harboe, the highest goal of schools corresponded with leading pedagogical trends and postwar pedagogical literature.[35]

**33** Torstein Harbo, *Målsetting og læreplan i den 9-årige skole* (Oslo: J. M. Stenersens forlag, 1960), 57–58.

**34** Od. prp. no. 30., *Lov om folkeskolen*, Ållmenne merknader pkt. c. (1958).

**35** Harbo, *Målsetting og læreplan*, 78.

## Eva Nordland's Contributions

As I have indicated above, school and education in postwar Norway were characterized by forces pushing in different directions and along several axes at once, thus being subject to a complexity that was typical of the era, involving political, religious, and ideological aspects. These aspects often came together or overlapped each other. Yet, to put it simply, one can say that the conservative voices – whether religious, cultural, or political – tried to maintain the predominantly Evangelical-Lutheran character of schools. Particularly among members and sympathizers of IKO, the Labor Party was regarded as fighting for secularizing tendencies, yet the school's Evangelical-Lutheran character was also under attack from left-wing intellectuals and prominent voices in the public sphere. Viewed in terms of the degrading of the Christian school subject (Knowledge of Christianity) that is implied in this school act, the Labor Party might be seen as a driving force behind secularization of schools.

In this landscape, Eva Nordland occupied a prominent position, as a scholar, as a well-respected public debater, and as a specialist advisor for the Labor Party in the postwar period. Through her husband Odd Nordland (1919–1999), an influential scholar in cultural history who was central to the rebuilding of the socialist student organization in the years after the Second World War, by the early 1950s she had already encountered prominent politicians in the Labor Party, not least Helge Sivertsen, with whom she forged a lifelong friendship and close cooperation. Nordland had already played a key role in the Council for the Pilot Schemes of Education and she emphasized schools' social roles and the importance of individual development. It should therefore be no surprise to see Eva Nordland using the public sphere to defend the school policies of her own time, as seen in important texts in Norwegian newspapers and periodicals in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Nordland's texts in the periodical *Kirke og Kultur* in 1957 were published in two subsequent editions.[36] In the first of the articles, Nordland was particularly concerned with distinguishing between a Christian philosophy of life and modern pedagogy. While the Christian pedagogy and philosophy of life, according to Nordland, viewed every single human as God's creature and promoted this as a goal in itself, modern pedagogy promoted the idea of a continuous development of humanity, in which human potential sprang forth through interaction with other people. This view was particularly true for the social radical approach to upbringing and childrearing, which Nordland tied to modern theories on psychology and ed-

**36** Nordland's articles are published in volumes 5 and 6 of the periodical (1957).

ucational sociology. “Cooperation is the most important issue of our time,” she proclaimed. Never before had people paid so much attention to the fact that human beings were mutually dependent on each other as they did now. This implied autonomous individuals who could make their own choices and take control of their own lives. This autonomy also meant that everyone was allowed the right to choose their own religion. Thus, the goal for childrearing, according to this social radical view, was to raise the child to interaction with others, within the family, the local community, and the country, as well as within all of humankind. This view on the individual, which necessarily recognized one’s neighbor as an equal, could lead to improved international cooperation and better local societies, she claimed. According to Nordland, this social radical pedagogy and its implications were extensively criticized among Christians in her own time.

Nevertheless, a Christian philosophy of life and this radical view on upbringing could easily be brought together, Nordland claimed. In the second of the subsequent articles in *Kirke og Kultur*, she sketched an alternative Christian approach to education and upbringing, promoted by the American educationalists Tunis Romein (1912–2004) and Theodore Greene (1897–1969).[37] Their approach was compatible with the social radical understanding of education presented in the previous volume of the periodical. In the opinion of Romein and Greene, all educational philosophies were based on faith, and faith in God was the premise binding humanity together. Moreover, they saw the belief in a common God, made necessary for humans by virtue of their sinful nature, as humanity’s only possibility. By virtue of being a constant and unchanging character, humankind needed to experience the presence and power of God in their lives. Consequently, all humans will feel obliged to God, with their innate presuppositions and possibilities as the point of departure. As an extension of this, Romein had also argued that a depersonalized God could be viewed as one of the greatest dangers of our time. A depersonalized God lacked the ability to become the highest authority in every human’s life, and the idea of a depersonalized God could also rub off on interpersonal relationships – there was a risk that humans would now treat each other as representatives of a group and as a means to achieve a goal, rather than as individual beings. Consequently, this weakened the ability to hold power over our fellow beings and the ability to see others as parts of communities, and it prevented the experience of a conscientious cooperation with other people.

**37** Theodore M. Greene, “A Liberal Christian Idealist Philosophy of Education,” *Teachers College Record* 56, no. 9 (1955), 91–136, and Tunis Romein, *Education and Responsibility* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955).

Romein's and Greene's theories gave direction to Nordland's own view on education and childrearing. If the child was raised to have confidence in a personal and caring other, they could also easily consider God as the highest good and a powerful force in their life, and being a fellow citizen as a goal in itself. Otherwise, there was a risk of being worn down by their organizations or collectives. Nordland found support for her view in Martin Buber (1878–1965), who had underlined that young people were beginning to feel that, because of their absorption by the collective, something important and irreplaceable was lost to them – that is, personal responsibility for life and the world – and that a true and full relationship between fellow humans only existed between unified and responsible persons.[38] The Christian and the non-Christian value-oriented rationalists thus had common ground for raising their children – based on timeless values such as love, kindness, truth, and beauty, whether rooted in a belief in God or not. This meant, according to Nordland's view, that there could not be substantial differences between a confessing Christian and a value-oriented rationalist, when it came to the question of ethics: "We strengthen each other as humans if we, in the new generation, promote what we have in common, a consciousness of values, without losing our own conviction."[39] Therefore, the consciousness about common values could be seen as the firm ground uniting a new generation, and this consciousness could not be rejected by authoritative or dogmatic judgments.

Thus, Eva Nordland seems to promote an ontological ethics founded upon fundamental and unchanging conditions of life, manifesting itself in universal values and applicable to both confessing Christians and those without a faith in God. She brings this into play in debate articles examining school politics in the coming years, not least in the previously mentioned texts in *Arbeiderbladet* in 1959 and *Norsk Skoleblad* in 1961. The text in *Arbeiderbladet*, "Skolens formålsparagraf i lovtekst og anvendelse" (School's purpose clause in the wording of an Act and practical application), is written as a comment to the curate Odd Godal's (1905–1959) article in the same newspaper one month earlier.[40] In this text, Godal had argued that the suggested preamble purpose clause focused on the wrong things. In his opinion, it should focus on what the school should give the child, and what the child needed and was, rather than on what the school should guide the child to become. In particular, Godal had reacted against the first formulation in the new preamble purpose clause, emphasizing that the schools' goal was to help the students become good citizens. This formulation had been added to the previ-

**38** Nordland here refers to Martin Buber's *Between Man and Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1947).

**39** Nordland, "Oppdragelse til menneske," 356.

**40** Odd Godal, "Skolen og menneskebarnet," *Arbeiderbladet*, December 16, 1958.

ous wording, which underlined that the foremost goal for the school was to help give the children a moral and Christian upbringing, and to work to make them capable both in spiritual and physical ways. In Godal's view, this addition reflected "our own time's urge to govern humanity and to adapt it to the societal processes we wanted to promote."[41]

In accordance with her understanding of education and childrearing, Eva Nordland interpreted the first formulation for the benefit of society, rather than seeing it as a threat. The first and most important goal for schools, she claimed, was to lead the child to social growth and development, and to encourage them to deeds and enterprises that served the community. Because the educator must constantly admit that they are unaware of whether the deeds and actions benefit or harm their society, they must show caution and restraint in the upbringing, and not push the child down their own narrow paths. Yet, in practical terms, it was possible to raise children as social beings and to teach them to enjoy their own efforts while also helping others. As an extension of this, one should aim to give children a Christian and moral upbringing. According to Nordland, this nonetheless meant that the child should not be given a religious or moral upbringing linked to any particular denomination against the parents' will. Rather, schools should help parents to give their children the best available upbringing in the country. In Norway, where 96 percent of the population were members of the Evangelical Lutheran church, one could expect the school to provide education in this confession, in accordance with the parents' choice. However, the school should also teach tolerance and openness, in order to encourage children to make their own choices and make personal decisions on the question of morality and religion. Thus, Nordland presupposes that the Evangelical Lutheran denomination is dominant in the society and exists as an explanatory model for the country's cultural identity.

In the texts published in *Norsk Skoleblad* in 1961, Nordland continued her analysis on the purpose clause, first in an introductory elaborative explanation and then in a reply to her critics, first and foremost Einar Helde (b. 1923) and Ivar Asheim (1927–2020), who had raised critical issues against Nordland's point of view in the same periodical. Nordland's texts clearly demonstrate the tensions between a liberal or cultural and a normative approach to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity. Helde, a high-profile teacher from Gudbrandsdalen, had argued that the Christian dogmas were incontestable, and that the Church's teachings should permeate Norwegian schools.[42] Asheim, at that time a PhD student at the Free Fac-

**41** Godal, "Skolen og menneskebarnet."

**42** Einar Helde, "Skal dogma diskuterast?," *Norsk Skoleblad* 17 (1961): 596.

ulty of Theology in Oslo, for his part stated that Nordland had overlooked important contexts in her interpretation of the new purpose clause such as the debates at the Storting and the more general societal development surrounding it.[43] Thus, he argued, her interpretation of the purpose clause was haphazard and subjective and a result of her private philosophy of education, rather than an analysis that allowed the meaning of the text to be expressed independently of the interpreter's own opinions. Asheim was also critical of her defense of activity pedagogy, which he believed would interfere with a more broadly oriented *Bildung*, achieved through the school subjects.

In her reply to Helde, Nordland underlined that, in her opinion, neutral information should characterize schools' religious education, rather than preaching. At the same time, she continued, schools should facilitate allowing the children to experience Christianity as a religion, for instance through prayers, hymnodies, or attending festivals and church services. As a societal institution, the school was responsible for letting the children encounter Christian preaching, but religious practice itself should arise from sincerity and devotion, rather than compulsion. This voluntary character could also preserve Christianity's position in the country, Nordland argued:

> There is talk about dechristianization and churches that are empty. I think this phenomenon is a result of pursuing the words and the institutions' desire for influence. If every individual human being was allowed to grapple with the content of the words, and if school children and teachers were given the right to reflect as freely as they wanted to, even with the risk of letting doubt and disbelief enter into religious education, a real and continuous spirit of reformation would enter our religion. Consequently, the Norwegians could again become a religious people.[44]

In her response to Asheim, Nordland argued that activity pedagogy could be reconciled with a general *Bildung*. Activity pedagogy strove to give the children knowledge that was relevant for life, knowledge which stimulated further growth and experience. "This is not always the activity pedagogues have been able to realize, but this is what they have been striving for. Whatever it is, it is no underestimation of the knowledge." Further, she argued, schools' foremost goal was to take care of all students, regardless of their religion. Students coming from non-religious homes would get a proper moral upbringing through their contact with others, and schools' primary aim should be to help them develop an ethical consciousness. Christian and secular ethics were all the same:

---

**43** Ivar Asheim, "Til tolkinga av formålsparagrafen," *Norsk Skoleblad* 17 (1961): 593 – 95.

**44** Eva Nordland, "Formålsparagrafen: en subjektiv tolkning," *Norsk Skoleblad* 23 (1961): 833.

> Truth and kindness are Evangelical-Lutheran commands of morality, yet they are also universal commands, which can be applied as ethical principles in all humanist thinking. The content of these commands will have consequences for human acts in their daily lives and for their long-term choices. How these commands link up with independence, honesty, perseverance, generosity, solidarity, and charity are topics that the children and youth have the right to think through, discuss and work on as a moral upbringing and ethical education. This is true for all students in school, including those not confessing a Christian faith.[45]

## Nordland, Løgstrup, and the Ethical Demand – and Concluding Reflections

Nordland's ontological and universal ethics has much in common with Knud E. Løgstrup's best-known book, *The Ethical Demand* (Den etiske fordring), originally published in 1956 and immediately translated into Norwegian and Swedish. In this book, Løgstrup argued for an ethics based on a basic trust, which obliterated the distinction between Christian and secular morality. For Løgstrup, there was only human morality. In the background of our needs, there was, according to Løgstrup, a demand to take care of each other, which was characterized as silent, radical, unfulfillable, and one-sided. Løgstrup's background can be traced in many directions, but in this regard, the inheritance from the phenomenological philosophical tradition, first and foremost Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Hans Lipps (1889–1941), is clearly shown to be important. In particular, he draws upon Lipps's ideas on how the human self is constituted by the reality of existence and linked to the everyday use of words.[46] Løgstrup combined this philosophical point of view with his own Christian background and allowed the specifically Christian content to gain general validity.

Løgstrup's ethics are based on a belief that the biblical message on love provides fundamental facts about human existence and our interdependence on each other. His project connects to two questions: "What attitude to the other human being is implicit in Jesus's proclamation? What view does it take of what is essential in our lives with and against each other, and how can that be stated in purely human terms?"[47] The key to these questions lies in human interdependence: "the other human must in fact be so dependent upon me that everything hangs on what

---

**45** Nordland, "Formålsparagrafen," 834.

**46** Bjørn Rabjerg and Robert Stern, "Introduction," in K. E. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, trans. with introduction and notes by Bjørn Rabjerg and Robert Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), xxv.

**47** Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, x.

I (and no one else) do in that relationship, and what I do here and now, and not what I do in some other time or in some other manner." This interdependence, the fact that every human is entangled in other people's lives, underpins the rest of Løgstrup's project, and is the starting point for his elaboration of what it means to love one's neighbor. A consequence of this interdependence is that humans always hold power over other human beings, as well as the idea that we never have anything to do with another human being without holding a part of his or her life in our hands. In later works, this interdependence is directly connected to sovereign expressions of life that are inherently other-regarding, such as trust, kindness, mercy, and sincerity. Thus, to put it simply, for Løgstrup the Christian message of love opens to an ethical universalism, connected to phenomenology and human interaction with fellow human beings.

In Eva Nordland's article in *Kirke og Kultur*, she seems to be defending the same universality that can be found in Løgstrup's works. She does not distance herself from Christianity, but rather sees it as a cultural prerequisite for an inclusive pedagogy, where the existence of each and every person is at the center. Her approach to education and upbringing is – as with Løgstrup's ethics – phenomenological, and she assumes that everyone is morally bound to fellow humans and obliged to act on this basis. Every human being should be treated as an individual human being, and not as a representative of a group. This presupposes a value-oriented ethical foundation which refuses to differentiate between Christians and non-Christians. When encountering our fellow human beings, timeless values were awakened, or in Løgstrup's words: sovereign expressions of life. This erased the distinction between a Christian and a secular upbringing.

It cannot be proved to what extent Nordland was familiar with Løgstrup's ideas at the time she wrote these texts, at least not the first of them – especially as Løgstrup's literal breakthrough in 1956, *The Ethical Demand*, received relatively little attention in Norway immediately after its release. There is, however, one interesting exception. On March 5, 1957, the newspaper *Frisprog*, published by the Parental Campaign (a group of parents who worked against radical language forms in children's textbooks), printed an article by the Danish writer Herluf Froberg (b. 1907) discussing Løgstrup's ethics and viewing them as a solution to contemporary ethical challenges.[48] This newspaper was frequently read by Norwegian intellectuals, and it is not unlikely that Eva Nordland had become familiar with Løgstrup's ideas through this text.[49] Nevertheless, regardless of whether she was familiar with these ideas or

**48** Herluf Froberg, "Den etiske fordring," *Frisprog*, March 9, 1957.

**49** Eva Nordland's husband Odd was engaged in the language dispute in the 1950s; see, for instance, his text in the newspaper *Dagbladet*, October 28, 1955, "Antroposofien og språkstriden."

not, they hold a coincident phenomenological view of humanity: Nordland assumes that all human beings are mutually dependent on each other, and her view is based upon an understanding of God as the highest being.

In Nordland's replies to Einar Helde and Ivar Asheim in *Norsk Skoleblad* in 1961, it is also evident that her views represent what Svein Tuastad has called an external approach to Christianity.[50] Nordland presupposes that a Christian culture permeates Norwegian society, and that this cultural inheritance is a sufficient starting point for schools' Christian education. Through serious and sober information, the students will be familiar with the teachings of Christianity, and based on their own assessments, will be able to form an opinion about the Christian faith. In Nordland's opinion, the individual experience of the Christian gospel is more important than the dogmas of Christianity.

Thus, Eva Nordland contributes to drawing a significantly less polarized picture of the Christian foundation of schools than the perceptions of her contemporaries. These ideas of polarization have often also been central for later scholars' images of postwar Norwegian education, at least within theology. As an academic with strong ties to theLabor Party's school politics in the 1950s and 1960s, Nordland demonstrates that the idea of Christianity as culture permeated society, and that this idea could be connected to prevailing political ideas and argumentation. Her phenomenological view on education has strong similarities with contemporary Protestant ethics, and her views on pedagogy and upbringing are linked to fundamental human values. However, these values are closely linked with a Christian ontology, just as they are based on Christian culture as a fundamental ground in society.

## References

Agøy, Nils Ivar. *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen: spenninger, skuffelser, håp: tiden fram til 1940.* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011.

Andreassen, Bengt Ove. "Religion Education in Norway: Tension or Harmony between Human Rights and Christian Cultural Heritage." *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 49, no. 2 (2014): 137 – 64.

Asheim, Ivar. "Til tolkinga av formålsparagrafen." *Norsk Skoleblad* 17 (1961): 593 – 95.

Buchardt, Mette. "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model." *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 2 (2015): 131 – 65.

Dokka, Hans Jørgen. "Normalplanen foran en revisjon," in *Prismet* (1958): 12 – 22.

Greene, Theodore. "A Liberal Christian Idealist Philosophy of Education." *Teachers College Record* 56, no. 9 (1955): 91 – 136.

**50** See above, p. x.

Harbo, Torstein. “1940 – 1960 Kirken, foreldrene og skolen i møte med staten.” In *Kirke – skole – stat 1739 – 1989*, edited by Brynjar Haraldsø, 105 – 29. Oslo: IKO-forlaget, 1989.

Harbo, Torstein. *Målsetting og læreplan i den 9-årige skole.* Oslo: J. M. Stenersens forlag, 1960.

Hareide, Bjarne. “Ein kristen innsats i skulen.” *Protokoll for styremøter* [minutes of the board]. (Oslo: KPK, 1948).

Helde, Eiuar. “Skal dogma diskuterast?” *Norsk Skoleblad* 17 (1961): 596.

Helsvig, Kim Gunnar. “Kristendom og dåpsopplæring i norsk skole 1739 – 2003.” *Kirke og Kultur* 8, no. 5 – 6 (2004): 447 – 61.

Helsvig, Kim Gunnar. *Pedagogikkens grenser: Kampen om norsk pedagogikk ved Pedagogisk Forskningsinstitutt 1938 – 1980.* Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2005.

Jarning, Harald. “Eva Nordland: mellom psykologi og samfunnsrettet pedagogikk.” In *Pedagogiske profiler: norsk utdanningstenkning fra Holberg til Hernes*, edited by Sveinung Vaage and Harald Thuen, 321 – 42. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2003.

Lomeland, Arne R. *Kristelig Folkeparti blir til.* Oslo, Bergen, and Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1971.

*Lov om folkeskolen.* Od. prp. no. 30 (1958).

*Lov om grunnskolen.* Oslo: 1969.

Løgstrup, Knud E. *The Ethical Demand.* Translated with introduction and notes by Bjørn Rabjerg and Robert Stern. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Nordland, Eva. “Formålsparagrafen: en subjektiv tolkning.” *Norsk Skoleblad* 23 (1961): 832 – 34.

Nordland, Eva. “Oppdragelse til menneske. To ulike syn i vår tid.” *Kirke og Kultur* 5 (1957): 291 – 303; 6 (1957): 342 – 58.

Nordland, Eva. “Skolens allmenndannelse i søkelyset.” *Norsk Skoleblad* 25 (1961), 236 – 38

Norseth, Kristin. “IKO gjennom 75 år.” *Prismet. Religionspedagogisk tidsskrift* 71, no. 3 (2020): 217 – 59.

Oftestad, Bernt Torvild. *Den norske statsreligionen: Fra øvrighetskirke til demokratisk statskirke.* Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 1998.

Romein, Tunis. *Education and Responsibility.* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955.

Roos, Merethe. *The Quest for a New Education: Social Democracy, Educational Reforms, and Religion in Norway after the Second World War.* Berlin: DeGruyter, 2024.

Roos, Merethe. “Sekularisering eller modernisering: Offentlig og politisk debatt om kristendomsfaget i 1946.” *Teologisk tidsskrift* 10, no. 4 (2021): 178 – 89.

Samordningsnemda for Skoleverket, XIX (1952). Sammenfatning og utsyn.

Skjelbred, Dagrun, Norun Askeland, Eva Maagerø, and Bente Aamotsbakken. *Norsk lærebokhistorie: Allmueskolen – folkeskolen – grunnskolen 1739 – 2013.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017.

Telhaug, Alfred Oftedal. *Forsøksrådet for skoleverket 1954 – 1984: en sammenfattende framstilling.* Trondheim: Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, 1989.

Telhaug, Alfred Oftedal. *Norsk skoleutvikling etter 1945.* Oslo: Didakta, 1982.

Telhaug, Alfred Oftedal, and Odd A. Mediås. *Skolen som nasjonsbygger: Fra statspietisme til nyliberalisme.* Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2003.

Thuen, Harald, and Nina Volckmar. “Postwar School Reforms in Norway.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1 – 30. Accessed 20 February 2024. DOI:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1456.

Tuastad, Svein. “Skulen og statsmaktsspørsmålet: stortingsdebattar 1945 – 2005 om religion i skulen og om private skular i lys av normativ teori.” PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2006.

Tønnessen, Aud V. *“Et trygt og godt hjem for alle?” Kirkelederes kritikk av velferdsstaten etter 1945.* KIFO perspekiv 7 (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2000).

Jørn Varhaug

# The Norwegian White Paper "Identity and Dialogue," 1995, as Part of Gudmund Hernes's Reform Strategies

## Introduction

Gudmund Hernes (born 1941) represented the Norwegian Labor Party as Minister of Education from 1990 – 1995. In several ways, he was the driving force behind the Norwegian School reforms in the 1990s.[1] As a part of the reforms, the Ministry of Church and Education suggested the implementation of a new subject of religious education. In order to develop this subject, the white paper NOU 1995:9, "Identity and Dialogue" (hereafter I&D), was written. The I&D white paper is the ideological consideration behind the reform of religious education in the Norwegian curriculum for primary and lower secondary education. These reforms were introduced in 1997 as "L97." The L97 curriculum introduced a new justification for religious education. The subject KRL – Christianity, Religion, and Life Views – was supposed to be inclusive, formative, and traditional, and should not be open for general exemption. In this chapter I will explore the extent to which it is possible to trace the main ideas in I&D in Hernes's earlier writings. I will also question the extent to which there is a plausible claim to be made that the ideas in I&D were simply extensions of the reforms already planned by the Minister of Education, or whether these ideas differed from his reform program.

## Gudmund Hernes as scholar and politician

Gudmund Hernes is known for his exceptional diligence, and his explicit ambition that sociology should be used as a science of governance.[2] The 1990s saw some of the most comprehensive reforms in the history of the Norwegian education system were made, with impressive speed. The reform of higher education was ready in 1991. A reform of upper secondary schools was put into practice from 1994, fol-

1 Kim Helsvig, *Reform og rutine: Kunnskapsdepartementets historie 1945 – 2017* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2017), 201.

2 Rune Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2001), 518.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-005

lowed by a reform of the primary and lower secondary school system in 1997, resulting in the curriculum known as L97.

In 1987 Hernes was appointed as leader of the Committee for University and Colleges (Universitets- og høyskoleutvalget), which was tasked with the mission of "evaluating goals, organizing and prioritizing within higher education and research towards 2000–2010."[3] In September 1988 the committee presented a white paper, NOU 1988:28, which was entitled "With Knowledge and Intent." Not only did this white paper comment on higher education, but also on the Norwegian education system in general. In the introduction to the recommendation, as well as in a corresponding newspaper article in *Aftenposten*, Hernes presented a critical view of the ambitions held by the Norwegian system of education. According to the recommendation, "The challenge for Norwegian education policy is that it does not get enough competence from the population's talent."[4] In the newspaper article Hernes claimed that the decline in the Norwegian population had led to a situation where youths entered the workforce with a minimum of education and little effort, and that the country was facing a "desert generation" which had underinvested in education. For this reason, the Norwegian knowledge intensive industry would not have enough expertise in the future. According to the article, the schools were not providing its pupils with a sufficient knowledge basis, and this led to bad work habits.[5] These texts received much attention and thrust education into the political spotlight. As the educational philosopher Tom Are Trippestad has noted, Hernes argued in these texts for a complete revision of the Norwegian educational system, based on new utopian visions, with explicit polemics against incremental, pragmatic piecemeal reforms.[6] Even though the recommendations in NOU 1988:28 were intentionally limited to higher education, it was already clear in Hernes's rhetoric that a more complete change was required across the entire Norwegian education system.

As Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland assembled her third government in 1990, she called on Hernes, who at that time was taking a sabbatical at Harvard University, to accept the position of Minister of Education. The object was to start a reform program that would improve the quality of education.[7] At the end of the

---

**3** Nina Volckmar, *Fra solidarisk samværskultur til kunnskapssolidaritet: Det sosialdemokratiske skoleprosjekt fra Sivertsen til Hernes* (PhD diss., NTNU, 2005), 131.

**4** *Med viten og vilje: Innstilling fra Universitets- og høyskoleutvalget*, NOU nr. 28 (Oslo: Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 1988), 8.

**5** Gudmund Hernes, "Dessert med bakrus-fare," *Aftenposten*, November 14, 1987.

**6** Tom Are Trippestad, *Kommandohumanismen: En kritisk analyse av Gudmund Hernes' retorikk, sosiale ingeniørkunst og utdanningspolitikk* (PhD diss. University of Bergen, 2009), 219.

**7** Helsvig, *Reform og rutine*, 181.

1980s, there was a general view among politicians from the leading political parties that school policy needed to be more strongly oriented towards producing a new, more economically competitive future workforce. There was a belief that local schools differed too much, and that schools were too permeated by social pedagogy for them to reach the necessary quality for them to be competitive on the international stage.[8]

## The KRL Subject and the White Paper "Identity and Dialogue" (I&D)

In L97, a new subject of religious education was introduced. This subject would be mandatory for all pupils and would be taught for an increased number of hours a week, compared with the previous subjects. The name of the new subject was KRL or *Kristendom, religion og livssyn* (Christianity, Religion and Life Views).

The white paper that explained the ideological basis of KRL was completed in 1995, and was given the title *Identitet og dialog* (Identity and Dialogue, or I&D). Hernes was not a member of the group that was responsible for this white paper. He did, however, decide that the leader of Institute for Christian Education (IKO), Erling Pettersen, should lead the committee. Hernes was also in close dialogue with the group as the document emerged. The committee's mandate took up four full pages, concluding that the secretary of the committee should be held by the Ministry of Church and Education.[9] This new subject would be mandatory for all pupils, though parents could apply to have their children exempted from individual sessions. Schools were instructed to arrange their teaching in ways that would actualize exemptions as seldom as possible.[10] The KRL-subject was supposed to cover a broad range of topics. Several of these were rather complex when considering the age of the pupils to whom they were introduced. Other religions besides Christianity were included to a much greater degree than in previous curricula.[11]

Three main ideas were developed in I&D. Firstly, the Norwegian education system in general, and religious education especially, should provide images, narra-

**8** Helsvig, *Reform og rutine*, 174–79.

**9** *Identitet og dialog: Kristendomskunnskap, livssynskunnskap og religionsundervisning*, NOU nr. 8 (Oslo: Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 1995), 105–8.

**10** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 68.

**11** Gunhild Hagesæther, "Evaluering av KRL-faget, Foreldres, elevers og læreres erfaringer," *Religion og Livssyn* 13 (2001): 7.

tives, and symbols. These should provide common references, increasingly turning Norwegians into a community bound together by these references. Secondly, religious education should support the identity of the pupil in order to prevent a culture of "flimmer" and narcissism from bringing confusion and to counteract rootlessness in the younger generation. Thirdly, religious education would provide knowledge of one's own identity, thus also providing a basis for dialogue with people of different opinions. In this chapter, I will examine these ideas and their implications, aiming to evaluate whether they stem from Hernes's earlier writings, and also to what extent posterity may consider these ideas sound.

## Idea #1: The Community of Common References

According to I&D, the nation needed common knowledge as a reference basis for learning. The shared knowledge should be as extensive as possible and should also include some challenging material that appealed to intellect and thought, as well as emotions, senses, and experience.[12]

This idea is expressed several times in the material relating to the reforms of the 1990s. In discussions of the idea, I&D is usually not the main reference, but rather the General Curriculum of 1993, which is included in L97. "Experience and research show that the less advanced knowledge one has that new knowledge can be related to, the slower and less achievable learning becomes. The foundational frames of reference in the different subjects are of particular importance."[13] The large number of goals referring to KRL in L97 show this idea in practice.[14]

This idea is also clear in I&D. A speech given in the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) by Hernes while he was serving as Minister of Education is quoted in I&D: "Anyone who does not know the contents of Christian beliefs, tradition, and teaching cannot know our country, our customs, our language, our art, our values, and our norms. The subject (religious education) is simply constituting knowledge – what you need to know in order to interpret and choose."[15] I&D includes a chapter with a major exposition of how the Bible and the Christian tradition is "the great code" for understanding our country, referencing Northrop Frye's

**12** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 46.

**13** Kirke- utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, *L93: Læreplan for grunnskole, videregående opplæring, voksenopplæring. Generell del* (Oslo, 1993), 26.

**14** Kirke- utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, *L93*, 95–107.

**15** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 21.

claim that the Bible is the key to understanding Western literature.[16] The chapter consists mostly of examples of common biblical allusions and does not seem quite convincing – even if the more general idea, that one needs to be familiar with relevant references in order to learn, is obvious enough.

There seems to be an assumption in L97 that explicit, detailed, and numerous goals give greater knowledge and a stronger foundation for references. It is therefore important to include enough explicit goals in the curriculum to ensure that every lesson is filled with content. The utopian result will then be a great common national corpus of references, knowledge shared by every citizen – which is intended to make the Norwegian school system better, compared to other countries with less explicit and comprehensive curricula. It is well known that this assumption has flaws, a point which we will come back to.

The idea that Norway as a nation should be a community of common references is one of the major ideas in general in Hernes's writings. In I&D this idea is regarded as a point of departure rather than a conclusion, and it is Hernes as Minister of Education who is quoted when this idea is introduced in the document. Hernes had previously developed this idea in several other texts, perhaps most prominently in his book *Vivat academia* (1988), a collection of three speeches that Hernes made to his academic colleagues in 1987–1988, in parallel with the writing of his white paper on higher education. According to *Vivat academia*, culture can be defined as "a script for living." It is the task of the academic community to define the culture and to create a community of common associations, wherein members may understand the same references, and academic culture can understand which thoughts are associated with the names of famous academic authors. The opposite would be like the Tower of Babel – not a people with one language, but a confusion of tongues. As well as ensuring communication, the common language promotes loyalty, enthusiasm, and identity.[17] In the same book, Hernes also deals with symbols and rituals in the academic community, which in his opinion are important for creating unity and enthusiasm. He is critical of the many academic arguments, dissatisfaction, and factions within the academic community. According to *Vivat academia*, academics should strive for unity, reverence, encyclopedic knowledge, the will to synthesize knowledge from different fields, and the will to cooperate across different disciplines.

As I have already mentioned, I&D quotes Hernes, who formulates this idea before the white paper embellishes it in the field of religious education. There is thus

**16** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 41–43. See Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

**17** Gudmund Hernes, *Vivat academia* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1988), 58–59.

a basis for arguing that the exposition of this idea was commissioned by the Minister of Education. The exposition in I&D is, however, less rhetorically powerful than that of the same idea in Hernes's own writings. For instance, in *Vivat academia* (1987), "With Knowledge and Intent" (1988) and in the General curriculum (1993), the Minister of Education had a tendency in his own rhetorical exposition to give an impression of urgency, the sense that the younger generation was in peril. The rhetoric of I&D heads in the same direction but has a less active character. While in *Vivat academia*, Hernes urges academics to make sure that common references in sciences and humanities are taught to new generations, I&D rather more passively claims that the Bible and national traditions are necessary as codes for understanding our culture. Hernes is prescriptive, while I&D attempts to be descriptive. As such, I&D tends to be less convincing. Is it necessary to know the biblical narratives in order to interpret Western literature, as I&D claims? Probably not. In any case, Hernes's claim that narratives and symbols can be used as vessels to convey meaning is doubtless obvious enough.

## Idea #2: The Engineering of a Social Identity against "Flimmer" and Narcissism

A prominent idea in I&D is that religious education in school should provide a basis of history, culture, and belief that pupils may utilize in their quest for self-interpretation, and in shaping their identity. Both in content and in number of hours, Christianity was a strongly favored topic in I&D. It seems plausible that a quest for an education to support one's own identity was most relevant to those who belonged to a Christian denomination. This assumption is supported by the later evaluation of the reform.[18] It is, however, argued strongly in I&D that pupils need a stable basis of learnt experiences and attitudes to resist an emerging culture of narcissism and "flimmer" – a culture in which consumerism, self-satisfaction, and relativism are more important than responsibility and diligence.[19]

One of the main concepts in I&D is "Identity," which is sometimes related to values and relationship with one's community. The formation of identity, integration, and living within overarching limits through traditions, narratives, symbols, and maxims, are necessary before the child can choose between alternative life views. From this perspective it is expected that the beliefs of the pupil should resemble those of their parents, and that the school should help the child to develop

**18** Hagesæther, "Evaluering av KRL-faget," 10.
**19** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 36.

an identity in relation to the traditions of which their families are part. I&D builds on the assumption that pro-social norms are common to all traditions. Among the values mentioned are human dignity, tolerance, equality, solidarity, responsibility, honesty, and compassion.[20]

According to I&D, there is a danger if the schools signal relativism regarding religion and life views, that this may lead to confusion about identity, values, and affiliation. The child should not be left to make its own choices amid ethical groping, insecurity, angst, moral relativism, and nihilism. I&D claims that it is "obvious to most people that contemporary culture provides poorer conditions for a stable and solid development of identity [...]. Schools must contribute to a countercultural mobilization of identity-developing values."[21] Later, the idea of schools as counterculture is elaborated in a long section.[22] Interestingly, there is no emphasis on social or economic justice. Schools are expected to counter the dissolution of norms. I&D defines its mission strongly in opposition to the contemporary culture of the 1990s. According to I&D, the new curriculum would be the basis for working towards a society where the lasting qualities of the traditions would recapture the ground lost to contemporary culture.

It seems that I&D works from the perspective that every citizen is part of a community that promotes traditions and values, and that in general all these communities agree on most of the fundamental questions concerning, for example, ethics. The difference in traditions concerns only language and aesthetic representations. Equally, all traditions work against relativism and deconstruction of values. This rather utopian perspective on identity seems to be not only a naïve misunderstanding: it assumes that it is the task of tradition to justify the norms of society. As such, it is not a descriptive but a normative assumption of the roles of traditions. The pupil should be educated in norms that benefit society, and these norms are to be illustrated and formed into identity through the work of the traditions in community practices, narratives, and art. From this perspective, the Christian church, other religions, and non-religious humanist communities are different arenas of socialization for the same pro-social values, and carriers of culture.

This idea of a stable identity contrasting with something resembling narcissism and "flimmer" is also well documented in Hernes's earlier writings. In 1977 he wrote a much-cited article in the Norwegian journal *Samtiden*, "Det medievridde samfunn" (A society turned towards mass media) in which he contrasted

**20** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 33–34.
**21** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 36.
**22** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 339–40.

older Norwegian rural culture with the then contemporary society. He held that common debate in a media-dominated society is characterized by abbreviation, simplification, polarization, intensity, and concreteness. There is no room for abstraction, thought development, or values under such conditions.[23] This reasoning is also well represented in a book Hernes wrote with a colleague ten years later, *Død og pine: Om massemedia og helsepolitikk* (Death and torment: On mass media and health politics). The main argument in this book is that attention is power, and that the politics of health care is not generally governed by rational actors – because politicians do not have the necessary information to act rationally. One way to get a political decision taken in your favor is to get your message through with the help of mass media. As the rules of media do not favor abstractions or reasoning, the message must be tailored to the rules of attention that are presupposed in mass media. It must be simple, polarized, and provocative, as well as targeted to the recipient's mental associations. In a society whose members do not have sufficient knowledge or capacity for reasoning to grasp the implications of political issues, the consumer will be occupied, rather, with simpler matters like recipes or pets.[24] Against this background, the identity to which the Minister of Education refers is a more stable basis of knowledge, experience, and intellectual associations, one that does not depend on simple short-sighted consumerism or scandals to get attention.

As noted above, while emphasizing the idea of a common language and a common pool of knowledge and associations, Hernes also intended to engineer a society characterized by greater unity, loyalty, and trust. I&D includes many of the same conclusions, but they are built on different strains of reasoning. The word "identity" is fundamental to the theory created by the German-American child psychoanalyst Erik H. Eriksson (1902–1994), referred to in I&D,[25] which posits that children develop their identity through different crises, and if the outcome of a crisis is mistrust, shame, guilt, or inferiority, the children may develop unhealthy characters. In order for the development of the child's character to be positive, the child needs stable adults and a healthy environment. Describing the reverse situation, I&D uses the word "*flimmer*", borrowed from the works of Robert Christian Lasch (1932–1994), who claimed that the younger generations in the twentieth century were characterized by narcissism, fear of commitment to lasting relationships, dread of aging, and general lack of meaning.[26]

**23** Gudmund Hernes, "Det medievridde samfunn," *Samtiden* 86 (1977): 7–8.

**24** Martin Eide and Gudmund Hernes, *Død og pine: Om massemedia og helsepolitikk* (Oslo: Fafo, 1987), 81.

**25** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 35–36.

**26** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 36.

It is possible to characterize the I&D committee as oriented more towards psychology, whereas Hernes in his writings is almost exclusively oriented towards sociology. Even if Hernes and the I&D writers differ in their arguments behind the concept of an engineered identity, their conclusions are similar. It is well documented that Hernes as a reform strategist was mainly striving to get traction for his ideas. The development of the identity concept in opposition to "flimmer" or narcissism is generally in line with Hernes's ideas, whereas the psychological reasoning in I&D is not a line Hernes would follow. On several occasions, Hernes has claimed that he is indebted to the young Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim, and considering his publications, this seems to be the case.[27] He seems less inclined to take a therapeutic view of the pupil, though one can say I&D does so to a greater degree.

## Idea #3: Identity as a Presupposition for Dialogue

According to I&D, knowledge of one's own religion or life view and knowledge of other religions is necessary as basis for dialogue.[28] This is the main argument in I&D for making KRL mandatory. Exemption is addressed as the major obstacle to religious education. KRL is interpreted as a prerequisite for gaining knowledge of culture, literature, art, and history. If pupils are exempted from religious education with this content, they will not be able to communicate or engage at all in dialogues, as they do not share the necessary common references. Neither will the exempted children be able to understand the ethics and values of their culture. I&D argues that if pupils are split into different groups in religious education, they are taught that religion is an area of separation and danger rather than an arena for dialogue. It is a subject that is dangerous, and a subject where one is to explore one's own beliefs rather than the beliefs of others. I&D[29] argues towards a common subject that represents diversity, and where dialogue is encouraged.

> The building of identity and dialogue are not mutually exclusive quantities. Identity building presupposes dialogue, just as dialogue presupposes a clear identity. A safe anchoring in one's own culture and religion and an awareness of one's own frame of reference are prerequisites for an open and genuine dialogue. The unknown is understood based on the familiar, the path goes from the known to the unknown.[30]

---

**27** Volckmar, "Fra solidarisk samværskultur," 197.
**28** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 38.
**29** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 8, 23.
**30** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 38.

As is expressed in the section above on idea #2, in the utopian description of identities, the differences between identities are generally seen in language and aesthetics, not values. If this is the case, conflicts between religions and traditions stem from ignorance or difference of interests, not differences in content or values. Therefore, by knowing each other's traditions, people may come to an increased understanding, and thereby resolve differences through dialogue. By learning about each other's traditions, pupils can resolve differences of interest. They can even appreciate differences in language and aesthetics, as such differences no longer pose a threat, as they are no longer strange and unknown. The arguments relating to idea #3 in I&D are generally supported by the works of the sociologists Clifford Geertz and Peter Berger, who promote theories that analyze how religions in general work, not how they differ. Religions provide rituals that guard against chaos, angst, and meaninglessness. They give language and stability to fragile social constructions.[31]

This idea #3 in I&D differs significantly from similar expositions made by Hernes. In Hernes's works, dialogue is less important. In the general part of the curriculum, mainly written by the Minister of Education, the word dialogue is used only once: "Young people must understand that views on morality may be sources of conflict, but that these views also undergo change, so that through reflection, critique, and dialogue the pupils may form new models of society and interaction between humans."[32] This is the language of social engineering, where dialogue is a tool rather than a value. Hernes did little to promote democracy, either in the education system or in the reform processes that he led. After hearings, only a few insignificant changes were made. School democracy was significantly reduced in the reforms of the 1990s.[33] From this perspective, in the writings of Hernes, dialogue seems to be a tool for removing obstacles, rather than a valuable way to reach reasonable conclusions. According to Tom Are Trippestad, it can be claimed that Hernes strategically put teachers, students, and bureaucrats in disempowered positions in order to get his ideas implemented.[34] This can be seen, for instance, in his discontinuation of the powerful expert advisory groups.[35] Dialogue was not a goal in its own right, but rather a tool.

**31** *Identitet og dialog* (NOU 1995: 8), 37.
**32** Kirke- utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, *L93*, 7.
**33** Volckmar, *Fra solidarisk samværskultur*, 177–78.
**34** Trippestad, *Kommandohumanismen*, 129–30.
**35** Helsvig, *Reform og rutine*, 193.

## The Relationship between I&D and the Ideological Writings of Gudmund Hernes

In his writings, Hernes once claimed that, "In order to build a nation, one needs a stronger common basis, the foundation in belief."[36] It is easy to suggest that he thought that common narratives, rituals, and symbols were important, and that a common subject of religious education was an important tool in his project of social engineering. Hernes used the implementation of Erik Pontoppidan's explanation of Martin Luther's catechism (1737) as a great example of social engineering. This work was commonly used among Norwegians for two hundred years and had an impressive influence on Norwegian language and literature. It seems that Hernes's intentions concerning the new subject on religious education, with limited possibilities for exemptions, must be understood in this context. The Norwegian youth should acquire all kinds of common knowledge, and in religion, they should be united in thoughts and metaphor, in a society characterized by diligence, cooperation, and harmony. Consequently, the striving for idea #1, a community of common references, is prominent in the works of Hernes, but more foreign to I&D. While idea #3 – identity as presupposition for dialogue – may be seen as the main idea in I&D, but absent in the writings of Hernes. Idea #2 – engineering a social identity – may be seen as prominent both in the writings of Hernes and in I&D, but the arguments for supporting a stable identity are different. In the works of Hernes, identity is necessary to secure loyalty and harmony, while in I&D, the point is the safety of the child, facing a culture of narcissism and "flimmer". It may also be argued that the word *identity* differs between Hernes's writing and I&D. In Hernes's writings, identity has to do with creating a common united people. In I&D, identity has more to do with character competence, the idea that the individual is able to resist destructive forces in culture and to create a safe space in society in which to grow up. These are, to some degree, different concepts.

It may be noted that one of the strategies Trippestad identified, which Hernes used in his reform work, was involving several well-known, high-status cultural figures. As with the General curriculum (1993) he invited a committee consisting of an author, a director, a bishop, a law professor, and a historian. The group agreed on many points but found little of their written suggestions in the curriculum texts.[37] However, by making use of this group, Hernes legitimized his report despite only involving teachers or teacher organizations in the work to a very

**36** Gudmund Hernes, *Læreboka fra godkjenning til forskning* (Oslo: Seminarrapport, NFF, 1992), 36.
**37** Trippestad, "Kommandohumanismen," 361.

small degree. His department wrote a white paper, Meld St 37, in which he managed to discontinue the expert advisory bodies that had previously represented the teachers in curriculum work.[38] Similarly, he managed to get several well-known scholars and teachers to cooperate in writing an issue of a school journal, *Grunnskolenytt* (News from the Compulsory School) in 1992, which presented the reforms in a favorable light.[39] It may be argued that when Hernes set up the committee behind "Identity and Dialogue," he had similar plans, and given the fact that the secretariat of the committee came from Hernes's administration, this would be plausible. As I have argued above, the reasoning in I&D differs significantly from Hernes's own thoughts, but it is still sufficient to take I&D as support for his own work.

## The Implementation

After Hernes finished his work as Minister of Education, as early as 1995, the Ministry of Church, Education and Research was able to implement the subject according to the framework whose establishment he had led. The curriculum for the new subject, Christianity, Religion and Life View (KRL), was first printed in the beautifully ornate book that became the L97-curriculum. Narration of stories from traditions was emphasized as the subject's main methodology. Skills in practical dialogue were also mentioned, a more Hernesian approach that owed less to the I&D approach.[40] A few pages later, an "ability to conduct dialogue among people with different opinions on questions of belief and life view" is discussed – a less Hernesian, but more I&D approach.[41] As one could expect, the curriculum defined many goals and activities, several of them quite complex. For example, pupils in seventh grade, about twelve years of age, were supposed to be familiar with one of Paul's main letters.[42]

According to the evaluation of the subject, many teachers were positive about KRL, but when the evaluation committees conducted research on its practical implementation, they observed that teachers approached the subject in several different ways. Some teachers crammed lessons with theoretical content in an effort to teach everything; others chose their own favorite parts of the subject and concen-

**38** Helsvig, *Reform og rutine*, 186.

**39** Trippestad, *Kommandohumanismen*, 276–77.

**40** Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, *L97: Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen* (Oslo: 1997), 92.

**41** Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, *L97*, 93.

**42** Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, *L97*, 102.

trated on these, though most schools were primarily led by the textbooks when deciding the content of the subject. One of the evaluation committees concluded that the differences between schools had not been reduced, and that there was too much content to allow teachers to go any deeper than a superficial level.[43] Thus, the evaluations claimed that idea #1 failed in its implementation. But this idea might also have been influential in other ways: firstly, by the reduction of local content in the L97-curriculum, compared with the earlier M87 – as national content invaded the timeframes. When the results from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test in 2000 were worse than expected, several politicians attributed some of the blame to the reforms of 1997. It had not delivered the improved results that were expected. Subsequently, much of the ideology of L97 was replaced by more empirical approaches to learning.[44] By the early 2000s, idea #1 already had less support among politicians at the point when the next reform, LK06, emerged.

## Norwegian Religious Education in the European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg

More seriously, some parents filed a complaint against the Norwegian state before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 2004, because, in their opinion, the exemption rules did not secure parental rights. The verdict concluded that KRL violated Article 2 of Protocol 1 ("Right to education") of the Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. According to this verdict, the main problem was the combination of the Norwegian elementary school's statement of purpose and the quantitative precedence of Christianity on the syllabus.[45] It can be argued that the court in Strasbourg claimed that all three ideas from I&D would be against the Human Rights Convention. If a country is supposed to be a community of common references, narratives, symbols, and rituals, mandatory for all citizens, without exemptions, this leaves little choice for parents with different views – and, as this idea explicitly goes beyond an emphasis on knowledge, both in the I&D version and in the Hernesian version, it is not difficult to claim that it is about indoctrination. If different religions are only different languages representing the same ideas – values would not be as important. However, from

**43** Hagesæther, "Evaluering av KRL-faget," 7–8.

**44** Trippestad, *Kommandohumanismen*, 338.

**45** Sissel Lied, "KRL-faget i Strasbourg: Presentasjon av dom og dissens i EMD og skisse av en mulig vei videre," *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 109, no. 1 (2008): 59.

a human rights perspective, this interpretation of religion does not need to be prescriptive. In addition, it can be seen from popular debate that common opinion rarely characterizes different religions as different language for the same beliefs.

Furthermore, the third claim – that the subject should be an area for dialogue – has proven to be less simple. The asymmetric power relations between teacher and pupil, and between different groups of pupils in the classroom, might lead to challenges. There are several problems with the assumption that pupils representing their parent's religion should perform dialogues in the classroom on their religion's behalf. What if the relationship between the family and the religion is complex? What if the child is ashamed of their ability to represent their traditions, or the teacher unintentionally places a child in a humiliating position? Such questions were discussed among scholars dealing with religious education, who mainly concluded that dialogue among religions in classrooms might be possible, albeit with several reservations.[46] However, from a human rights perspective, such problems are relevant when the subject is made compulsory and exemption discouraged.

## Conclusions

Tom Are Trippestad has described several traits of the Hernes era in educational policy. In Trippestad's opinion, Hernes's politics represented a sociological paradigm of knowledge, "an elitist and authoritarian variant of democratic thinking, education and policy, that was uncommon and had unexpected consequences when it came."[47] Trippestad builds his analysis upon Karl Popper's treatise, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, which divides policymaking into utopian reforms and piecemeal reforms. Trippestad argues that Hernes, to a great degree, constructed a utopia and used his vision rhetorically in order to criticize current conditions and execute reforms. This description of Hernes as a statesman seems relevant. The rhetorical strategies used in the development and implementations of the reforms reveal an intellectual who managed to impose his influence on the Norwegian school system. His reforms have been heavily criticized. As Peder Haug claimed after leading evaluation work on the reforms relating to L97, "several signals given in the reform are unclear in their presentations [...] when the distance between the political demand and the practical possibilities become too great, the

**46** Sissel Lied, "Forholdet mellom elev og lærer i KRL-faget: Et asymmetrisk eller dialogisk forhold?," Prismet 1 (2005), 19; Bendik Aslakby, "Dialog i religion- og etikkfaget" (master's thesis, MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2018), 66 – 67.

**47** Trippestad, *Kommandohumanismen*, 81.

politics will gradually lose. As a result, other, perhaps more random situations decide what happens in schools."[48] The reforms were not sufficiently adapted to the possibilities and culture in Norwegian schools, and therefore had no real chance of working as intended.

The claim that Hernes's intention in creating I&D was to manufacture a document supporting ideas that he had already decided is plausible. However, the main ideas in the document are not expressed in the same language as Hernes used. The term "identity" in Hernes's words has more to do with common references and harmony in his engineered society, while identity in I&D has to do with character competence, the idea that the individual can resist destructive forces in culture and create a safe space in society in which to grow up. The word "dialogue" is uncommon in the works of Hernes, and where it does appear it seems more like a strategical tool to overcome resistance, whereas in I&D dialogue is central to efforts to overcome barriers of language. The conception that differences in religion can be resolved through dialogue may be considered naive, or a reflection of the general optimism in 1990s international politics.

## References


Aslakby, Bendik. "Dialog i religion- og etikkfaget." Master's thesis, MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2018.

Eide, Martin, and Gudmund Hernes. *Død og pine: Om massemedia og helsepolitikk.* Oslo: Fafo, 1987.

Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Hagesæther, Gunhild. "Evaluering av KRL-faget, Foreldres, elevers og læreres erfaringer." *Religion og Livssyn* 13 (2001): 5–12.

Haug, Peder. "Om grunnlaget for Evaluering av Reform 97." *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift årgang* 88, no. 4 (2004): 264–80.

Helsvig, Kim. *Reform og rutine: Kunnskapsdepartementets historie 1945–2017.* Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2017.

Hernes, Gudmund. "Dessert med bakrus-fare." *Aftenposten*, November 14, 1987.

Hernes, Gudmund. *Læreboka fra godkjenning til forskning.* Oslo: Seminarrapport, NFF, 1992.

Hernes, Gudmund. "Det medievridde samfunn." *Samtiden* 86 (1977): 1–14.

Hernes, Gudmund. "Ti teser om forhandlinger." *Nytt norsk tidsskrift* 11 (1994): 246–55.

Hernes, Gudmund. *Vivat academia.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1988.

Kirke- utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet. *L93: Læreplan for grunnskole, videregående opplæring, voksenopplæring. Generell del.* Oslo, 1993.

Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet. *L97: Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen.* Oslo, 1997.


**48** Peder Haug, "Om grunnlaget for Evaluering av Reform 97," *Norsk pedagodisk tidsskrift* 88, no. 4 (2004): 259.

Lied, Sissel. “Forholdet mellom elev og lærer i KRL-faget: Et asymmetrisk eller dialogisk forhold?” *Prismet* 1 (2005): 5 – 21.

Lied, Sissel. “KRL-faget i Strasbourg: Presentasjon av dom og dissens i EMD og skisse av en mulig vei videre.” *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 109, no 1. (2008): 55 – 71.

Norges offentlige utredninger. *Identitet og dialog. Kristendomskunnskap, livssynskunnskap og religionsundervisning.* NOU nr. 8. Oslo: Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 1995.

Norges offentlige utredninger. *Med viten og vilje: Innstilling fra Universitets- og høyskoleutvalget.* NOU nr. 28. Oslo: Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 1988.

Slagstad, Rune. *De nasjonale strateger.* Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2001.

Stortinget. *Fra visjon til virke: Om høgre utdanning.* Stortingsmelding nr. 40 (1990 – 1991). Oslo: Stortinget, 1991.

Stortinget. *Organisering og styring i utdanningssektoren.* Stortingsmelding nr. 37 (1990 – 1991). Oslo: Stortinget, 1991.

Trippestad, Tom Are. *Kommandohumanismen: En kritisk analyse av Gudmund Hernes’ retorikk, sosiale ingeniørkunst og utdanningspolitikk.* PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2009.

Volckmar, Nina. *Fra solidarisk samværskultur til kunnskapssolidaritet: Det sosialdemokratiske skoleprosjekt fra Sivertsen til Hernes.* PhD diss., NTNU, 2005.

# Sweden

Johan Wickström

# The Transition from Paganism to Christianity in History Textbooks from 1900 to 1930

## Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, the primary school (*folkskolan*) was a school form for children from the lower societal strata. The curriculum was marked by Christian and nationalist ideologies that gradually shifted towards more civic aims.[1] The main teaching content – except for Christianity (*kristendomskunskap*) – consisted of reading, writing, and sometimes basic mathematics and history. In a longer perspective, the primary school and Swedish education in general were characterized by an ongoing secularization process where the State Church's grip on the school system diminished, little by little.[2]

Accordingly, the importance of Christianity as a school subject was progressively weakened, but to what extent is intensely debated among historians.[3] For instance, some scholars argue that Christianity did not really lose its significance, but rather was given a different role under the influence of Cultural Protestan-

**1** Tomas Englund, *Samhällsorientering och medborgarfostran i svensk skola under 1900-talet*, vol. 2 (Uppsala: Pedagogisk forskning i Uppsala, 1986); Tomas Englund, *Läroplanens och skolkunskapens politiska dimension* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2005); Åke Isling, *Kampen för och emot en demokratisk skola 2: Det pedagogiska arvet* (Stockholm: Sober dokumentation 113, 1988); Daniel Lindmark, *Reading, Writing and Schooling: Swedish Practices of Education and Literacy, 1650–1880* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2004); Johannes Westberg, "Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish: The School Act of 1842 and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Sweden," in *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling: Education Policy in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Lukas Boser Ingrid Brühwiler, and Johannes Westberg (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 195–222.

**2** Lennart Tegborg, *Folkskolans sekularisering 1895–1909: Upplösning av det administrativa sambandet mellan folkskola och kyrka i Sverige* (Stockholm: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 1969); Karl-Göran Algotsson, *Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet: Debatten om religionsundervisningen i skolan under 1900-talet.* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1975).

**3** Emma Hellström, "Svensk Läraretidning och nordisk kulturprotestantism: Debatten om kristendomsundervisningens fostrande uppdrag i folkskolan 1882–1919," in *Utbildningens fostrande funktioner: Historiska undersökningar av fostran i offentliga och enskilda utbildningsinsatser*, ed. Viktor Englund et al. (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies of History of Education, 2022); Mette Buchardt, "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers Behind the Nordic Welfare State Model," *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 5, no. 2 (2015): 131–65.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-006

tism,[4] in which national and Christian education were reconciled and included in different school subjects, not only in Christianity.[5]

In order to assess the institutional and pedagogical importance of Christianity in primary school during the twentieth century, we therefore need to look into how Christianity was presented in school subjects other than Christianity. This is also the main focus of this chapter, where I will study the meaning of Christianity in history textbooks.

History was an important subject which, according to contemporary teacher guidelines, aimed to foster the younger generation using both good examples and deterrents from the past.[6] The history textbook is a specific genre aiming to reproduce a worldview and an ideology of the past in form of historical narratives presented for the pupils.[7] By historical narratives I mean all the stories contained in the textbooks. A certain kind of historical narrative is analyzed in this chapter, namely *transitional narratives* that deal with the transition from Old Norse religion to Christianity. Based on a combined reading of several transitional narratives found in different textbooks, I constitute and analyze a grand narrative of transition, which is based on considering all transitional narratives as a corpus. Approximately twenty textbook titles are analyzed in the chapter. Some of them appeared in several revised editions. I have included not only texts that were widely circulated but also those that were less published.

The main purpose of the chapter is to study how contemporary views on Christianity were expressed in Swedish history textbooks between 1900 and 1930. More specifically, I will analyze how the narratives in history textbooks presented the transition from Old Norse religion to Christianity. Firstly, I want to study how Christianity was understood as a force of cultural change, and secondly, I want to uncover notions, norms, and values attached to Christianity and its different branches: that is, Protestantism and Catholicism. The research questions are: How was the transition period described in the history textbooks? What were the driving forces behind the religious transition according to the textbooks?

---

**4** For an extensive introduction to *cultural protestantism*, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, "Kulturprotestantismus: Zur Begriffsgeschichte einer Theologiepolitischen Chiffre," *Arkiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 28 (1984): 214–68.

**5** Mette Buchardt, "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education."

**6** Isling, *Kampen för och emot en demokratisk skola*, 240–56.

**7** Staffan Selander, "Pedagogiska texter och andra artefakter för kunskap och kommunikation: En översikt över läromedel: perspektiv och forskning," in *Statens Offentliga Utredningar* (SOU 2003:015, 2003), 184. Niklas Ammert, "Om läroböcker och studiet av dem," in *Att spegla världen: Läromedelsstudier i teori och praktik*, ed. Niklas Ammert et. al (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2018); Eckhardt Fuchs, Inga Niehaus, and Almut Stoletzki, *Das Schulbuch in der Forschung: Analysen und Empfehlungen für die Bildungspraxis* (Göttingen: V&R unipress), 23.

How was the relationship between Old Norse religion and Christianity/Catholicism presented and in what sense can we speak of Christianity as a force of cultural change in the textbooks?

The chapter begins with the historical background, followed by an analysis of the grand narrative of the transition. In the subsequent sections, I analyze how these narratives compare Old Norse religion with Christianity, and how they connect both religions. In the conclusion, I discuss the results in the context of contemporary Christianity at the turn of the twentieth century.

## Historical Background

From a Lutheran point of view, the transition period could be seen as a paradoxical historical era. Catholicism was undisputedly connected to Christianity, but it could also be considered "non-biblical" or even heretic. At the turn of the twentieth century, there existed in Sweden a distinct hostility towards Catholicism.[8]

Old Norse religion was pagan and therefore unacceptable, but from a nationalistic perspective it could simultaneously be perceived as a domestic tradition, deeply rooted in the prehistory of the Swedes.[9] Thus, there were a variety of possible approaches to relate to the transition from Old Norse religion to Christianity, a variety that also posed an obvious challenge for the textbook authors.

The period 1900–1930 was in many ways turbulent. An older, agrarian society was turning into a modern, industrial society. The labor movement was organized, and the socialist party was divided into the Social Democratic and Socialist parties in 1917. Democracy and parliamentarism were established. The liberals and the socialists struggled for universal and equal suffrage, which was achieved in 1919–20, when women finally obtained voting rights.[10] In 1919 a new curriculum, characterized by progressive ideals, was introduced in primary schools[11] and the role of the

**8** Christer Hedin, *Kristendomens historia i Sverige* (Farsta: Molin and Sorgenfrei, 2017), 233; Kjell Blückert, *Moder, syster eller sköka: Bilden av katolska kyrkan i kristen press år 1989* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2004).

**9** Johan Wickström, *Våra förfäder var hedningar: Nordisk forntid som myt i den svenska folkskolans pedagogiska texter fram till år 1919* (Västerås: Edita Västra Aros, 2008), 4.

**10** Lars-Åke Norborg, *Sveriges historia under 1800- och 1900-talen: Svensk samhällsutveckling 1809–1992* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), 178–93.

**11** Ulf P. Lundgren, "En gemensam skola – utbildning blir en nödvändighet för alla," in *Lärande, skola, bildning: grundbok för lärare*, ed. Ulf P. Lundgren, Roger Säljö, and Caroline Liberg (Stockholm: Natur och kultur); Tomas Englund, *Medborgerlig läroplanskod för folkskola, fortsättningsskola och grundskola 1918/19–?* (Stockholm: Institutionen för pedagogik, 1980); Hartman, *Det pedago-*

Lutheran State Church version of Christianity as a unifying ideology was challenged. During the early twentieth century, the Swedish State Church's influence over the Swedish education system began to loosen.[12] The Revivalist movement and the free churches demanded a more inclusive religious education that could be accepted by all Christian factions.[13] Liberals and socialists also struggled for religious freedom and a non-denominational compulsory education for all children.[14] The social democratic movement, however, was divided in its view on Christianity.[15] Some sought to abolish Christian education altogether, while others saw it as possible to reconcile socialism and Christianity.[16] How, then, was Christianity as a cultural force perceived during this time? Narratives on the breakthrough of Christianity will help us understand its ideological functions.

## The Grand Narrative and its Ideological Content

The general plot in the grand narrative that I have reconstructed can be summarized as follows: Sweden was originally a primordial kingdom with a wild and barbarous paganism as its native religion.[17] Christianity was initially a foreign reli-

---

*giska kulturarvet: Traditioner och idéer i svensk undervisningshistoria* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2005), 47.

**12** Bernhard Salqvist, *Folkskolans kristendomsundervisning: Med särskild hänsyn till 1919 års undervisningsplan* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans Diakonistyrelse, 1947); Lennart Tegborg, *Folkskolans sekularisering*; Karl-Göran Algotsson, Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet; (1975); Åke Isling, *Kampen för och emot en demokratisk skola 2*.

**13** Karl-Göran Algotsson, *Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet*; Christer Hedin, *Kristendomens historia i Sverige*, 246.

**14** Hjalmar Holmquist, *Handbok i svensk kyrkohistoria 3: Från romantiken till första världskriget jämte grunddragen av det övriga Nordens kyrkohistoria* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans Diakonistyrelse, 1952), 153–54.

**15** Carl-Erik Sahlberg, *Allmän kyrkohistoria: Från Jesus till kyrkan idag* (Uppsala: STH Academic, 2021), 281.

**16** Oloph Bexell, *Sveriges kyrkohistoria 7: Folkväckelsens och kyrkoförnyelsens tid* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2003), 258–59.

**17** Ola Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan: I fullständig överensstämmelse med folkskolelärobokskommitténs grundsatser* (Stockholm, 1898); Hans Larsson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (Lund: Gleerups, 1898); Georg Brandell, *Sveriges historia: Berättad för folkskolans barn* (Stockholm: A.V. Carlsson, 1904); Clas Theodor Odhner, *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia: Under författarens ledning bearbetad för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1905), Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*; Lennart Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan: Första delen* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1907); Alfred Dalin, *Svensk vers: Psalmer, sånger, visor. Valda och sammansatta af Alfr. Dalin* (Stockholm: Alfred Bonniers förlag, 1908); Verner von Heidenstam, *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar: Berättelser för unga och gamla* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1911); Aron Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets*

gion. According to some texts, the Swedes gained knowledge about this new religion from prisoners of war and slaves, who taught their masters the foundations of Christianity. Several texts claim that the Swedish king demanded the Christian church to send missionaries to the Nordic countries.[18] Other texts stress that missionaries were sent to Sweden on the initiative of the French king, who had become exasperated with the plundering perpetrated by the northerners.[19] Such external motives are always counterbalanced by presentations of how Swedes initiated invitations to Christian missionaries. Some texts even say that Swedes "longed to serve him [God], who was superior to their gods, and went to a foreign land to be baptized."[20] These elements are significant, since they bridge the gap between paganism and Christianity and reveal a strategy to harmonize Christianity with the pagan past. Accordingly, the transition to Christianity was not forced upon the Swedes by external powerful actors.

In the history textbooks, it is stated that the German missionary Ansgar, who historically often has been seen as the most important mediator of Christianity in Sweden, arrived in Sweden and preached Christianity with success.[21] He was well

*historia för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Fritze, 1908); Olof Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Palmqvist, 1910); Olof Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan 1* (Uppsala: Lindblad, 1920); Hans Larsson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (Lund: Gleerups, 1918); Ola Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Beckman, 1921); Georg Brandell, *Sveriges historia för folkskolans barn* (Stockholm: Carlson, 1921); Nanna Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken. Första delen. T.o.m. 1666.* (Stockholm: J. A. Lindblad, 1922); Nanna Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken. Första delen. T.o.m. 1660.* (Stockholm: J. A. Lindblad, 1922); Aron Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan* (Stockholm: C. E. Fritzes bokförlag, 1923); Jean Häggman, *Sveriges historia i förenklad framställning för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1926).

**18** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 10; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 17; Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 198; von Heidestam, *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar*, 62; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan 1*, 23; Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 19; Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 36; Brandell, *Sveriges historia för folkskolans barn*, 36; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 28.

**19** Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 34; Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 195; von Heidenstam, *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar*, 62; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 35; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 28; Häggman, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 31.

**20** Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 50. All quotes are translated by the author of the article.

**21** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 11; Larsson, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 14; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 17; Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 34; Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 193–194; von Heidenstam, *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar*, 65; Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 31–32; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 23–25; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan 1*, 53; Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 19; Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1935), 36; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 36–38; Lundh-

received and permitted by the king to preach. The decision was made by the king – or, as emphasized in some texts, after a discussion at the *ting*.[22]

Many textbooks contain detailed pious descriptions of Ansgar.[23] These often reproduce hagiographic literature, such as Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii.* In Georg Brandell's textbook, there is an extensive presentation of how Ansgar, described as a "very godly man," saw the Virgin Mary in a dream.[24] Similar presentations occur in the textbook by Nanna Lundh-Eriksson.[25] One of the most detailed descriptions of Ansgar can be found in Lennart Ribbing's work. Here, Christianization is placed in a salvation-historical context, wherein Ansgar is presented as God's tool in reaching out to the deprived pagans:

> It is now more than 1900 years since Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the Jewish land – 1900 – almost 2000 years ago. At that time the country didn't look like it does today. […] Here lived […] our ancestors […] the wild Northmen. For them the star of Bethlehem did not shine on Christmas night, for them the angels did not sing that the Savior of the world was born. Centuries came and went, but the gospel, the glad tidings, had not yet been preached in the Nordic countries. Then one day among the people in the small town of Birka stood an unknown man […] He spoke to them about White Christ.[26]

This text not only portrays Ansgar as a long-time expected missionary, but also compares him with the apostles. A later text passage describes how he came to Sweden "destitute of everything, just as Jesus's apostles went out into the Holy Land without sword, without money, without travel food. He sowed the word of God and waited patiently for the harvest."[27] The text also clarifies that Ansgar saw the apostles in a dream, where he witnessed Purgatory.[28]

However, when Ansgar left the country, the people of Sweden again turned to paganism. Ansgar then made a second trip to Sweden,[29] and Christianity was slow-

---

Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 28 – 29; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 26, 37; Häggman, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 31.

**22** The *ting* (ON *þing*) was in ancient Scandinavia an assembly of free men from a certain area who gathered to read the law, take decisions, and settle disputes. See Gro Steinsland, *Fornnordisk religion* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2007), 411 – 13.

**23** Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 34; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 24 – 25; Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 146.

**24** Brandell, *Sveriges historia* (1915), 15, 18.

**25** Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 26.

**26** Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 193 – 94.

**27** Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 203.

**28** Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 196 – 97.

**29** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 11; Larsson, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 14; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 17; Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 202 – 3; Rose-

ly established as the main religion.[30] Some of the texts also contain stories about how missionaries were sent to different parts of Sweden.[31] Most of the texts have hagiographic depictions of later missionaries, for example in the text by Ola Bergström, who presents the deeds of the missionaries Eskil, Stefan, and Sigfrid and how God intervened in their actions.[32] Likewise, Aron Rydfors includes texts about how the missionaries show supernatural elements.[33] Accordingly, the readers were told that the missionary work was led by God and that it was highly requested by the inhabitants.

The texts generally view the missionaries favorably, regardless of whether Christianization was described as voluntary or coercive. Ribbing contrasts the self-determined and peaceful Christianization of Sweden with the situation in Norway, where the implementation of Christianity was more violent.[34] The author legitimizes the violence with the good intentions of the missionaries. Some texts state, however, that Ansgar's successors proceeded ruthlessly, which in some cases resulted in a backlash of paganism.[35]

Furthermore, it is emphasized that Olof Skötkonung was baptized as the first Christian king.[36] Several texts narrate a conflict between the "Götar" and the

---

nborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 25; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan.1*, 53; Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 20; Bergström, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1935), 37; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 29.

**30** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 11; Larsson, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 15; Brandell , *Sveriges historia* 15; 18; Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 43; Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 203 – 204; Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 147; von Heidenstam, *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar*, 68; Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 37; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 25; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 20; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1935), 37; Brandell, *Sveriges historia* (1921), 44; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 29; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 31; Häggman, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 33.

**31** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 11; Larsson, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 15; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 26; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan 1*, 54 – 55; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 21; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1935), 36 – 38; Brandell, *Sveriges historia* (1921), 45; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 31; Rydfors, *Fäderneslanets historia för folkskolan*, (1923), 35 – 36; Häggman, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 33.

**32** Bergström, *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan* (1935), 20, 36 – 38.

**33** Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 37– 38; Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan* (1923), 35 – 36.

**34** Ribbing, *Läsebok för folkskolan*, 204.

**35** Bergström, *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 11.

**36** Larsson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1918), 15; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 25; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 54 – 55, Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 27; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 39; Lundh-

"Svear."[37] The Götar adopted Christianity early, while the Svear persisted longer in pagan beliefs. After the first king was baptized, the Svear joined a pagan appeal led by Blot-Sven. Eventually, however, Blot-Sven was expelled from the throne and the king Inge re-established Christianity. Thereafter, Christianity slowly gained foothold in all parts of Sweden.

In the texts that poetically depict the transition, the language is characterized by a theological understanding of the transition as an intervention by God. Dalin, who collected a number of poems included in *The New Reader*,[38] cites the poem "The Star of the Eastern Country":

> With greater light than the clear day / was lit in a hurry around the Nordic countries: / angels sang God's good pleasure / and glory and peace on earth. / To the pagans on the ice-filled shore / Jesus' star came from the East, / she shone on the sword and armor [...] The Viking children saw with wondering eyes. / The light of God flowed down from the sky / the snow, where they lay on their knees / The duel was forgotten and swords and battle, / with the joy of heaven and Christmas peace / for the first time they felt [...] / At the same moment a tremor went / through the foundations of the rocks / for the Aesir fled for an angelic look, / for the miracle of salvation. / Thor his hammer forever mist, / northerners both to White Christ, / and clearly burned Bethlehem's star.[39]

The timing of the transition is explained as a result of the arrival of God, Christ, and the angels.

Another poem in Dalin's text underlines that God gave the gospel to the Swedes, who like the Israelites lived in the desert.[40] These divine interventions are arranged in a salvation-historical context and there are obvious similarities in how the Christian mission to Sweden was explained. Some texts adopt an organic metaphor for the transition: Christianity was like a plant that grew and bore

---

Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 31; Häggman, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 33.

**37** Larsson, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 16; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 18; Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 43; Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 36; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 27; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 27–28; Brandell, *Sveriges historia (1921)*, 45; Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan* (1923), 34.

**38** *The New Reader* (Sw. *Den nya läseboken*) was a project initiated by some famous Swedish authors who wrote and compiled new texts for the primary school with the idea of replacing the *State Reader*. See Bo Ollén, ed., *Från Sörgården till Lop-nor: Klassiska läseböcker i ny belysning* (Stockholm: Carlssons bokförlag, 1996).

**39** Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 146.

**40** Dalin, Svensk vers, 147.

fruit.[41] One text gives a detailed description of how the first Christians were chosen by God to be the "giants" on which God would build His Church.[42]

On the one hand, it was the Swedish population and their rulers who explicitly asked for missionaries to spread Christianity. We can regard this as a historical aspect of the transition. This aspect strongly marks the domestic and nationalist motives behind the process, even if it is also characterized by hagiographically-marked descriptions of individual missionaries chosen by God. On the other hand, there is a theological and salvation-historical aspect to the transition, since Christianization is interpreted as a result of divine intervention. The gospel softens and civilizes the barbaric culture of the wild pagans. This could be interpreted as a historiographical expression of the Lutheran two-regiments doctrine. Historical events have their historical actors, active in the secular regiment. These actors are at the same time tools of the spiritual regiment, who help God spread the gospel. In other words, the main narrative events of history are marked both by a nationalist and a theological ideology that effectively bridges the gap between the pagan past and Christianity. Primary school pupils should learn that Christianity was not implemented by force and that God had a plan for the spread of Christianity in Sweden.

## Comparing Paganism and Christianity/Catholicism

Remarkably few textbooks evaluate Catholicism. Most authors describe Christianity in a general sense, but there are some exceptions. Rydfors contrasts Catholicism with the pagan religion. He states that Christianity at the time of the transition contained aspects that were not found in the Bible, but rather, were constructed by humans.[43] Carl Grimberg uses similar wording.[44] Rydfors states that two aspects of Catholicism appealed to the pagans: polytheism and the Christian liturgy.[45] The statement about polytheism can most probably be understood as an expression of a Protestant notion that the Catholics were polytheists because they worshipped saints and the Virgin Mary, even if this cannot explicitly be found in the text. However, it is obvious that an early twentieth-century, Evangelical-Lutheran point of

41 Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 50.
42 Von Heidenstam, *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar*, 66.
43 Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 38.
44 Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 44.
45 Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 38 – 39.

view informs the pejorative descriptions of Catholic 'polytheism' and the non-biblical content. In some texts, even the pagan religion is depicted positively when compared to Catholic traditions. Lundh-Eriksson, for instance, identifies some Catholic practices negatively. One example describes how pagans found it hard to accept the idea of eternal perdition for the deceased non-Christians. The pagans also preferred not to abandon their Viking voyages and instead focused on fastening and fattening. Lundh-Eriksson described this Catholic requirement as "not compatible with their powerful and healthy souls."[46]

Several textbooks make explicit comparisons between pagan religion and Christianity.[47] In most cases, this turns out to benefit Christianity. Nevertheless, the texts establish an ethical dualism between the two traditions and Christianity evidently takes precedence over paganism. In Rydfors, Christian ethics are positioned against the fighting spirit and violence of the pagans. In Bergström, paganism is classified as "cruel."[48]

The Christian doctrine of peace and harmony is contrasted with blood revenge. The same applies to the pagan habit of killing unwanted children, as opposed to the Christian idea of respect for human life. Furthermore, the practice of enslavement is contrasted with the Christian message of equality of all men before God.[49] Bergström makes similar comparisons. Pagan blood revenge is set up against Christian views of meeting evil with goodness. Christ had set everyone free and made all men equal before God: this principle is juxtaposed with pagan slavery.[50]

However, not all narratives are as detailed as those of the authors above. Most common are statements describing how Christianity somehow changed customs.[51] In Grimberg, changes are linked to "the loving words of Jesus."[52] Brandell and Rosenborg write that "milder customs permeated" Swedish society and that "life

**46** Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan. Läroboken*, 31.

**47** Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 17–18; Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 34; Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 146–47; Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 38–39; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 27; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 31.

**48** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 15.

**49** Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 38–39.

**50** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 27.

**51** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskkolan*, 15; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 17; Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 146–47; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 56; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 21; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 28; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 31.

**52** Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 34.

and traditions" were altered.[53] Some texts elaborate extensively on the difficulties for the pagan people. Bergström finds that it was not "so easy to change the thoughts of a nation. Christianity condemned so much of what the pagans used to love."[54] Rydfors draws a similar conclusion: "All this was contrary to what the pagans had hitherto considered wise and prudent. Therefore, it was not surprising that it took so long for the people to become Christians."[55]

What changes did Christianity, according to these narratives, entail? It brought Christian ethics, peace, domestic harmony, freedom and equality of all men, and an overall respect for human life. Christianity is thus depicted as a force that upheld culture and civilization. It disciplined the wild northerners and destroyed their barbaric traditions. The cessation of the Viking forays is particularly highlighted.[56] One example is the poem "Mission Song" in Dalin. Through Christianity, "love, peace and tranquility took hold / in the robbers' nest." Furthermore, it is said that "it brightened more and more around the motherland / and peacefully the permanent bond of society was forged."[57] Here, the cessation of looting is linked to the establishment of a more orderly and civilized society. Grimberg explicitly states that "monasteries introduced several useful things,"[58] but without giving any explicit examples.

On the basis of the empirical data from the history textbooks, it is possible to construct a binary narrative model or map ways in which the wild and barbarous pagan country was, with the help of Christianity, transformed into an ordered and civilized society.

The results of this study indicate that during the first half of the twentieth century, Christianity was perceived, alongside nationalism, as one of the main cultural forces that brought order and civilization to Sweden. The history textbooks construct Christianity as a cultural force, most often without paying particular attention to negative aspects of Catholicism.

However, the table does not indicate the aspects of paganism that are classified positively, nor certain Christian and Catholic elements that are classified negatively. The data therefore needs to be supplemented with an illustration of these anomalies. In the left column below, both positive and negative classifications of

**53** Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 18; Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 56.

**54** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 27.

**55** Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 39.

**56** Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 18; Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 34; Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 146; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1921), 27; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan. Läroboken*, 28 – 29.

**57** Dalin, *Svensk vers*, 146 – 47.

**58** Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 45.

**Table 1:** Negative and Positive Concept Classifications.

| Negative classifications (-) | Positive classifications (+) |
|---|---|
| Paganism | Christianity |
| Wildness | Order |
| War | Peace |
| Viking forays abroad | Domestic harmony |
| Fighting spirit | Christ's mild doctrine / Christian ethics |
| Fear and horror | Peace and love |
| Darkness | Light |
| Cruelty | Love and care |
| Slavery | Freedom of man and equality of all men |
| Blood revenge | Forgiveness and "turning the other cheek" |
| Killing unwanted children | Respect for human life |
| Thieving | Respect for private ownership |
| Lack of order | Society |
| Pagan cults | Monasteries |

the pagan religion are listed. In the right column, the corresponding negative classification of Catholicism is listed.

**Table 2:** Classifications on Old Norse religion and on Catholicism.

| Positive (+) or negative classification (-) of Old Norse religion | Negative classification of Catholicism (-) |
|---|---|
| Powerful and healthy souls (+) | Fastening and fattening |
| Many gods (-) | Polytheism |
| Feasts of sacrifice (-) | Liturgy |
| Mythology (-) | Extra-biblical elements |

## Interpretatio Christiana

In the textbook narratives about Old Norse mythology there is a crucial motive concerning the final battle between the pagan gods and their chaotic enemies. This battle ends with the rising of a new world ruled by a new god.[59] Bergström

59 Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 13; Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 16; Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 24; Ribbing, *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan*, 27; Rosenborg,

tells us that "everything will perish and a new world with new human people will emerge. A new god will rule over the new world, a god that is more powerful than all the Asar."[60] Brandell writes: "But from the sea a new earth will rise, the humans on this earth will be good and happy, and over the new world a mightier god will rule."[61] In Rydfors, the narrative is more elaborate:

> out of this devastation, a new, more glorious life will emerge. From the sea a new, evergreen soil, where the crops grow unsown, will rise. On it lives a new and better human race. A god will rule over this world, whose name no one dares to mention.[62]

In Grimberg the same motive is presented in a poetic form: "Then comes the mighty / to the judgment of the world / the strong above / who controls everything. He sits in judgment/ establishes peace/statutes, what is eternal/shall stand in sanctity."[63]

These motives are clearly associated with Christian eschatology. The god whose name the people dare not mention, and who is called "the strong above," is undoubtedly the Christian God. However, it is only in Grimberg that this identification is explicit. The other authors do not comment on this eschatological connection. Some texts are formulated almost like riddles, which it is up to the pupils to solve. Yet in Rosenborg the identification is made quite explicit – it is an "unknown, mighty god." He states: "It seems that Christianity finally made some impression on the theology of our ancestors."[64]

These narrative elements bind mythology together with salvation history. During the nineteenth century, several scholars of religion claimed that at the beginning of time, humans were monotheists, and that later on this was distorted by pagan priests.[65] Accordingly, paganism was presented as a "distorted" primitive religion at the same time as Christianity was portrayed as self-evident and natural.

---

*Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 46; Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia ör folkskolan* (1921), 18; Brandell, *Sveriges historia* (1935), 20–22; Lundh-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läroboken*, 21; Lund-Eriksson, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Läseboken*, 16–18.

**60** Bergström, *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 13. Sw. *asar* (ON *æsir*) is a category of gods in Old Norse mythology; see Steinsland, *Fornnordisk religion*, 146–47.

**61** Brandell, *Sveriges historia*, 20–21.

**62** Rydfors, *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan*, 27.

**63** Grimberg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan*, 24.

**64** Rosenborg, *Sveriges historia för folkskolan* (1920), 46.

**65** Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte. Bd 1. Einleitung, Vorgeschichtliche Perioden, Religiöse Grundlagen des Lebens, Seelen- und Geisterglaube, Macht und Kraft, das Heilige und die Kultformen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956), 51; Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12–13.

Therefore, the pupils were supposed to learn that paganism was doomed to perish and that their pagan ancestors had conceptions of a Christian god even before Sweden was Christianized. The missionary strategy of interpreting elements of foreign religions as testaments to Christianity is called *interpretatio christiana.*[66] Through this approach, the textbook narratives appropriate the pagan past and establish a Christian continuity that neutralizes foreign elements in the pagan religion.[67]

## Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to explore how Christianity was perceived during the first three decades of the twentieth century by studying history textbook narratives about the transition from paganism to Christianity. My research questions have concerned the portrayal of this transition, the driving forces behind the transition, and how the relationship between Old Norse religion and Christianity was portrayed, especially regarding the relationship to Catholicism. Through this approach, I have shown how Christianity was perceived as a force of cultural change and how its norms and values were perceived in this era.

This study has shown that narratives on the transition to Christianity reflect how an originally pagan country was Christianized through two different initiatives. The first was the domestic initiative of the country's inhabitants and its king. Their curiosity led to missionaries being invited to the country. No coercion or violence occurred initially, and the missionaries, who are depicted as pious people led by God, were officially permitted to preach. Christianity was thus not forced upon Sweden by external powers; this was important, as Christianity was also perceived as a crucial element of the Swedish national identity at the turn of the twentieth century. The second driving force emanated directly from God and interconnected – in a theological understanding – Christianity with salvation history. This is further enhanced in the narratives by the insistence that, in the Old Norse mythology, the pagans already conceived of a future God who would replace pagan polytheism. Accordingly, the history textbooks appropriate the pagan past and establish a religious continuity from Old Norse religion to Christianity. Taken together, these themes reveal that these transitional narratives incorporate both nationalist and theological dimensions.

**66** Johann Konrad Eberlein, "Interpretatio christiana," in *Brill's New Pauly*, ed. Hubert Cancik et. al., English edition by Christine F. Salazar, 2006, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/interpretatio-christiana-ct-e1406540

**67** Cf. Wickström, *Våra förfäder var hedningar*, 325–26.

Quite surprisingly, there are few narratives that explicitly value Catholicism. The texts that do discuss Catholicism, do so negatively. This scanty and disparaging discussion focuses on elements that "are not in the Bible" or on aspects perceived as polytheistic. Extensive comparisons, though, are made between the Old Norse religion and Christianity as a whole. These comparisons mainly favor Christianity, with a few exceptions.

These narratives of transition, taken together, offer a basis for reconstructing a binary model of the transition. Christianity is classified positively as the bringer of civilization, love, order, and respect for life, while Old Norse religion is classified as its direct opposite, with chaos, violence, and cruelty as its main characteristics. Its only redeeming feature is the healthy and dynamic pagan soul. The Christian virtues in the transitional narratives were also connected to a broader context: the history of mankind's salvation and how Christianity – as a cultural, peaceful, and civilizing force – defeated the wild, barbaric, and pagan way of life.

The primary school was established as an institution for moral education for children from the peasantry and the working class at a time when the Lutheran State Church began to lose its political and institutional influence in Sweden.[68] Yet many studies have shown that Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity still remained a moral guarantor for the primary school at the turn of the twentieth century.[69] In the introduction, I suggested that narratives about the transition from paganism to Christianity are highly relevant for studying how Christianity was perceived in the Swedish society at the turn of the twentieth century. The results confirm that the narratives about the transition to Christianity were dominated by an inclusive and ethical form of Christianity. Such an ethical version of Christianity – which was in line with the cultural-Protestant, liberal-theological, and historical-critical approach that emerged in Northern Europe from the 1870s – emphasized that the mythical and dogmatic content should be removed in favor of Jesus's ethics.[70]

Christianity could be understood as a unifying and culture-changing force that enjoyed huge moral importance at the turn of the twentieth century. The main conclusion of the chapter is that Christianity up until 1930 still was a tangible ingredient in the socialization of the pupils in primary school, even as a parallel process of institutional secularization was occurring in Swedish society.

---

**68** Wickström, *Våra förfäder var hedningar*, 51.

**69** Buchardt, *Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education.*

**70** Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Kirkehistorie: grundtræk af vestens kirkehistorie fra begyndelsen til nutiden* (Fredriksberg: Anis, 1997), 234–35.

# References

## History Textbooks

Bergström, Ola. *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan: I fullständig överensstämmelse med folkskolelärobokskommitténs grundsatser.* Stockholm, 1898.
Bergström, Ola. *Sveriges historia för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Beckman, 1921.
Brandell, Georg. *Sveriges historia: Berättad för folkskolans barn.* Stockholm: A. V. Carlsson, 1904.
Brandell, Georg. *Sveriges historia för folkskolans barn.* Stockholm: Carlson, 1921.
Grimberg, Carl. *Sveriges historia för folkskolan: Försöksupplaga omfattande tiden till Gustav Vasas tronbestigning.* Stockholm, 1906.
Häggman, Jean. *Sveriges historia i förenklad framställning för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Bonnier, 1926.
Heidenstam, Verner von. *Svenskarna och deras hövdingar: Berättelser för unga och gamla.* Stockholm: Bonnier, 1911.
Larsson, Hans. *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan.* Lund: Gleerups, 1898.
Larsson, Hans. *Lärobok i Sveriges historia för folkskolan.* Lund: Gleerups, 1918.
Lundh-Eriksson, Nanna. *Sveriges historia för folkskolan. Läseboken. Första delen. T.o.m. 1660.* Stockholm: J. A. Lindblad, 1922.
Lundh-Eriksson, Nanna. *Sveriges historia för folkskolan. Läroboken. Första delen. T.o.m. 1666.* Stockholm: J. A. Lindblad, 1922.
Odhner, Claes Theodor. *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia: Under författarens ledning bearbetad för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Norstedts, 1897.
Ribbing, Lennart. *Läsebok för svenska folkskolan. Första delen.* Stockholm: Norstedts, 1907.
Rosenborg, Olof. *Sveriges historia för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Palmqvist, 1910.
Rosenborg, Olof. *Sveriges historia för folkskolan 1.* Uppsala: Lindblad, 1920.
Rydfors, Aron. *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Fritze, 1908.
Rydfors, Aron. *Fäderneslandets historia för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Fritzes förlag, 1923.

## Literature

Algotsson, Karl-Göran, *Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet: Debatten om religionsundervisningen i skolan under 1900-talet.* Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1975.
Ammert, Niklas, "Om läroböcker och studiet av dem." In *Att spegla världen: Läromedelsstudier i teori och praktik*, edited by Niklas Ammert. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2018.
Bexell, Oloph, *Sveriges kyrkohistoria 7: Folkväckelsens och kyrkoförnyelsens tid.* Stockholm: Verbum, 2003.
Blückert, Kjell. *Moder, syster eller sköka: Bilden av katolska kyrkan i kristen press år 1989.* Skellefteå: Artos, 2004.
Buchardt, Mette. "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model." *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 5, no. 2 (2015): 131–65.
Eberlein, Johann Konrad. "Interpretatio Christiana." In *Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity Volumes*, edited by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider; English edition by Christine F. Salazar. Accessed on

22 February 2024, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/interpretatio-christiana-ct-e1406540

Englund, Tomas. *Läroplanens och skolkunskapens politiska dimension.* Gothenburg: Daidalos, 2005.

Englund, Tomas. *Medborgerlig läroplanskod för folkskola, fortsättningsskola och grundskola 1918/19–?* Stockholm: Institutionen för pedagogik, 1980.

Englund, Tomas. *Samhällsorientering och medborgarfostran i svensk skola under 1900-talet.* Vol. 2. Uppsala: Pedagogisk forskning i Uppsala, 1986.

Fuchs, Eckhardt, Inga Niehaus, and Almut Stoletzki. *Das Schulbuch in der Forschung: Analysen und Empfehlungen für die Bildungspraxis.* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014.

Graf, Friedrich Wilhelm. "Kulturprotestantismus: Zur Begriffsgeschichte einer theologischenpolitische Chiffre." In *Archiv für Begriffsgechichte* 28 (1984): 214 – 68.

Hallberg, Peter. *Den fornisländska poesin.* Verdandis skriftserie 20. Stockholm: Alb. Bonniers boktryckeri, 1962.

Hartman, Sven G. "Hur religionsämnet formades." In *Livstolkning och värdegrund: att undervisa om religion, livsfrågor och etik*, edited by Edgar Almén, Ragnar Furenhed, Sven G. Hartman, and Björn Skogar. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2000.

Hartman, Sven G. *Det pedagogiska kulturarvet: Traditioner och idéer i svensk undervisningshistoria.* Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2005.

Hartman, Sven G. "Perspektiv på skolans religionsundervisning." In *Religionsdidaktik: mångfald, livsfrågor och etik i skolan*, edited by Malin Löfstedt. Studentlitteratur: Lund, 2011.

Hedin, Christer. *Kristendomens historia i Sverige.* Farsta: Molin & Sorgenfrei Förlag, 2017.

Hellström, Emma. "Svensk Lärartidning och nordisk kulturprotestantism: Debatten om kristendomsundervisningens fostrande uppdrag i folkskolan: 1882 – 1919." In *Utbildningens fostrande funktioner: Historiska undersökningar av fostran i offentliga och enskilda utbildningsinsatser*, edited by Viktor Englund, Anne Berg, Peter Bernhardsson, Janne Holmén, Esbjörn Larsson, Germund Larsson, Johanna Ringarp, and David Sjögren. Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in History of Education, 2022.

Holmquist, Hjalmar. *Handbok i svensk kyrkohistoria 3: Från romantiken till första världskriget jämte grunddragen av det övriga Nordens kyrkohistoria.* Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans Diakonistyrelse, 1952.

Isling, Åke. *Kampen för emot en demokratisk skola 2: Det pedagogiska arvet.* Stockholm: Sober dokumentation, 1988.

Kidd, Colin. *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600 – 1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Larsson, Edgar. "Religious Education in Sweden." In *Religious Education in Great Britain, Sweden, and Russia: Presentations, Problems, Inventories and Commentaries. Texts from the PETER project*, edited by Edgar Almén and Hans Christian Øster. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2000.

Lindmark, Daniel. *Reading, Writing and Schooling: Swedish Practices of Education and Literacy, 1650 – 1880.* Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2004.

Lundgren, Ulf P. "En gemensam skola: utbildning blir en nödvändighet för alla." In *Lärande, skola, bildning: grundbok för lärare*, edited by Ulf P. Lundgren, Roger Säljö, and Caroline Liberg. Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2010.

Långström, Sture. "Författarröst och lärobokstradition: en historiedidaktisk studie." PhD diss., Umeå University, 1997.

Norborg, Lars-Åke. *Sveriges historia under 1800- och 1900-talen: Svensk samhällsutveckling 1809 – 1992.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993.

Ollén, Bo, ed. *Från Sörgården till Lop-nor: Klassiska läseböcker i ny belysning.* Stockholm: Carlssons bokförlag, 1996.

Richardson, Gunnar. *Svensk utbildningshistoria: skola och samhälle förr och nu.* Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2004.

Sahlberg, Carl-Erik. *Allmän kyrkohistoria: Från Jesus till kyrkan idag.* Uppsala: STH Academic, 2021.

Salqvist, Bernhard. *Folkskolans kristendomsundervisning: Med särskild hänsyn till 1919 års undervisningsplan.* Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans Diakonistyrelse, 1947.

Sandin, Bengt. *Hemmet, gatan, fabriken eller skolan: folkundervisning och barnuppfostran i svenska städer 1600 – 1950.* Lund: Arkiv avhandlingsserie, 1986.

Schwarz Lausten, Martin. *Kirkehistorie: grundtræk af vestens kirkehistorie fra begyndelsen til nutiden.* Fredriksberg: Anis, 1997.

Selander, Staffan. "Läroboken: det vetbaras gräns i skolan?" In *Från folkskola till grundskola: tio forskare vid Pedagogiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet, belyser utvecklingen under 150 år i anslutning till folkskolejubiléet*, edited by Erik Wallin. Uppsala: Pedagogiska institutionen, 1992.

Selander, Staffan. "Pedagogiska texter och andra artefakter för kunskap och kommunikation: En översikt över läromedel – perspektiv och forskning." *Statens Offentliga Utredningar.* SOU 2003:015, 2003.

Tegborg, Lennart. *Folkskolans sekularisering 1895 – 1909: Upplösning av det administrativa sambandet mellan folkskola och kyrka i Sverige.* Stockholm: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 1969.

Vries, Jan de. *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte: Bd 1. Einleitung, Vorgeschichtliche Perioden, Religiöse Grundlagen des Lebens, Seelen- und Geisterglaube, Macht und Kraft, das Heilige und die Kultformen.* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956.

Westberg, Johannes. "Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish: The School Act of 1842 and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Sweden." In *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling: Education Policy in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Lukas Boser Ingrid Brühwiler, and Johannes Westberg, 195 – 222. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Wickström, Johan. "Fornskandinaviskt stoff i den svenska folkskolans pedagogiska texter: en bred empirisk inventering av etniska, mytiska, kultiska, politiska, sociala, genusmässiga och övergångstida framställningar." Unpublished lic. thesis, Uppsala universitet, 2005.

Wickström, Johan. "Religion i folkskolans styrdokument: Ett bidrag till religionsbegreppets didaktiska historia. *Nordidactica: Journal for Humanities and Social Science Education* 11, no. 3 (2021): 71 – 96.

Wickström, Johan. *Våra förfäder var hedningar: Nordisk forntid som myt i den svenska folkskolans pedagogiska texter fram till år 1919.* Västerås: Edita Västra Aros, 2008.

Emma Hellström

# Christian Education and the Creation of Democratic Citizens: Presentations of Christianity in Swedish Textbooks during the 1930s and 1940s

## Introduction

> The more a people embrace and absorb Christianity, the more they develop. The moral and economic progress of a people depends essentially on the life of Christianity among the people. On the other hand, history teaches us that when a people despise the divine revelation proclaimed by the Bible and when religious life has been allowed to decline, it results in societal decay. Therefore, it should be our task, as Christian people, to do what is in our power to preserve the light of Christianity among us, above all by ensuring that our children and youth receive a truly good Christian education.[1]

These words were uttered by the Conservative politician Axel Rubbestad in the Swedish parliament in 1933. His views on Christianity as a guarantor of moral and economic progress were common among politicians from most Swedish political parties at that time. Accordingly, Christian education was considered to be of great importance for the fostering of pupils' character and civic values. Hence, there was a strong belief in Christianity (*kristendomskunskap*) as a crucial primary school subject.[2] This did not, however, mean that there was a political consensus on the contents of Christian education.

In the Swedish parliament's promulgation of the new curriculum in 1919 (*1919 års undervisningsplan*), the school subject Christianity underwent major changes. Among other things, Luther's Small Catechism was removed as the most important textbook. Instead of the dogma advocated by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Sweden, Christian education should be based on Christian ethics and a general Christian message.[3]

The abolition of Luther's Small Catechism created a vacuum: what was to replace it? The debate in the parliament and among schoolteachers was therefore

1 Parliamentary motion SC, nr. 404 (Stockholm, 1933). My translation.

2 Emma Hellström, "Kristendomsundervisning som medborgarfostran: Striden om kristendomsundervisningens syfte och innehåll, 1920–1969" (paper presented at the 8th Nordic Educational Conference, Aalborg University, Denmark, May 23–25, 2022).

3 *Undervisningsplan för rikets folkskolor* (Stockholm: Skolöverstyrelsen, 1919), 19, 26.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-007

often intense. Several proposals and prize competitions emerged, and the number of new textbooks quickly increased.

In this chapter, I will analyze how Christianity was presented in primary school textbooks that were supposed to replace the Small Catechism during the 1930s and 1940s. I will explore if the changes in the curriculum of 1919 resulted in a diminishing trust in the educational ambition of Christianity as a school subject. The leading research questions are: Which norms and values were transmitted through Christian education, and how can these values be seen in the light of the pursuit to foster democratic citizens?

## The Social Democratic Welfare State

In 1932, when the Social Democrats gained a relatively stable government position, welfare state construction began in Sweden.[4] Its core emphasis were on equality and social security, which reflected the ambitions of the Swedish Social Democracy to abandon class conflict in favor of class alliances.[5]

In earlier research, the development of the welfare state has often been described as an enlightenment project connected to modernity, rationalism, and secularization. In the past, the prevailing notion was that democracy and welfare benefited from the marginalization of Christianity.[6] However, in recent studies, this interpretation has been questioned. On an international level, educational historian Daniel Tröhler argues that Christian values, even if they were not always evident, still dominated school teaching.[7]

In a Swedish and Nordic context, institutional secularization – which gained a foothold in Sweden during the first decades of the twentieth century – did not automatically entail a cultural secularization or a secularization of teaching.[8] According to historian Uffe Østergård, the Social Democratic focus on work and social se-

**4** Kjell Östberg, *Folk i rörelse: vår demokratis historia* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2021), 175.

**5** Ingela K. Naumann, "Consensus, Conflict or Compromise? Church–State Relations in the Swedish 'People's Home' During the 1920s and 1930s," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 1 (2014): 35.

**6** Tomas Englund, *Samhällsorientering och medborgarfostran i svensk skola under 1900-talet* (Uppsala: Pedagogiska institutionen, 1986), 297; Åke Isling, *Kampen för och mot en demokratisk skola* (Stockholm: Sober, 1988), 110, 114–18.

**7** Daniel Tröhler, "The Lasting Legacy of the European Reformation of the 16th Century: Protestant Foundations of Modern Educational Reasoning," *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in religion and Education* 42, no. 2 (2020): 259.

**8** Lennart Tegborg, *Folkskolans sekularisering 1895–1909. Upplösning av det administrativa sambandet mellan folkskola och kyrka i Sverige* (Stockholm: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 1969).

curity reflects two of the central ideas of Lutheranism: daily work as the fulfillment of God's calling, and – for all believers – a priesthood that promoted social equality. Therefore, the Nordic countries could be described as Lutheran welfare states based on secularized Lutheranism.[9]

Historian Daniel Alvunger makes similar conclusions and emphasizes how the term "secularized Lutheranism" is used to describe how principles based on a Lutheran societal view have been transformed during the construction of the Nordic welfare states. Consequently, the former confessional patterns have lost their religious meaning and instead have been adapted to a secular framework.[10]

## Christian Education in Primary Schools after 1919

Even if the Lutheran culture of unity was weakened from the end of the nineteenth century, teaching in primary schools was still influenced by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Sweden and centered on Luther's Small Catechism. However, during the democratization that took place at the turn of the century, the Small Catechism was subjected to increased criticism among teachers and politicians, since it was considered to violate the freedom of thought. It was also underlined that the Small Catechism contained sections that could not be accepted by the Free Church movements or by those who did not have a strictly Lutheran view on Christianity.[11] Accordingly, a Christian education based on Luther's Small Catechism was not seen as compatible with the increasing societal demands for democratization, whose core values were tolerance and freedom of thought.[12]

As a result of this criticism, the school subject Christianity underwent major changes in the curriculum of 1919 and was more or less adapted to a religiously pluralistic society. Henceforth, teaching should be based on the Bible, with ethics and the Sermon on the Mount as the main pillars.[13]

---

**9** Uffe Østergård, "The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity: From Composite to Nation-States," in *The Cultural Construction of* Norden, ed. Østein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 69; Ingela K. Naumann and Lindsay Paterson, "Why Swedes Trust the State and Scots Do Not: An Exploration of the Diverse Protestant Roots of Modern Welfare Systems," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33 no. 4 (2021): 475–77.

**10** Daniel Alvunger, *Nytt vin i gamla läglar: socialdemokratisk kyrkopolitik under perioden 1944–1973* (PhD diss., Lund University, 2006), 28–29.

**11** The catechism contains, for example, a passage about baptism. Baptism in the catechism implied infant baptism, which the Baptists, who practiced adult baptism, could not accept.

**12** Karl Göran Algotsson, *Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet: Debatten om religionsundervisningen i skolan under 1900-talet* (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 1975) 36, 216.

**13** "Undervisningsplan 1919," 19.

Even if the attitude towards Christianity somewhat changed in the curriculum of 1919, it should not be equated with Christianity losing its strong position in Swedish society. An institutional secularization was undoubtedly taking place, but this also entailed a process of integration in which Christianity was transformed to a social and cultural cement of the nation.[14] This conversion defused both ecclesiastical aspects and dogmatic doctrines. Instead, it emphasized the cultural value of Christianity. This can be seen as an expression of a re-sacralization of the state, which contributed to a renewed relation between Christianity and the Swedish state.[15]

The transformation of Christianity that was revealed in the curriculum of 1919 rested on liberal theological ideals. A central aspect of liberal theology was that the ethical teaching of Jesus constituted the core of Christianity. Consequently, genuine Christianity did not dwell on dogmatic doctrines, such as perceptions of Jesus's divinity. A branch of liberal theology was Cultural Protestantism, which aimed to bridge the gap between Christianity and modern society. This was done by emphasizing the culturalization and nationalization of Christianity.[16]

Educational and Church historian Mette Buchardt argues that the process of culturalization implied that the school subject Christianity became more compatible with other primary school subjects. Accordingly, the civic mission of Christianity was distinct. By presenting historically important figures like Jesus and Martin Luther as role models, primary school teaching was supposed to have a focus on moral education.[17] The process of culturalization also entailed a de-confessionalization. Teaching was no longer to be conducted in accordance with Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity. Despite these changes, Christian education should still educate Christian individuals, since the curriculum stated that teaching should promote religious and moral development. This religious development should, however, be based on a general Christian message found in ethics and the Sermon on the Mount.[18] Consequently, the new Christian education should educate (Christian) citizens who could function in the emergent democratic Swedish society.

---

**14** Mette Buchardt, "The Nordic Model and the Educational Welfare State in a European Light: Social Problem Solving and Secular Religious Aspirations When Modernizing Sweden and France," in *The Nordic Educational Model in Context: Historical Developments and Current Renegotiations*, ed. Daniel Tröhler et al. (London: Routledge, 2023), 114–17.

**15** Buchardt, "Cultural," 155.

**16** Urban Claesson, "Folkhemmets kyrka: Harald Hallén och folkkyrkans genombrott. En studie av socialdemokrati, kyrka och nationsbygge med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1905–1933" (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2004), 373.

**17** Buchardt, "Cultural," 139–45.

**18** Buchardt, "Cultural," 141–43.

Even if the curriculum of 1919 reflects liberal theological ideas, a theological reorientation took place in the 1920s. It criticized the liberal idea of the historical Jesus as separated from the Christ of faith and dogma. Instead of the anthropocentric and idealistic Christianity advocated by liberal theology, a return to a more theocentric view was invoked. The essence of Christianity was not the human and her deeds, but God and his deeds. It was considered impossible to decouple the historical Jesus from his preaching – for example Jesus's understanding of himself as the Son of Man (*Människosonen*).[19]

This theological reorientation became prominent in a governmental decree issued in 1929 that allowed sections of the Small Catechism to be read, together with the Bible, as a summary of the Christian faith and not solely as a historical document. The changes brought forward by the curriculum of 1919 and the decree of 1929 give rise to investigate how textbooks were supposed to relate to Christianity.

## Educational Ambitions and Moral Regulation

To further explain and illuminate the importance of Christianity in fostering democratic citizens during the 1930s and 1940s, it is useful to apply concepts such as "educational ambitions" and "moral regulation." According to educational historian Jeroen Dekker, educational ambitions define "the will to educate children with a clear result in mind."[20] Thus, it focuses on goals of fostering, education, and teaching.[21] Closely connected to educational ambition is the concept of moral regulation. It highlights certain forms of behavior, beliefs, and values mediated in teaching and schooling.[22]

Educational historian Johannes Westberg emphasizes how the study of textbooks can help us discover different moral and intellectual intentions in education. He also shows how educational ambition and moral regulation changed during the nineteenth century. More and more, the children were to be educated

**19** K. G. Hammar, *Liberalteologi och kyrkopolitik* (PhD diss., Lund University, 1972), 332; Claesson *Folkhemmets kyrka*, 380.

**20** Jeroen Dekker, *Educational Ambitions in History: Childhood and Education in an Expanding Educational Space from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Schweiz: Peter Lang, 2010), 10.

**21** Dekker, *Educational Ambitions in History*, 10–11.

**22** Johannes Westberg, "Från statsapparater och disciplin till educationalization och educational ambitions," in *Utbildningens fostrande funktioner: Historiska undersökningar av fostran i offentliga och enskilda utbildningsinsatser*, ed. Viktor Englund et al. (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies of History and Education, 2022), 308.

through recognition and identification with role models. Before, the focus had been on deterrence via discouraging examples of bad behavior.[23]

## Textbooks as Source Material

I have examined nine textbooks frequently used in Swedish primary schools. To select these books, I have used documentation from school inspectors in the diocese of Uppsala.

Due to the period this study focuses on, it should be mentioned that textbooks used in Swedish schools from 1938 to 1991 needed to be scrutinized and approved by a national textbook board. The textbook board's task was to assess the external characteristics of the textbooks (price, scope, and layout) as well as the content (objectivity, conformity with the syllabus, and reliability).[24] Therefore, it is possible to argue that the establishment of the State Textbook Board in 1938 demonstrated the will of the state to regulate the content of teaching. However, the task of reviewing textbooks was hardly an easy one, since the guidelines were elusive. Especially the task to assess objectivity was deemed to be difficult.

An objective Christian education has often been equated with non-confessional teaching in which all religions are given the same space.[25] However, the concept of objectivity is more complex than that. The curriculum of 1919 does not emphasize objectivity. Nevertheless, the emphasis on tolerance of dissenters was a step towards objectivity. At the same time, there was a perception that Christian values could be transmitted to pupils without a negative impact on objectivity.[26]

Thus, objectivity is an elusive concept and the Textbook Board's guidelines did not define objective teaching. For the first time in 1965, the Textbook Board explicitly described what objectivity meant in Christian education. Among other things, it was emphasized that textbooks should be neutral with regard to content. Moreover, it was underlined that the question of God's existence was open. Before, it had been perceived as self-evident that there was a God. Furthermore, it was im-

**23** Westberg, "Från statsapparater," 307.
**24** Åström Elmersjö, *En av staten*, 53–54.
**25** Algotsson, *Från katekestvång*, 124.
**26** *Svensk Läraretidning*, Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening 13 (Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening, 1920), 223.

portant that neither persons nor events were presented as historical when both historical and theological research considered them as myths and legends.[27]

## Transformation of Christianity in Textbooks

The analysis below is based on different themes, founded on keywords in the investigated texts: humility, greed, helpfulness, sin, love, revenge, repentance, reconciliation, depravity, and so on. These keywords reveal central norms and values conveyed in the textbooks.

### A Critical Approach to the Christian Truth Claim

As stated above, throughout the period there was a recurrent discussion on the necessity of Christianity to ensure a good upbringing and a civilized society. Textbooks were no exception. More or less all of them explicitly emphasized the necessity of the Christian faith.

Valuable qualities and virtues were constantly related to a religious framework and were often presented in the context of biblical quotations or even linked directly to excerpts from Luther's small catechism. In the book *Christian Doctrine and Morals for Early Childhood Schools* (Kristen tros- och sedelära: För barndomsskolorna) (1938), the authors Henrik Steen and Gustav Larson stated that "through sin the creation is stained and disfigured. But it can and should be restored and perfected by God's grace. This happens when a man: 1) Sticks to God and trusts in him; 2) Obeys God's will and does his work."[28] This quote gives the impression that the Christian faith was necessary to avoid sin. Accordingly, it raises questions about whether the textbooks embraced a critical approach.

In the parliamentary debates, Social Democrats and some Liberals expressed the need to critically examine the truths of Christianity based on a historical-critical method.[29] However, these demands did not have much impact on the studied textbooks. All of them avoided discussing the credibility of the historical dogmas

**27** Emma Hellström, "The Role of Religion in the rise of Democratic Schools: The Negotiation over Christian Education in Swedish Primary Schools, 1920–1969," (PhD diss., Uppsala University, forthcoming).

**28** Henrik Steen and Gustav Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära: För barndomsskolorna* (Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1938), 12.

**29** Hellström, "Kristendomsundervisning."

(for example, the miracles of Jesus), which implied that they were, rather, conveyed as something that actually happened.

The authors of *Folkskolans kristendomsbok* (The Book of Christianity) (1935) described how Jesus cured a lame man and restored sight to a blind man. The description of these miracles was probably a way to demonstrate Jesus's omnipotence. Accordingly, blindness and paralysis were explained as the result of human sin. By not following Jesus's message, humans were unable to see or walk in the right direction, but in believing and hearing the words of Jesus, humans regained the ability to see and walk.[30]

Instead of discussing or questioning the miracles, they were used as tools to demonstrate the necessity of the Christian faith and promulgated that Christianity conveyed the truth. In Ernst Westberg's *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för folkskolan* (Textbook of Christian Education for Primary Schools) (1931), it was, for instance, argued that this truth only could be reached through Christian faith. Westberg states: "God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."[31] Thus, Christianity was supposed to convey a kind of truth, but what this truth entailed was not evident. Given the religious framework, it probably implied knowledge of the kingdom of God. This suggests that it was not a truth achieved by scientific methods but rather by trusting in Jesus. Therefore, it is evident that the question of God's existence was not open for critical discussion. As Westberg puts it, "God knows, hears and sees everything and is always present."[32]

Even if the meaning of Christian truth was not elaborated on in detail, two of the textbooks briefly described the origins of the biblical texts. In *Vår bibel* (Our Bible) (1930), written by Sven Herner and *Folkskolans läsebok: Kristendom* (Textbook for Elementary School) (1945) authored by Rut Claëson et al., it was explained that biblical texts are very old and that they, for a long time, were transmitted orally between generations.[33] Claëson et al. also stressed that it was impossible to determine the origins of the texts in the Old Testament.[34] This was also mentioned by

**30** Alf Ahlberg et al., *Folkskolans kristendomsbok* (Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1935), 45; Edvard Rodhe and Gunnar Thunander, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska Diakonistyrelsen, 1936), 61.

**31** Ernst Westberg, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1931), 4.

**32** Westberg, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap*, 26.

**33** Sven Herner, *Vår bibel: förklarande inledning* (Lund: Gleerup, 1930), 4 – 6; Rut Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok: Kristendom* (Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1945), 24 – 28.

**34** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans Läsebok*, 25.

Herner who furthermore explained the origin of the New Testament, especially the Gospels and their interrelationship.[35]

Unlike the theology professor Emanuel Linderholm, who was inspired by liberal theology, Herner did not critically discuss the sources of the Gospels, for example how the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are based on the Gospel of Mark and how they probably included text elements from the so-called Q-source. Based on a critical discussion, Linderholm concluded that the three first Gospels could be regarded as historical sources. However, the same could not be said of the Gospel of John because it differed too much from the first three. It could therefore only be regarded as a speculative theological text in which the historical Jesus was lost.[36]

Nonetheless, far from everyone shared Linderholm's liberal theological view. The teacher magazine *Svenska Folkskolans Vän*, for instance, sharply criticized Linderholm's conception as well as liberal theological rationalism. *Svenska Folkskolans Vän* thought that Linderholm's view on the Bible was far from objective and insisted that reading of the Bible should not be interrupted by comments on its content.[37]

Despite different approaches of how to scrutinize biblical texts, it is evident that the textbooks did not encourage a critical discussion on the content of the Bible. At the same time, the lack of a more analytical description can be understood in the light of the curriculum's formulation that teaching needed to be adapted to the receptivity of the children.[38] It was probably seen as inappropriate to discuss truth claims and systematic explanations with primary school children. This argument was for example expressed by the teacher Anna Sörensen as early as 1913 in *Svensk Läraretidning*. She said that "at this age, there is not the slightest interest in a critical presentation."[39] Here, objectivity implied that the content should "speak" freely to the children without any disturbing and personal reflections, which in this case was considered to undermine the objective view on Christianity.

This ambivalence regarding objectivity can be explained by different positions in the Swedish theological debate at this time. In 1926, the primary school teacher Hjalmar Kihlberg expressed in the magazine *Skola och Samhälle* (School and society) that primary school teaching should not be concerned with either Bible pas-

**35** Herner, *Vår Bibel*, 41.

**36** Emanuel Linderholm, *Jesu bergspredikan: för folkskolans undervisning* (Stockholm: P. A. Nordstedt and Sons, 1921), 6–21.

**37** *Svenska Folkskolans Vän*, 15 (1922), 235–36.

**38** "Undervisningsplan 1919," 20–27.

**39** *Svensk Läraretidning*, Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening 47 (Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening, 1913), 1055.

sages to support certain orthodox beliefs or a critical examination of the Bible. Primary schools should unite and not divide. Accordingly, Kihlberg argued that Christian education must focus on character education based on ethical principles.[40]

Another explanation for the lack of critical perspectives can be found in the purpose of primary schools. Although Sweden had undergone a political democratization in 1919 and 1921, it did not imply that critical thinking in primary schools was promoted. Educational historian Henrik Åström Elmersjö argues that the democratic mission in primary schools in the early twentieth century did not endorse emancipation and development of the individual. Rather, it focused on creating a consensus on the principles of democracy.[41] What was evident in the textbooks was that the pupils would not learn how to question or challenge Christianity.

## The Necessity of Christian Faith: Christian Responsibility and Character

The desirable virtues and qualities presented in the textbooks do not differ significantly from qualities that are highly valued today, such as humility, solidarity, helpfulness, industriousness, and so on. The difference, however, is that the textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s mainly placed these virtues in a Christian framework. One example can be found in the textbook *Översikt över den kristna tros- och livsåskådningen* (Overview of the Christian faith and philosophy of life, 1948) by Ivar Holm, who wrote that there was only one way to escape anxiety, fear, and worry: faith in God. Therefore, the union with God gave the human a sense of security and peace.[42]

Furthermore, it was emphasized that it was only through faith in God that the conscience of the human became clear. Deviating from God's way diminished and clouded the conscience and drove man into corruption. The clouded conscience therefore needed to be purified and enlightened. According to Holm, this purification and enlightenment could only be achieved by the trust in God, by taking responsibility for one's sins, and by repentance.[43]

---

**40** *Skola och Samhälle: tidskrift för folkundervisningen* 26(Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1926), 323.

**41** Henrik Åström Elmersjö, "An Individualistic Turn: Citizenship in Swedish History and Social Studies Syllabi, 1970–2017," *History of Education* 50, no. 2 (2021), 224–25.

**42** Ivar Holm, *Översikt över den kristna tros- och livsåskådningen* (Stockholm: Magn. Bergvall, 1948), 4; David Hedberg et al., *Bibliska berättelser och texter för folkskolan* (Stockholm: Magn. Bergvall, 1948), 126.

**43** Holm, *Översikt*, 6; Steen and Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 15.

This indicates that trust in God was the cure for human anguish. Similar conclusions were drawn by Westberg. Referring to Luther, he stressed that godliness was not about fear or compulsion. Rather, the meaning was to follow God's message. Thus, Westberg endorses the belief that God is humanity's salvation and shield against all evil.[44]

Therefore, the textbooks reveal that those who loved and devoted themselves to God and Jesus also were capable of loving and treating their fellow human beings righteously. If the message of God was rejected, the capacity to love one's neighbor also disappeared. Westberg exemplifies: "He who does not love has not come to know God, for God is love."[45]

There was an underlying threat of punishment embedded in the perception of the necessity of the Christian faith. In the book *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap* (Textbook for Christian education for primary schools, 1936), authored by Edvard Rodhe and Gunnar Thunander, it was described how God punished the Jewish people when they deviated from his path. The punishment consisted of misfortunes, imprisonment, and mental sickness.[46] Church historian Björn Skogar argues, however, that the punitive and avenging aspect decreased in the curriculum of 1919, since greater emphasis was placed on the Sermon on the Mount.[47] This shift was indeed evident in the textbooks. Nonetheless, the punitive aspect was still present, but now in a more implicit way.

When the textbooks describe the life and teachings of Jesus, they seldom mention punishment through banishment or imprisonment. Nevertheless, it was made clear that if humans gave in to temptations of the flesh, wealth, and so on, there would be negative consequences. The textbook *Bibliska berättelser och texter* (Biblical stories and texts for primary school, 1948), written by David Hedberg et al., exemplified this by referring to one of Paul's statements: "But those who want to become rich, they will fall into temptations and snares and subdue to many foolish and harmful desires, which bring people down to destruction and ruin, since the desire for money is the root of all evil."[48] The perception of money and greed reflects one central aspect of Lutheran theology. Church historian Bo Nylund argues that neither Augustine nor Luther perceived material things as evil. The problem arose when people clung to money, power, status, and so on. That what should have been a means for personal development instead became an end in itself, a

**44** Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*, 22, 26–27.

**45** Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*, 5.

**46** Rodhe and Thunander, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap*, 23.

**47** Björn Skogar, "Teologins språk- och livets: Några dominerande teologiska profiler under svenskt 1900-tal," in *Modern svensk teologi*, ed. Håkan Eilert et al. (Gothenburg: Verbum, 1999), 30.

**48** Hedberg et al., *Bibliska berättelser och texter*, 149.

false god. This was exemplified in the textbooks on Jesus's teaching about God and Mammon. Rodhe and Thunander, for instance, insisted that humans cannot serve both the purifying God and the greedy Mammon.[49] Ahlberg et al. underlined that even if Jesus did not forbid humans to possess earthly goods, they should not cling to them. This was also imbued with Jesus's message that it was more important to give than to receive.[50]

In addition, Hedberg et. al. described how Jesus was tempted by the devil but managed to resist.[51] Temptations could therefore only be combated with the guidance of Jesus. Hence, there was a clear warning against greed and material abundance, which were considered to darken the human heart and lead an individual away from the faith. To become a good citizen, self-control and self-criticism were therefore seen as necessary to resist the dangers and temptations that lured humans into choosing the wrong path. This meant that humans should not only be helpful and humble; it was equally important that they noticed their faults and shortcomings, a principle exemplified by Jesus's parable of the branch and the beam, found in all textbooks.[52] The unrighteous were often described with reference to gluttony, selfishness, greed, drunkenness, and fornication. If the human indulged in these vices, they would be in thrall to sin.[53]

Regarding chastity and fornication, Steen and Larson highlighted an interesting perspective. They emphasized that the Christian faith helped young people to be morally pure and attentive to their desires. However, Steen and Larson also alleged that natural instincts were neither sinful nor ugly, but there was a risk that they led young people into undesired temptations. In this battle, Jesus was needed. A similar point of view was depicted by Claëson et al. To realize what constitutes a pleasurable and healthy life, a moral model was needed – and no one could fulfill such a task better than Jesus.[54]

In the textbooks, the fear of moral decay could be interpreted as an indirect critique of the emerging welfare state. Church historian Aud V. Tønnessen argues that many church leaders perceived the welfare state as a materialistic threat, since they thought that it had replaced Christian and humanitarian ideals in favor of a materialistic way of life. People acted as if they were free to do as they pleased, which risked resulting in undermining Christian norms. For a suc-

**49** Rodhe and Thunander, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap*, 98.

**50** Ahlberg et al., *Folkskolans kristendomsbok*, 151; Bo Nylund, *Teologi genom seklerna* (Uppsala: Wretmans förlag, 1971), 25.

**51** Hedberg et al., *Bibliska berättelser och texter*, 52.

**52** See, for example, Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*, 40.

**53** Steen and Larsson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 36.

**54** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 306.

cessful and flourishing welfare state, it was thus necessary that Christian values were the paramount guiding force.[55] This perception was often reflected in the textbooks.[56] A life following the message of love and fulfilling the commandments was depicted as the most important aspiration for a human. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the textbooks continually underlined that children should obey, appreciate, and help their parents and respect their teachers.[57]

It is obvious that a hierarchal societal order still had a significant role in Swedish society, even if democratization was ongoing. Over and above becoming citizens, the pupils were educated to take their place in a hierarchical order. For instance, the textbooks of Westberg, Holm, Steen, and Larson frequently underlined the need to always and uncritically submit themselves to God and the state.[58] Westberg writes: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your intellect."[59] Furthermore, he stresses that humans' relation to the state should be submissive, obedient, and docile. Everyone, in a God-given order, had their place in society. Social differences and injustices were legitimized by reference to God. Accordingly, the main impression is that the textbooks preferentially conveyed a passive citizenship, both for men and women.

Apart from respect for parents, teachers, and the state, the textbooks depicted several other important modes of behavior. There were examples taken from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus stressed the need to show peacefulness and reconciliation.[60] Furthermore, forgiveness was underlined, and people must resist wrongdoing by turning the other cheek. Mercy and helpfulness were also emphasized. Claëson et al. stressed: "If Jesus detested one thing, it was that people were unwilling to sacrifice anything of their own to help others."[61] Overall, the textbooks depicted virtues such as humility, generosity, helpfulness, mercy, self-sacrifice, sobriety, and chastity.[62]

Even if the fear of moral decay could be seen as a critique of the materialism and capitalism embedded in the welfare state, the textbooks' description of Chris-

**55** Aud V. Tønnessen, "The Church and the Welfare State in Postwar Norway: Political Conflicts and Conceptual Ambiguities," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 1 (2014): 13–35.

**56** Steen and Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 32.

**57** Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*, 38–39; Steen and Larsson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 26; Holm, *Översikt*, 26.

**58** Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*, 38–39; Steen and Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 26; Holm, *Översikt*, 26–27.

**59** Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*, 27.

**60** See, for example, Rodhe and Thunander, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap*, 103.

**61** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 70.

**62** See, for example, Westberg, *Kristendomskunskap för folkskolan*; Steen and Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*; Hedberg et al., *Bibliska berättelser.*

tian ethics is closely connected to the ideologies of the welfare state. For example, Political scientists Kees van Kersbergen and Philip Manow stress that in one way or another, Christianity emphasizes the Christian duty to love one's neighbor, be charitable, and show, solidarity, humility, and a work ethic. This can easily be linked to the lager responsibility of the state to look after and protect its citizens.[63] Additionally, the duty to work was also seen as an antidote to the lust for sin. Work promoted prosperity and contributed to comfort as well as to strength of mind.[64] This notion, therefore, mediates a conception that adherence to Christian ethics and values facilitated the establishment of a democratic welfare state.

Christianity as a precondition for a solid society was further explained by Jesus's final words in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house, and it fell and its decay was great.[65]

One of the most important lessons of this quotation is that Christians were supposed to be well-prepared for the challenges of life. Steen and Larson, for instance, write: "The word of Jesus is the only solid foundation on which we can confidently build our lives. This foundation holds when everything else falters and collapses."[66]

The main objective of the textbooks studied here was to influence the pupils in a Christian direction. However, according to the curriculum of 1919, Swedish pupils were not to be educated in accordance with the Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity advocated by the Church of Sweden. Instead, they were to embrace a more general Christian message expressed through the Sermon on the Mount. All textbooks expressed what educational historian Johannes Westberg refers to as moral regulation.[67] It is obvious that the authors had the intention to educate pupils to become a certain type of (Christian) citizens. By presenting the good and merciful Jesus as a moral role model, pupils would adopt certain Christian norms and values. At the same time, the textbooks presented an ambiguous message. It is obvious that, on the one hand, they tried to adapt Christianity to a democratic and more religiously

**63** Kess van Kersbergen and Philip Manow, "Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, 2nd. ed., ed. Daniel Béland et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 365, 367.
**64** Østergård, "The Geopolitics," 69.
**65** Ahlberg et al., *Folkskolans kristendomsbok*, 106. My translation.
**66** Steen and Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 51.
**67** Westberg, "Från statsapparater," 308.

pluralistic society; on the other hand, the uncritical obedience to authorities was still prominent. Nevertheless, it is clear that the textbook authors, as well as influential politicians and ideologists, were convinced that Christian values must be the foundation of the Swedish welfare society.

## The Greatness of Christianity

The content of the textbooks shows that Christianity was considered a superior tool in the education of good and loyal citizens. All textbooks described the Bible as the most powerful book in the world. Claëson et al. pointed out: "No other scripture but the Bible has been able to change people and reshape the world."[68] Moreover, Steen and Larson argued that the story of the Good Samaritan made the greatness of Christianity even more visible. They stipulated, with this story as an example, that love for one's neighbor was not only about friendship or kinship. It also implicated an obligation to help all in need, no matter what religion or nation they belonged to.[69]

Even if Steen and Larson stated that it was an obligation for Christians to help all fellow humans, it did not mean that they thought that all religions had equal value. Instead, they said that there were "higher" and "lower" religions. The higher ones included those that proclaimed the belief in *one* God. Not surprisingly, Christianity was considered the highest and the purest religion.[70] Steen and Larson furthermore maintained that Jesus's perfection of the commandments created a positive message. Instead of prohibitions, Jesus commanded love. This implied that the commandments applied to all people, regardless of religious affiliation. People, then, were not only perceived as religious or Christian but also as belonging to a culture in a general sense. Therefore, the Swedish cultural heritage was transmitted through Christian values.[71] The connection to the cultural heritage shows how Christianity was adapting. Due to democratization and religious pluralism, it was no longer possible to educate Evangelical-Lutheran individuals. To make Christian education relevant in a new society, and less exclusively confessional, allusions were made to the universality of Christian values and the importance of Christianity for understanding the Swedish cultural heritage.

The superiority of Christianity compared to other religions was evident in the textbooks' presentations of Islam. Claëson et al, for instance, alleged that Muslims

**68** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 24.

**69** Steen and Larson, *Kristen tros- och sedelära*, 25.

**70** See also Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*.

**71** Alvunger, *Nytt vin*; Naumann and Paterson, "Why Swedes."

could not be described as pagans, since they worshipped the same God as Jews and Christians. At the same time, Islam was criticized for being hypocritical.[72] The textbooks pointed out that Muslims often stressed their good deeds to gain praise and recognition and to get closer to God. In contrast with Islam, it was a central tenet of Protestantism and Lutheran theology that only through faith alone could God's grace be obtained.[73] This implies that a person could act righteously only through faith. In other words, faith in God had ethical consequences.

Nevertheless, descriptions of Islam were less critical than the presentations of religions in Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific islands. These people were depicted as pagans who, before the introduction of Christianity, were barbaric maneaters. However, after a persistent Christian mission, this barbaric lifestyle was replaced with Christian worship and the gospel of peace.[74]

Claëson et al. also underlined that the introduction of Christianity in Sweden signified a similar change. During the Viking era, slaves, women, and children were treated as vermin, but thanks to the Christian message of equality between all humans, they were more highly valued.[75] This can be seen as a deterministic view of development. Although the Bible underlines that all humans are created in the image of God, there were still vast differences between men and women; Christianity rather legitimized a logic of separation (in Swedish: *isärhållningslogik*). The Bible also conveyed a view that men and women had different duties in order to maintain a God-given order. This view of men and women was further reinforced by the Table of Duties. Men were to take their place in the public sphere, while women belonged to the private sphere.[76] Therefore, it is too simplistic to claim that Christianity laid the foundation for equality between the sexes.

Furthermore, despite the greatness and superiority of Christianity, Claëson et al. admitted that the Christian message of loving one's neighbor not yet had reached everybody. At the same time, it was pointed out that Christian ideas had begun to gain a foothold in Swedish society. Claëson et al. stated that Christian ideas were at the forefront in establishing hospitals, schools, and other charity and security programs. These welfare projects were financed by taxes, and those who paid their taxes were thus fulfilling the Christian duty to help their fellow humans.[77] Consequently, the textbook mediated a conception that the growing wel-

**72** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 214–16. See also Rodhe and Thunander, *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap*, 271.

**73** Nylund, *Teologi genom seklerna*, 47.

**74** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 230–31.

**75** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 231–33.

**76** Yvonne Hirdman, *Om det stabilas föränderliga former* (Malmö: Liber, 2001), 38–40.

**77** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 233–34.

fare society was built on Christian values. However, Claëson et al. stressed that much work remained to be done regarding drunkenness and immorality. Here, not surprisingly, Christianity also had an important role to play.[78]

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analyzed how Christianity was presented in primary school textbooks supposed to replace the Small Catechism during the 1930s and 1940s. I have investigated whether there was diminishing trust in the educational ambition of Christianity. The leading research questions were: which norms and values were transmitted through Christian education, and how can these values be seen in the light of the pursuit to foster democratic citizens?

The study of these textbooks shows that Christianity was unavoidable when fostering young pupils as citizens. Christianity was thus synonymous with civic education, since it imparted values such as humility, helpfulness, self-sacrifice, charity, and sobriety. The depiction of Christian values also reflects a general societal change where Christianity had an important cultural and ethical role to play in the construction of the Swedish welfare state.[79]

Previous research has argued that the changes in the curriculum of 1919 entailed a shift from educating good Christians to emphasizing the historical value of Christianity and its ethical content.[80] This shift was indeed visible in the textbooks, but their aim was still to educate Christian individuals. The difference was that it should no longer be done in accordance with the old Lutheran confessions and the Small Catechism.

The continuing strong religious framing in the textbooks shows tensions between ethics and Christology. There were frequent references to the supernatural birth of Jesus, his resurrection and ascension into heaven, and his divinity. It was constantly stressed that Jesus was the Son of God. Some liberal theological groups were convinced that Christian ethics should be separated from Christology in order to illuminate the core of Christianity. As the textbooks have shown, the separation was difficult to implement in practice, since these ethics were still explained through a Christological framework. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the textbooks consisted of a mix between liberal theology and a theology that underlined that it was impossible to separate Jesus's ethical parables from the teach-

**78** Claëson et al., *Folkskolans läsebok*, 233–34.

**79** Östberg, *Folk i rörelse*, 175.

**80** Moberger, "Religionsfrihet och religionsenhet," 178–89.

ing of Christ as the Son of God. Consequently, to preserve the uniqueness of Christianity vis-á-vis other religions, it was difficult to completely decouple Christian ethics from a religious interpretive framework, since its ethics fundamentally presupposed a firm belief in a God.

In many ways, the contents of the textbooks can be seen as a mode of indoctrination. Educational historians Hilda Amsing and Jeroen Dekker make an important distinction between indoctrination and cultural transmission.[81] Cultural transmission means that the textbook transmits particular social rules and values to the students. Unlike indoctrination, there is room for questioning.[82] Accordingly, textbooks in this study had an indoctrinating purpose. There was undeniably a conscious effort to impose specific Christian values on pupils. Furthermore, the lack of a critical approach shows that pupils could not learn how to question and challenge Christianity.

The indoctrinating aspect became more visible due to the underlying threat of punishment for those who did not live by the words of Jesus. This strengthened the belief that a Christian individual had better opportunities to live a righteous life and to contribute constructively to the development of the welfare state. Moreover, the textbooks did not provide any alternatives, since Christianity was presented as the only religious option.

The Christian values and norms conveyed by the textbooks were highly valued in Swedish society during the 1930s and 1940s. Whether religiously framed or not, these values were cornerstones in the construction of the Swedish welfare state. Through Christian education, pupils were to become humble, hard-working, helpful, and obedient citizens who at the same time should guarantee a democratic society. Therefore, it is impossible to claim that there was a contradiction between anchoring and instilling democratic values and simultaneously emphasizing a strong Christian education. The textbooks mediated a conception that religion and the Christian faith in particular was a precondition for a democratic development. Consequently, it is important to illuminate Christianity as a part of the construction of the democratic welfare state.

**81** Hilda Amsing and Jeroen Dekker, "Educating Peace amid Accusations of Indoctrination: A Dutch Peace Education Curriculum in the Polarized Political Climate of the 1970s," *International Journal of the History of Education* 56, no. 3 (2020): 366.

**82** Amsing and Dekker, "Educating Peace," 366.

# References

## Textbooks

Ahlberg, Adolf, Herman Gottfrid Pihl, and Emil Liedgren. *Folkskolans kristendomsbok.* Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1935.

Claëson, Rut, Emil Eljas, Gösta Granlund, and Stellan Orrgård. *Folkskolans läsebok: Kristendom.* Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1945.

Hedberg, David, Ivar Holm, and Frans Lindskog. *Bibliska berättelser och texter för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Magn. Bergvall, 1948.

Herner, Sven. *Vår bibel: förklarande inledning.* Lund: Gleerup, 1930.

Holm, Ivar. *Översikt över den kristna tros- och livsåskådningen.* Stockholm: Magn. Bergvall, 1948.

Linderholm, Emanuel. *Jesu bergspredikan: för folkskolans undervisning.* Stockholm: P. A. Nordstedt and Sons, 1921.

Rodhe, Edvard, and Gunnar Thunander. *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Svenska Diakonistyrelsen, 1936.

Steen, Henrik, and Gustav Larson. *Kristen tros- och sedelära: För barndomsskolorna.* Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1938.

Westberg, Ernst. *Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för folkskolan.* Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1931.

## Literature

Algotsson, Karl Göran. "Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet: Debatten om religionsundervisningen i skolan under 1900-talet." PhD diss., Uppsala University, 1975.

Alvunger, Daniel. "Nytt vin i gamla läglar: socialdemokratisk kyrkopolitik under perioden 1944 – 1973." PhD diss., Lund University, 2006.

Amsing, Hilda, and Jeroen Dekker. "Educating Peace amid Accusations of Indoctrination: A Dutch Peace Education Curriculum in the Polarized Political Climate of the 1970s." *International Journal of the History of Education* 56, no. 3 (2019): 360 – 83. doi:10.1080/00309230.

Buchardt, Mette. "Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historical Layers behind the Nordic Welfare State Model." *Nordidactica* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 131 – 65.

Buchardt, Mette. "The Nordic Model and the Educational Welfare State in a European Light: Social Problem Solving and Secular Religious Ambitions When Modernizing Sweden and France." In *The Nordic Education Model in Context: Historical Developments and Current Renegotiations*, edited by Daniel Tröhler, Bernadette Hörmann, Inga Bostad, and Sverre Tveit, 107 – 24. London: Routledge, 2023.

Claesson, Urban. "Folkhemmets kyrka: Harald Hallén och folkkyrkans genombrott. En studie av socialdemokrati, kyrka och nationsbygge med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1905 – 1933." PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2004.

Dekker, Jeroen. *Educational Ambitions in History: Childhood and Education in an Expanding Educational Space from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century.* Schweiz: Peter Lang, 2010.

Englund, Tomas. *Samhällsorientering och medborgarfostran i svensk skola under 1900-talet.* Uppsala: Pedagogiska institutionen, 1986.

Hammar, K. G. *Liberalteologi och kyrkopolitik.* PhD diss., Lund University, 1972.

Hellström, Emma. “Kristendomsundervisning som medborgarfostran: Striden om kristendomsundervisningens syfte och innehåll, 1920 – 1969.” Paper presented at the 8th Nordic Educational Conference, Aalborg University, Denmark, May 23 – 25, 2022.

Hellström, Emma. “The Role of Religion in the Rise of Democratic Schools: The Negotiation over Christian Education in Swedish Primary Schools, 1920 – 1969.” PhD. diss., Uppsala University, forthcoming.

Hirdman, Yvonne. *Om det stabilas föränderliga former.* Malmö: Liber, 2001.

Isling, Åke. *Kampen för och mot en demokratisk skola.* Stockholm: Sober, 1988.

Kersbergen, Kees van, and Philip Manow. “Religion.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, 2nd ed., edited by Daniel Béland, Kimberly J. Morgan, Herbert Obinger, and Christopher Pierson, 364 – 76. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Moberger, Karin. “Religionsenhet och religionsfrihet i folkskolans kristendomsundervisning 1911 – 1919.” *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 60 (1961): 154 – 225.

Naumann, Ingela K.. “Consensus, Conflict or Compromise? Church–State Relations in the Swedish ‘People’s Home’ during the 1920s and 1930s.” *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 1 (2014): 36 – 59. doi:10.1093/jcs/cst136.

Naumann, Ingela K., and Lindsay Paterson. “Why Swedes Trust the State and Scots Do Not: An Exploration of the Diverse Protestant Roots of Modern Welfare Systems.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33, no. 4 (2021): 473 – 88. doi:10.1111/johs.12299.

Nylund, Bo. *Teologi genom seklerna.* Uppsala: Wretmans tryckeri, 1971.

Skogar, Björn. “Teologins språk- och livets: Några dominerande teologiska profiler under svenskt 1900-tal.” In *Modern svensk teologi*, edited by Håkan Eilert, Anne-Louise Eriksson, Anders Jeffner, Lars Lindberg, Gert Nilsson, Folke T. Olofsson, Birger Olsson, Björn Skogar, Krister Stendahl, and Maria Södling, 17 – 68. Gothenburg: Verbum, 1999.

*Skola och Samhälle:tidskrift för folkundervisningen* 26. Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1926.

*Svensk Läraretidning.* Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening no. 47. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening, 1913.

*Svensk Läraretidning.* Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening no. 13. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollärarförening, 1920.

*Svenska Folkskolans Vän.* no. 15, 1922.

Tegborg, Lennart. *Folkskolans sekularisering 1895 – 1909: Upplösning av det administrativa sambandet mellan folkskola och kyrka i Sverige.* Stockholm: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 1969.

Tröhler, Daniel. “The Lasting Legacy of the European Reformation of the 16th Century: Protestant Foundations of Modern Educational Reasoning.” *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion and Education* 42, no. 2 (2020): 258 – 76. doi:10.1080/13617672.2020.1818934.

Tønnessen, Aud V. “The Church and the Welfare State in Postwar Norway: Political Conflicts and Conceptual Ambiguities.” *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 1 (2014): 13 – 35. doi:10.1093/jcs/cst131.

*Undervisningsplan för rikets folkskolor.* Stockholm: Skolöverstyrelsen, 1919.

Westberg, Johannes. “Från statsapparater och disciplin till educationalization och educational ambitions.” In *Utbildningens fostrande funktioner: Historiska undersökningar av fostran i offentliga och enskilda utbildningsinsatser*, edited by Viktor Englund, Anne Berg, Peter Bernhardsson, Janne Holmén, Esbjörn Larsson, Germund Larsson, Johanna Ringarp, and David Sjögren, 297 – 317. Uppsala: Uppsala Studies of History and Education, 2022.

Åström Elmersjö, Henrik. "An Individualistic Turn: Citizenship in Swedish History and Social Studies Syllabi, 1970 – 2017." *History of Education* 50, no. 2 (2021): 220 – 39. doi: 10.1080/0046760X.2020.1826052.

Åström Elmersjö, Henrik. *En av staten godkänd historia: Förhandsgranskning av läromedel och omförhandlingen av historieämnet 1938 – 1991.* Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2017.

Östberg, Kjell. *Folk i rörelse: vår demokratis historia.* Stockholm: Ordfront, 2021.

Østergård, Uffe. "The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity: From Composite to Nation-States." In *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, edited by Østein Sørensen and Bo Stråth. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997.

Janne Holmén

# Social Democracy, Confessional Pluralism, and Value Indoctrination: Swedish Textbooks on Christianity and Religion, 1945 – 1974

## Introduction

No society has been more permeated by social democratic ideals than Sweden was from the 1940s until the 1970s.[1] During this period, the Social Democrats governed without interruption, and their policy of constructing an egalitarian welfare state – *folkhemmet*, or the Swedish model – was generally accepted by the other political parties. Initially, Swedish social democracy was hostile to religion and wanted to separate church and state. However, in the decades before the Second World War, this policy was abandoned. Under the ideology of the Folk Church, the Lutheran religion was instead democratized and used to convey social democratic values. By studying textbooks published between 1945 and 1974, at the apex of the welfare state, this chapter investigates the role of Swedish primary and secondary religious education as a transmitter of majority values. It focuses on how the promotion of (social) democratic ideals was balanced against religious freedom and tolerance.

Axel Hägerström (1868 – 1939) and his Uppsala school of philosophy were an important influence on views on values in Swedish social democracy. He rebelled against the idea of divine truth as the foundation of values: "The feeling that we stand under the demands of an absolute will lying in the background, that we are under obligation and responsible to it, must now melt away. An actually autonomous morality is within us, determined only by direct regard for what we esteem most of all."[2]

The history of Swedish religious education in the second half of the twentieth century is the history of how social democratic morality grew out of the ashes of Lutheran dogma. The objective of this education was to dismantle the remnants of the once authoritative state-sponsored religious belief system while avoiding frag-

**1** For economic equality in Swedish and the Nordic countries, and its relationship to educational policies, see Thomas Piketty, *Kapitalet i tjugoförsta århundradet* (Stockholm: Karneval, 2015), 246, 248, 304.

**2** Axel Hägerström, *Philosophy and Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 79.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-008

mentation of society into splinter groups that clung to their own moral values. The method involved a unified school system with religious education common to all.

## Democracy, Human Rights, and Religious Freedom: The Swedish Way

Sweden was left outside the consensus on human rights and the division of power that formed in Europe after the Second World War. For example, the West German constitution of 1949, with its strong protections for human rights such as religious freedom, became a model for much of the continent but not for Sweden. This was due to the influence of Hägerström's value nihilism on Swedish lawyers and politicians, in combination with the fact that the country did not share the experience of war and occupation that invigorated ideas of natural law on the continent.[3] In Sweden, human rights were seen more as a hindrance to democratic progress than as a necessary complement and counterbalance to it.[4]

However, human rights, called "social superstitions" by the Uppsala school,[5] entered Sweden from the continent through international organizations. For example, the 1951 Law of Freedom of Religion was a direct consequence of Sweden's signing of the European Convention on Human Rights. Before the convention was enforced in 1953, the Swedish parliament objected to special schools based on the parents' religion.[6] A debate on ending the ban on monasteries in 1951 also revealed that religious freedom was not generally interpreted as an individual human right of citizens and minorities against pressure from the state. On the contrary, many social democratic voices claimed that the state was obliged to actively promote re-

**3** Kjell Å. Modéer, "Den svenska och nordiska samhällsreligionen," in *Författningskulturer: Konstitutioner och politiska system i Europa, USA och Asien*, ed. Anders Mellbourn (Lund: Sekel, 2009), 175–91.

**4** Janne Holmén, "Den demokratiska skolan: Om likvärdighet och delaktighet 1960–2020," in *Demokratins drivkrafter: Kontext och särdrag i Finlands och Sveriges demokratier 1890–2020*, ed. Henrik Meinander, Petri Karonen, and Kjell Östberg (Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet, 2018), 257–94.

**5** Ola Sigurdson, *Den lyckliga filosofin: Etik och politik hos Hägerström, Tingsten, makarna Myrdal och Hedenius* (Eslöv: Symposion, 2000), 64.

**6** Edgar Almén, "Religious Education in Sweden," in *Religious Education in Great Britain, Sweden and Russia: Presentations, Problem Inventories and Commentaries*, ed. Edgar Almén and Hans Christian Øster (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2000), 63.

ligious freedom by banning institutions that limited freedom, such as monasteries.[7]

Based on Hägerström's principle that all value judgments are logically void, the philosopher Ingemar Hedenius claimed that no one can be convinced of the advantages of democracy solely by rational arguments. It may be argued that democracy optimizes freedom and equality, but that argument only impresses those who already perceive freedom and equality as positive values. Other influential intellectuals inspired by the Uppsala school, such as Herbert Tingsten and Gunnar Myrdal, expressed similar views.[8] Although both Tingsten and Hedenius were vocal critics of Christianity and religion in the early 1950s, religious education would continue to form a value foundation for Swedish society. However, under the influence of radical criticism, the subject was deprived of the last remnants of its dogmatic content, and only the values remained. By conveying a shared set of fundamental values to all children, religious education was supposed to create a common ethical language that enabled democracy to function.

## Religion and Religious Education in the Welfare State

It has been claimed that social democracy and the Nordic welfare state have ideological roots in Lutheranism.[9] Early social democracy was atheist and hostile to the church, but when long-term government power came within grasp in the 1920s, religious divisions were downplayed. The broad support of Swedish Social Democrats depended on the fact that the economic dimension dominated politics, while religious, regional, linguistic, and ethnic differences faded into the background. A precondition was that religious and non-religious workers were united in the same party.[10]

---

**7** Daniel Alvunger, *Nytt vin ur gamla läglar: Socialdemokratisk kyrkopolitik under perioden 1944–1973* (Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2006), 157–60.

**8** Johan Strang, "Why 'Nordic Democracy'? The Scandinavian Value Nihilists and the Crisis of Democracy," in *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, ed. Johan Strang and Jussi Kurunmäki (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2010), 90–91, 96, 104.

**9** Robert H. Nelson, *Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy: A Different Protestant Ethic* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017).

**10** Johannes Lindvall, "När Branting mötte Söderblom: Socialdemokraternas pragmatiska religionspolitik under mellankrigstiden," in *Vetenskapssocieteten i Lund: Årsbok* (Lund: Vetenskapssocieteten, 2016), 64.

In 1941, Herbert Tingsten observed a rapprochement between the church and social democracy. The policies of the Social Democrats were moderated as they became a large government party, while the democratic consciousness of the church was heightened, in part because of lessons from the world war. The church and social democracy began to emphasize some common values, such as human dignity and spiritual freedom. Additionally, liberal parties, closely aligned with Free Churches, dropped their demands for separation between church and state.[11]

By midcentury, leading policymakers began to stress the connection between the church and the welfare state. Gunnar Myrdal stated that his attempts to bring a moral dimension to economics were rooted in his Lutheran heritage, and Tage Erlander – prime minister from 1946 to 1969 – claimed that social democracy had its roots in Christianity.[12]

In the interwar years, social democratic and state church ideals merged in the Folk Church. Social Democrats within the church searched for truths in public opinion rather than in revelation. For example, Harald Hallén was afraid that the church might break loose from the state since that would have shielded it from public opinion. Instead, he wanted to democratize it from below through increased lay influence. This Folk Church model was introduced at the local level in the 1930s and nationally in the 1940s.[13]

The social democratic views on religious freedom echoed Hägerström's idea that when the oppressed classes have taken power, they no longer need human rights, which, conversely, might hinder them.[14] The idea of absolute values such as religious dogma or human rights can stand in the way of reforms desired by the political majority. Thus, religious freedom was used to dismantle the absolute values of Christianity, which were blocking reforms. However, this freedom was not elevated to an absolute value in itself since that could have blocked the social transformation favored by the majority.

The Swedish comprehensive school reform, which took place from the late 1940s until the 1960s, aimed at replacing the former parallel tracks of the elementary school and the grammar schools with a common education for all. Edgar Almén claims that the ideology of this school promoted a particular kind of diversity: "pluralism as an open milieu with many social relations and with as many

**11** Herbert Tingsten, *Den svenska arbetarklassens historia: Den svenska socialdemokratins idéutveckling II* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1941), 317.

**12** Sigurdson, *Lyckliga*, 150, 226.

**13** Urban Claesson, "Folkhemmets kyrka: Harald Hallén och folkkyrkans genombrott. En studie av socialdemokrati, kyrka och nationsbygge med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1905–1933" (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2004), 200, 421–32.

**14** Sigurdson, *Lyckliga*, 65.

traits of common frames of reference as possible." Religion, together with civics, had an important role in promoting personal development, tolerance, and international understanding. In the words of Almén, religious education became an ideological agent "not so much for churches and religious communities as for the school system of 'the Swedish model.'"[15]

From the 1940s until the late 1960s, several government committees and commissions prepared reforms of the school system, including religious education. The School Commission of 1946 stated that religious education should be objective. However, the meaning of this was still vague and was seen as compatible with promoting Christianity in a general, non-confessional manner. For each new committee, however, demands for religious neutrality became stricter. Beginning with upper secondary schools in 1965, the subject also changed its name from Christianity to Religion. The State Church and the Free Churches, who clashed in debates on religious education in the first half of the twentieth century, now united in opposition to the watering down of Christian confessional elements. They also agreed that religious values supported by a majority in society should be taught in schools. However, the churches gradually retreated, so in the mid-1960s, they largely accepted non-confessional religious education. According to the polls, so did 66 percent of the population. The secularization of society made the churches realize the impossibility of upholding confessional education in Christianity, although they still argued for more religion in the curriculum than the government committees were proposing.[16] Thus, in Swedish religious education, Christianity should be at the center, while acknowledging other religions and beliefs. It should allow freedom of thought but also convey ethical values.

## Earlier Research

A small number of studies on Swedish religion textbooks partially overlap the period researched in this chapter. Sven-Åke Selander's report on Swedish religion curricula and textbooks from 1962 to 1980 focused on how the change from "closed" to "open" society was reflected in religious education. Closed Lutheran teaching shifted to open citizenship education; unity in religion was replaced by pluralism, and the confessional society was replaced by the non-confessional. Christian personal development gave way to general personal development. The

**15** Almén, *Religious*, 66.

**16** This process is described in Karl-Göran Algotsson, *Från karekestvång till religionsfrihet: Debatten om religionsundervisningen i skolan under 1900-talet* (Uppsala: Statsvetenskapliga föreningen, 1975), 289 – 430.

closed society demanded identification with the Lutheran faith, while the open society allowed identification with an independently chosen worldview. While the closed society valued the integrity of the individual, in the open society, the individual developed in interaction with others.[17]

A few studies have investigated the portrayal of Islam. Kjell Härenstam has found that from the Second World War until 1962, Muslims were portrayed as fanatics in Swedish religious instruction textbooks. Jonas Otterbeck suggested that such negative views were influenced by the popular writings of the historian of religion Archbishop Nathan Söderblom. From 1962 to 1969, the portrayal of Muslims was more neutral, while after 1969, negativity returned in the critique of gender relations.[18]

Both Selander and Härenstam focused on comprehensive schools, and Härenstam studied only a limited number of books from my period of research. In Selander's study of the change from "closed" to "open" religious education, open is described as clearly preferable, and Selander was partaking in the change process as much as he was researching it. This is common in textbook studies, as the field has its roots in politically motivated progressive textbook revision. An early example was the report on nationalism in history textbooks produced by Christian organizations in Stockholm 1925, led by Nathan Söderblom.[19] Thus, the person working for the removal of prejudices between European nations was, if Otterbeck is correct, in part to blame for the negative stereotypes of Muslims in Swedish textbooks.

Given the limited aims and scope of earlier research, this study will be the first to provide a general overview of the value content in Swedish religious education textbooks from the 1940s to the 1970s.

---

**17** Sven-Åke Selander, *Religionsundervisning för hela människan* (Malmö: Lunds universitet/Lärarhögskolan i Malmö, 1982), 12–14.

**18** Kjell Härenstam, "Skolboks-islam: analys av bilden av islam i läroböcker i religionskunskap" (PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 1993), 100–153; Jonas Otterbeck, "Vad kan man egentligen begära? Läromedelstexter om Islam," in *Religion, skole og kulturel integration i Danmark og Sverige*, ed. Peter B. Andersen et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2006), 237–62.

**19** Wilhelm Carlgren and Verner Söderberg, eds., *Report on Nationalism in History Textbooks* (Stockholm, Bergvalls, 1928).

## Background on the School Textbooks in the Study

The lower and upper secondary school textbooks analyzed below are treated together in subchapters based on themes central to the balance between the promotion of certain values and religious freedom and tolerance.

A total of seventeen textbooks were investigated. For each level, at least two textbooks were selected from each of the three curricula that were in force during the period: lower secondary school curricula came in 1962 and 1969 and for upper secondary school in 1965 and 1970. The authors had diverse backgrounds. For example, the atheist social democratic politician Stellan Arvidsson co-authored an upper secondary school book with the priest and psychologist of religion Hjalmar Sundén. However, most of the authors had a teaching background, including Arvidsson, and all the authors were male. The publishers were mostly commercial, but some were owned by religious organizations (Verbum and Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag).

## Christians and Jews

As one of the cornerstones of Swedish religious education was that all children should receive the same instruction, and no congregations active in Sweden could be treated in a derogatory manner. Therefore, Christian and Judaic beliefs and practices were treated neutrally, and ecumenical cooperation was encouraged.[20] Only a few exceptions can be found that criticize conservative groups within the Church of Sweden – Schartauans and Laestadians. In 1961, Erik Sjöberg claimed that Schartauans could become intolerant and narrow-minded.[21] This overt criticism against a movement within the Church of Sweden was unique; other cases of criticism were subtler. For example, a book from 1970 claimed that Laestadianism can seem boring to an outsider but qualified this to say that an insider's perspective would be different.[22] The same book also managed to censure a Christian denomination in the claim that Muslim views on women, Catholic views on abortions, and the Hindu caste system might be obstacles to develop-

**20** See, for example, Sigurd Kroon and Sten Rodhe, *Kyrkohistoria* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1962), 224–29.

**21** Erik Sjöberg, *Kristendomskunskap för realskolan* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961), 12.

**22** Jan Hammarstedt and Lars Hartmann, *Religion: Stadieboken i religionskunskap för högstadiet* (Stockholm: AW Läromedel, 1974), 70.

ment.[23] Indirect criticism of religion or Christianity also surfaced through descriptions of atheist ideologies or philosophers, such as Hedenius.[24]

Some books drew parallels between undesirable religious beliefs among non-Christians and earlier stages in the history of Christianity. For example, Ingvar Ström, Olof Pettersson, Erland Sundström, and Håkan Wall claimed that one reason for the gap between rich and poor people might be religion. Beliefs in the spirits of ancestors, the caste system, the acceptance of suffering in Hinduism and Buddhism, and Islamic fatalism might have conservative effects. Similar phenomena had existed in Christianity in the past, and, as a consequence, development came to a halt.[25]

In an anthology from the 1950s, texts by various authors were presented together with ingresses and questions, compiled by the editors, which compared Christian and non-Christian practices. For example, after a text on Shia self-flagellation, the editors asked: "Provide examples which illustrate that self-torture has occurred also within Christianity." The ingress to a text on witchcraft and spirits in Islam pointed out how heathen practices also survived in Catholic cults of saints. However, the texts on Catholicism did not contain similar critical views.[26]

Since Jews were an established minority in Sweden, their religion was portrayed in the same uncritical manner as Christian denominations. In the 1970s, more material about the Holocaust and current events related to Jews appeared. Ingvar Ström and Olof Pettersson mentioned the contemporary persecution of Jews in Poland and the Soviet Union by reprinting an article from *Broderskap*, a magazine for social democratic Christians. Some criticism of Zionism also appeared. Jan Hammarstedt and Lars Hartmann claimed that many Jews distanced themselves from Zionism and that many non-Jews put forth strong anti-Zionist propaganda. This does not necessarily mean that they are anti-Semites, the authors clarified.[27]

In general, the portrayal of Jews and the State of Israel remained positive throughout the period, especially in contrast to how other non-Christian religions

**23** Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion*, 304.

**24** Erland Sundström and Bertil Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Läromedelsförlaget/Svenska bokförlaget, 1968), 160.

**25** Ingvar Ström et al., *Religion* (Stockholm: Läromedelsförlaget, 1972), 262–63.

**26** Berndt Gustafsson, Einar Lilja, and Åke Sondén, *De var själva med 3: Ögonvittnesskildringar av icke-kristna religioner* (Lund: Gleerups, 1966), 162, 165; Berndt Gustafsson, Einar Lilja, and Åke Sondén, *De var själva med 2: Ögonvittnesskildringar från den kristna kyrkans historia under 1800–1900 talen* (Lund: Gleerups, 1967).

**27** Ström et al., *Religion*; Hammarstedt and Hartman, *Religion*, 39; Rudolf Johannesson and Martin Gidlund, *Vägar och livsmål* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1974), 159–61.

were treated. Although religious education was supposed to be neutral, many textbook authors were still active Christians raised on biblical history, which made them inclined to view Jews as God's chosen people and Israel as their homeland. As late as 1974, Rudolf Johannesson and Martin Gidlund maintained that it was "under all circumstances worth considering" that the Jewish people's continued existence was strong evidence of the existence of God.[28] It should be kept in mind that this book was published by Verbum, a religious publisher largely owned by the Church of Sweden, and might have had a more traditional Christian inclination than the average textbook.

## Other Religions

Even in the early stages, upper secondary school textbooks displayed a less normative view and more factual knowledge of non-Christian religions than books for younger children. However, the focus was still Christian. In a textbook from 1955, Islam was only described in the chapter on Christianity in the Middle Ages, and other religions were described in the chapter on the Christian mission.[29] Later, foreign religions received their own chapters, but not the same neutral treatment as Christian denominations and Judaism.

Adherents of nature religions were described as riddled with superstition and fear,[30] although the descriptions became less negative in later books.[31] The main criticism of Islam was connected to fatalism or predestination,[32] while predestination in Christian denominations was not criticized. Hinduism and Buddhism were claimed to be so focused on individual spiritual development that they became indifferent to other people and society.[33] Christian monasteries were not subject to similar criticism. In addition, Christianity, with its congregations, was seen as an important factor in the development of modern democratic societies, but the sup-

**28** Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 147.

**29** Harry Hermerén, *Kyrkohistoria för gymnasiet* (Lund: Gleerups, 1955), 51–54, 258–74.

**30** Henning Lindström, *Kristendomskunskap: Årskurs 7–8 i enhetsskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget, 1959), 64–65; Einar Lilja, *Högstadiets religionskunskap: Faktabok åk 7–9* (Lund: Gleerups: 1970), 174; Ström et al., *Religion*, 177.

**31** See, for example, Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion*, 293–99.

**32** Lindström, *Kristendomskunskap*, 72, 75; Jan Evers, Sören Halldén, and Bengt Hägglund, *Religionskunskap för gymnasiet och fackskolan* (Lund: Gleerups, 1968), 240–41.

**33** Lindström, *Kristendomskunskap*, 81.

posed tribalism of non-Christian religions was seen as a hindrance to such development.[34]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, criticism of foreign religions abated. This might be linked to the decolonization process, increased immigration to Sweden, and an emphasis on the developing countries and international solidarity in Swedish society. Textbooks from the later part of the period were often critical of the position of women in Muslim countries, as Otterbeck also stated.[35] However, some textbooks noticed improvements, such as that the Al-Azhar university in Egypt now accepted female students,[36] or that liberal Muslims had revised the religion's social ethics.[37]

Textbooks from the 1970s mentioned Hindu and Buddhist reformers such as Ramakrishna, who propagated a socially active religion.[38] Sometimes religion was overtly appropriated for the cause of social democracy. For example, Hammarstedt and Hartmann claimed that the welfare state was an ideal in the teachings of Buddha, that there were similarities between socialism and Buddhism, and that Buddhism opposed desire of personal possessions. In Buddhist texts, employers were encouraged to give workers fair pay and a share of company profits.[39] Profit sharing was a hot topic in Sweden in 1974, as a debate raged about the wage earners' funds. The world religions were no longer used as cautionary examples but seen as allies in the struggle for social justice.

## Missions

The textbooks' chapters on Christian missions initially focused on saving the souls of heathens. In 1955, Hermerén claimed that the primary goal of missions was not social or humanitarian but to follow Jesus's Great Commission to convert peoples.[40] With time, the emphasis shifted to the social aspects of missions. In the early 1970s, the view of missions was complicated. Ström and his co-authors argued that it might be a mistake to preach about the salvation and conversion of

**34** Lindström, *Kristendomskunskap*, 81–82.
**35** Ström et al., *Religion*, 142; Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 174; Otterbeck, "Vad kan man egentligen begära?"
**36** Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 223.
**37** Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 183
**38** See Ström et al., *Religion*, 154, 163; Hammarstedt and Hartman, *Religion*, 282–83; Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 97.
**39** Hammarstedt and Hartman, *Religion*, 290.
**40** Hermerén, *Kyrkohistoria*, 255–57.

individuals rather than address economic and social problems.[41] However, Einar Lilja claimed that Jesus's Great Commission was still relevant since white people had a debt to repay for their enslavement and colonial plunder of Black people, and because people believing in nature religions lived in fear of evil spirits.[42]

In 1974, Hammarstedt and Hartmann claimed that although many developing countries have a valuable culture, it is also obvious that old traditions might stand in the way of progress. Therefore, the missions had to actively work against certain ideas. This was difficult for the UN, which had to be religiously neutral, but easier for missionaries who were convinced that the Gospel was a life-changing force.[43]

Several books also noted that the colonial legacy was a hindrance to Christian missions and one reason that Islam spread more easily. Jan Evers, Sören Halldén, and Bengt Hägglund added that the lower moral and religious standards of Muslim missionaries contributed to their success.[44]

## Absolute Values

Although textbooks took a neutral stance on religions, churches, and worldviews found in Sweden, they were prescriptive with regard to values. First, they described tolerance as a necessary value. For example, Åke Dahlberg wrote that society should not force anyone into a certain worldview and that tolerance demands full freedom of thought and expression. However, he concluded that society could not be indifferent to the worldviews of citizens but had to transmit a cultural heritage that encompassed norms of coexistence in democratic society: we have to be just, honest, tolerant, helpful, and willing to serve others. These maxims should not remain external but be internalized in our worldviews.[45] Thus, after declaring that society cannot force anyone into a worldview, Dahlberg tried to do exactly that.

Some books linked respect for others to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Hammarstedt and Hartmann claimed could unite people with different worldviews and religions.[46] Hjalmar Sundén, Gösta Hök, and Stellan

**41** Ström et al., *Religion*, 262–63; Lindström, *Kristendomskunskap*, 81.
**42** Lilja, *Högstadiets*, 145.
**43** Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion,* 304.
**44** Evers, Halldén, and Hägglund, *Religionskunskap*, 247; Hermerén, *Kyrkohistoria*, 255–257; Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 224; Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 174, 233–34.
**45** Åke Dahlberg, *Kyrko- Bibel- Troskunskap: Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för grundskolans högstadium. Del 2. Årskurs 9* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, 1964), 157.
**46** Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion*, 15.

Arvidsson mentioned that natural rights were currently removed from the laws due to earlier criticism and should merely be understood as agreements to be followed. Erland Sundström and Bertil Zachrisson argued that, for a long time, natural law had led the fight for human dignity. It was now contested as a legal philosophy, but many worldviews and political ideologies still had human dignity at their core.[47] Thus, the textbook authors wanted to save human dignity from natural law, which was questioned by Hägerström's value nihilism. Their views reflected the differences between Swedish and European views on human rights.

Other books referred directly to Hägerström and his attacks on absolute values. However, Sundström and Zachrisson claimed that value communities could still be created when people ended up in similar situations and acted similarly.[48] The Swedish comprehensive school system, with its one-size-fits-all religious education, was an attempt to forge such a value community by placing all students in a similar situation.

Another value that could not be compromised was equality. Evers, Halldén, and Hägglund claimed that utilitarianism had to halt in front of the principle of equality and declared that hierarchies stood in the way of it.[49] In the early 1960s, it was portrayed as a Christian duty to fight inequality. For example, Sjöberg claimed that a Christian had to try to implement a social order that alleviated inequalities and prevented poverty; indifference was not acceptable. Political parties could have different views of how to implement social justice through individual initiatives or government regulations, but all had the same goal.[50]

Towards the end of the decade, equality was no longer portrayed as a particularly Christian duty. For example, one book claimed that active social policy also had roots in the Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist religions, although opinion was divided regarding whether this was the case also in Hinduism.[51] Thus, social equality was portrayed as a universal value.

However, the textbooks did not take sides in a concrete equality question, such as the topic of female priests.[52] Moreover, on the question of abortions, they pre-

**47** Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 42–44; Hjalmar Sundén, Gösta Hök, and Stellan Arvidsson, *Religionskunskap för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Liber, 1968), 228–32; Sjöberg, *Kristendomskunskap*, 263.

**48** Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 36–38; Sundén, Hök, and Arvidsson, *Religionskunskap*, 50.

**49** Evers, Halldén, and Hägglund, *Religionskunskap*, 47–48.

**50** Sjöberg, *Kristendomskunskap*, 264.

**51** Hans Hof, Jan Hammarstedt, and Clarence Nilsson, *Människan och livsåskådningarna: Religionskunskap för gymnasiet och fackskolan* (Stockholm: AW Läromedel, 1968), 199–204.

**52** Sten Rodhe and John Ronnås, *Religionskunskap* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget/Norstedts, 1967), 256, 285.

sented both sides of the argument neutrally.[53] Thus, female priests and free abortions were not part of the social equality that was considered an absolute value. Christians in Sweden still had different views in these questions, and in such matters, the textbooks could not take sides.

In the 1970s, sexual morality was discussed more openly than before. Some textbooks mentioned that homosexuality was slowly being viewed less negatively. They still viewed sexual sadism as dangerous but added that sexual deviants had to be treated with tolerance.[54] Ström claimed in 1972 that 85 percent of Swedes considered it acceptable that unmarried couples who were in love had sex with each other. However, a huge majority still believed in fidelity.[55] This is an example of how the values of the majority replaced religious dogma as a moral yardstick.

The textbooks also had very specific ideas about what professional and voluntary endeavors were worthwhile for young people to engage in. According to Harry Hermerén, young people wanted to renew everything, from their schools to foreign aid, since they were radical and wanted to create a new world according to their ideals.[56] Apparently, he had no objections to these ambitious social goals. However, under the heading "Fantasies," he dismissed individual ambitions such as becoming a sports hero, pop star, movie star, or crime-solving detective. Even worse fantasies were becoming a businessman or, worst of all, a ruthless stock market speculator. Perhaps such fantasies are sometimes caused by contact with the superman ideals of Friedrich Nietzsche, Hermerén suggested. However, he added that such youthful dreams are usually abandoned later, when one is accepted by colleagues and finds common goals and meaningful work.[57] These anti-individualist ideas were in line with the comprehensive school curriculum of 1969, which warned that freedom and independence were not goals in themselves but rather a means to cooperation.[58]

Lilja added church activities to the list of unsuitable selfish endeavors. The search for community in the youth group of a congregation puts one at risk of selfishly developing one's own spirituality in a closed group, isolated from life. It is

**53** Evers, Halldén, and Hägglund, *Religionskunskap*, 52; Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 55; Hof, Hammarstedt, and Nilsson, *Människan*, 180–182; Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 51–52.

**54** Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion*, 183; Ström et al., *Religion*, 200–201.

**55** Ström et al., *Religion*, 195–97.

**56** Harry Hermerén, *Religionskunskap för grundskolans högstadium* (Lund: Gleerups, 1970), 222.

**57** Hermerén, *Religionskunskap*, 223–224.

**58** Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan 1: Allmän del* (Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 1969), 14.

better to follow the Christian message of unselfish love by doing something for others.[59]

Although the main tendency in religion textbooks was to criticize individualism, which was seen as a threat to collective values, a counter-tendency can be seen in some of the later textbooks. In 1968, Sundström and Zachrisson argued that personal freedom and integrity are undermined as the state gains more power.[60] In 1970, Lilja claimed that the individual gets lost in large organizations, which might lead to revolt and violence. This was exemplified by the wildcat strike at the state-owned LKAB mine in Kiruna. The students were asked whether it was right to take part in a wildcat strike.[61] These are examples of the left-wing criticism of the monolithic state that preceded the neoliberal attack that began in the 1980s.

In 1968, the Swedish author Göran Palm claimed that Luther's interpretation of the Ten Commandments instilled respect for the property rights of the oppressors. According to Palm, this indoctrination still permeated mandatory religious education in schools.[62] However, in the late 1960s, religious education no longer explained the teachings of Luther in detail, and if textbooks mentioned property rights, the "indoctrination" was quite different. For example, Sundén called people who believe they have right to the property they acquire or inherit "naïve and unreflective."[63] Another book claimed that work done for profit and not to help others was ethically inferior.[64] A third book claimed that it was the duty of corporate management to consider the maximum good of the workers regarding salary and conditions.[65] Thus, in line with their collectivist ideology, the textbooks were critical of private property rights and economic activity for personal gain.

## Nietzsche and Marxism

In time, more emphasis was placed on secular worldviews, such as humanism, naturalism, existentialism, and Marxism. Social democracy was not one of the ideologies presented since the Swedish welfare state was perceived as a non-ideological,

**59** Lilja, *Högstadiets*, 210–13.
**60** Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 64–65.
**61** Lilja, *Högstadiets*, 142.
**62** Algotsson, *Katekestvång*, 500–504.
**63** Sundén, Hök, and Arvidsson, *Religionskunskap*, 40.
**64** Rodhe and Ronnås, *Religionskunskap,* 287–90.
**65** Hof, Hammarstedt, and Nilsson, *Människan*, 196.

rational implementation of the common good.[66] Marxist teleology, on the other hand, was in the tradition of Hägerström seen as a metaphysical creed.[67]

Although most worldviews were treated neutrally or positively, Nietzsche's philosophy was almost always criticized. For example, Sundén claimed that, according to Nietzsche, it is not wrong to allow others to perish if it helps the development of the superman. Those who preach self-sacrifice stand in the way of natural selection for strong persons, races, and nations. Nietzsche was also often linked to Nazism. A rare neutral and informed account of Nietzsche's philosophy was provided by Arvidsson in the same book that also contained Sundén's criticism.[68] Nietzsche's idea of the individualist superman, free of Christian slave morals, collided with the collectivist and altruist values that permeated Swedish textbooks in religion.

In contrast, the textbooks portrayed Marxism favorably since it was more closely related to the ideology of Swedish religious education. The curriculum for the comprehensive school of 1969 suggested that the relationship between Christians and Marxists was a difficult subject that should not be discussed until the last school year.[69] Most textbooks from this period therefore ended with a chapter on Marxism and Christianity.

Lilja noted that the fierce conflict of the 1800s abated as Christians shifted their focus from individual salvation to social responsibility.[70] Hammarsten and Hartman claimed that Marxists and Christians were also united by an interest in peace and justice,[71] and Sundén noted a similar rapprochement between Muslims and Marxists.[72]

Sundén also pointed out some differences. According to Marx, hate is not evil if it is directed against oppressors and exploiters, and those who preach patience in the face of injustice are blocking the way to a better future.[73] In this respect, Swedish textbooks in religion were closer to Marxism than to Christianity, as they criticized religiously motivated passivity and promoted social action. Johan-

**66** See, for example, Hedenius's view in Sigurdson, *Lyckliga*, 180.

**67** Sigurdson, *Lyckliga*, 68, 85.

**68** Dahlberg, *Troskunskap*, 61; Evers, Halldén, and Hägglund, *Religionskunskap*, 29–30; Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion*, 307; Sundén, Hök, and Arvidsson, *Religionskunskap*, 38–39, 196–97; Sundström and Zachrisson, *Religionskunskap*, 169.

**69** Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan 2. Supplement: kompletterande anvisningar och kommentarer* (Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 1969), 15.

**70** Lilja, *Högstadiets*, 226.

**71** Hammarstedt and Hartmann, *Religion*, 310–14.

**72** Sundén, Hök, and Arvidsson, *Religionskunskap*, 265–66.

**73** Sundén, Hök, and Arvidsson, *Religionskunskap*, 38.

nesson and Gidlund noted that the World Council of Churches had declared it a Christian duty to, when necessary, promote justice also by revolutionary means.[74]

## Conclusions

The Swedish comprehensive school system was implemented from the Second World War until the early 1970s. During this period, Sweden was governed by the Social Democratic Party, and its policies influenced school reforms and changes in religious education, mainly in consensus with other parties. This study has investigated how Swedish textbooks in religious education balanced the promotion of desirable social values against religious freedom and tolerance.

Social Democrats and the majority within the State Church of Sweden were critical of many traits within different Christian denominations, but these, as well as Judaism, were still treated neutrally in school textbooks. Critique might have jeopardized the unity of religious education since it could trigger minority groups to break out, shielding them from majority values. However, non-Christian religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, which barely existed in Sweden at the time, were openly criticized. In the course of discussing these faiths, it was possible to criticize values that also existed in Christian churches, such as conservatism, hierarchy, misogyny, unworldliness, and focus on spirituality in place of social reform. For example, the textbook writers (all male) did not take a clear stand on gender equality issues, such as abortions and female priests, which were still controversial in Christian churches, but criticized misogyny in Islam.

Towards the end of the 1960s, also non-Christian religions began to be treated in a respectful manner, probably because they had become represented in Swedish classrooms through immigration. All religions were now portrayed as resting on the same value base: selfless pursuit of social justice and equality.

In the name of objectivity, Swedish religious education abandoned Christian dogmatism, but this did not mean that it became value neutral. On the contrary, the textbooks promoted collectivist values and discouraged individualistic pursuits, be they dreams of becoming movie, pop, or sports stars, or even introverted religiosity. It was particularly frowned upon to strive for wealth and property. The individualistic superman philosophy of Nietzsche was heavily criticized. One textbook even suggested that his ideas were to blame for young people's unrealistic dreams of fame. Thus, in the religious education of the *folkhem*, Nietzsche replaced the Devil as Antichrist and tempter.

---

**74** Johannesson and Gidlund, *Vägar*, 69.

Sweden was the most extreme example of some general trends in the postwar period. The promotion of social equality reached its apex in most nations during the same period, yet it did not reach the same heights as in Sweden. The transformation of the church in the eyes of the political left from an enemy to an ally against egoistic capitalism is also a broader phenomenon.

However, some traits might be particular to Sweden. Several figures central to the construction of the Swedish *folkhem* were inspired by Axel Hägerström and his Uppsala school of philosophy. It was described as "value nihilistic" by its opponents since it argued that value judgments have no truth value. However, since they were convinced that values were outside the reach of logical reasoning, the disciples of Hägerström believed that a common value base was a necessary prerequisite for a functioning democracy. Once values were fixed, they were unlikely to be changed by facts and arguments; therefore, democratic values had to be inculcated early through comprehensive schooling.

In the original tradition of Hägerström, absolute values such as human rights, including religious freedom, were described as superstition. Among Hägerström's disciples, human rights came to be viewed as useful from a utilitarian perspective, as long as they served the common good. Accordingly, religious freedom was not a primary value in Swedish education but an instrument that enabled inclusion and discussion among religious groups, ultimately aiming for the creation of a community around majority values.

Religious education at the peak of the Swedish social democratic welfare state can be characterized as tolerant in dogmatic questions designed to more effectively indoctrinate students in certain values. By not criticizing the beliefs of any religious community in Sweden, all children could receive the same religious education, exposing them to majority values of social equality and collectivism. This value engineering was a form of social engineering, which to Swedish reformers meant rational implementation of majority interests.[75]

However, the development was not simply a social democratic takeover of Christianity and religious education, which transformed it into a secular propaganda machine for majority values. From a complementary perspective, the process can be understood as an attempt by Christians and religious educators to remain relevant in an age of rapid social change. The position of religion in society was under attack, and religious education was losing influence on the curriculum. To stay afloat, religion needed to rebrand itself. In a society dominated by the ethics of the egalitarian *folkhem*, Lutheranism was marketed as an ally and even an ideological source of the welfare state.

---

**75** For social engineering, see Sigurdson, *Lyckliga*, 113–121.

Traditional Lutheran Christianity was criticized for burdening children with guilt through strict teachings on sin and unreachable ideals. However, the values to which children in the social democratic *folkhem* were supposed to adhere were no less demanding. No matter what their personal ambitions were, they were condemned as individualistic. The only true and narrow path was that of unselfish contributions to the common good. Free will was endorsed in theory but was declared to be of real value only if it was used to help others. The appeal of the individualistic and competitive values that emerged in the 1980s might be interpreted as a reaction to the indoctrination of the preceding period. While private property and profits were in the 1960s described as evils in Swedish religion textbooks, reforms in the 1990s transformed schools into private property and education into a for-profit product. From an international perspective, the swings of the pendulum in both directions were unrivaled in their radicalism. Such violent oscillations in ideology and regulatory structure are enabled by Sweden's political culture. Since public opinion and the parliamentary majority are seen as the sole yardsticks of values, few constitutional constraints or considerations of human rights stand in the way of rapid reforms.

## References

Algotsson, Karl-Göran. *Från karekestvång till religionsfrihet: Debatten om religionsundervisningen i skolan under 1900-talet.* Uppsala: Statsvetenskapliga föreningen, 1975.

Almén, Edgar. "Religious Education in Sweden." In *Religious Education in Great Britain, Sweden and Russia: Presentations, Problem Inventories and Commentaries*, edited by Edgar Almén and Hans Christian Øster. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2000.

Alvunger, Daniel. *Nytt vin ur gamla läglar: Socialdemokratisk kyrkopolitik under perioden 1944 – 1973.* Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2006.

Carlgren, Wilhelm, and Verner Söderberg, eds. *Report on Nationalism in History Textbooks.* Stockholm: Bergvalls, 1928.

Claesson, Urban. "Folkhemmets kyrka: Harald Hallén och folkkyrkans genombrott. En studie av socialdemokrati, kyrka och nationsbygge med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1905 – 1933." PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2004.

Holmén, Janne. "Den demokratiska skolan: Om likvärdighet och delaktighet 1960 – 2020." In *Demokratins drivkrafter: Kontext och särdrag i Finlands och Sveriges demokratier 1890 – 2020*, edited by Henrik Meinander, Petri Karonen, and Kjell Östberg, 257 – 94 Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet, 2018.

Hägerström, Axel. *Philosophy and Religion.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

Härenstam, Kjell. "Skolboks-islam: analys av bilden av islam i läroböcker i religionskunskap." PhD diss., Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 1993.

Lindvall, Johannes. "När Branting mötte Söderblom: Socialdemokraternas pragmatiska religionspolitik under mellankrigstiden." In *Vetenskapssocieteten i Lund: Årsbok*, edited by Henrik Rahm, 63 – 71. Lund: Vetenskapssocieteten, 2016.

Modéer, Kjell Å. "Den svenska och nordiska samhällsreligionen." In *Författningskulturer: Konstitutioner och politiska system i Europa, USA och Asien*, edited by Anders Mellbourn, 175–91. Lund: Sekel, 2009.

Nelson, Robert H. *Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy: A Different Protestant Ethic.* Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017.

Otterbeck, Jonas. "Vad kan man egentligen begära? Läromedelstexter om Islam." In *Religion, skole og kulturel integration i Danmark og Sverige*, edited by Peter B. Andersen, Curt Dahlgren, Steffen Johannessen, and Jonas Otterbeck. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2006.

Piketty, Thomas. *Kapitalet i tjugoförsta århundradet.* Stockholm: Karneval, 2015.

Selander, Sven-Åke. *Religionsundervisning för hela människan.* Malmö: Lunds universitet, Lärarhögskolan i Malmö, 1982.

Sigurdson, Ola. *Den lyckliga filosofin: Etik och politik hos Hägerström, Tingsten, makarna Myrdal och Hedenius.* Eslöv: Symposion, 2000.

Skolöverstyrelsen. *Läroplan för grundskolan 1: Allmän del.* Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 1969.

Skolöverstyrelsen. *Läroplan för grundskolan 2. Supplement: kompletterande anvisningar och kommentarer.* Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 1969.

Strang, Johan. "Why 'Nordic Democracy'? The Scandinavian Value Nihilists and the Crisis of Democracy." In *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, edited by Johan Strang and Jussi Kurunmäki. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2010.

Tingsten, Herbert. *Den svenska arbetarklassens historia: Den svenska socialdemokratins idéutveckling II.* Stockholm: Tiden, 1941.

## School Textbooks

Dahlberg, Åke. *Kyrko- Bibel- Troskunskap: Lärobok i kristendomskunskap för grundskolans högstadium. Del 2. Årskurs 9.* Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, 1964.

Evers, Jan, Sören Halldén, and Bengt Hägglund. *Religionskunskap för gymnasiet och fackskolan.* Lund: Gleerups, 1968.

Gustafsson, Berndt, Einar Lilja, and Åke Sondén. *De var själva med 3: Ögonvittnesskildringar av icke-kristna religioner.* Lund: Gleerups, 1966.

Gustafsson, Berndt, Einar Lilja, and Åke Sondén. *De var själva med 2: Ögonvittnesskildringar från den kristna kyrkans historia under 1800–1900 talen.* Lund: Gleerups, 1967.

Hammarstedt, Jan, and Lars Hartmann. *Religion: Stadieboken i religionskunskap för högstadiet.* 3rd ed. Stockholm: AW Läromedel, 1974.

Hermerén, Harry. *Kyrkohistoria för gymnasiet.* Lund: Gleerups, 1955.

Hermerén, Harry. *Religionskunskap för grundskolans högstadium.* Lund: Gleerups, 1970.

Hof, Hans, Jan Hammarstedt, and Clarence Nilsson. *Människan och livsåskådningarna: Religionskunskap för gymnasiet och fackskolan.* Stockholm: AW Läromedel, 1968.

Johannesson, Rudolf, and Martin Gidlund. *Vägar och livsmål.* Stockholm: Verbum, 1974 (1972).

Kroon, Sigurd, and Sten Rodhe. *Kyrkohistoria.* Stockholm: Norstedts, 1962 (1956).

Lilja, Einar. *Högstadiets religionskunskap: Faktabok åk 7–9.* Lund: Gleerups, 1970.

Lindström, Henning. *Kristendomskunskap: Årskurs 7–8 i enhetsskolan.* Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget, 1959.

Rodhe, Sten, and John Ronnås. *Religionskunskap.* Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget/Norstedts, 1967.

Sjöberg, Erik. *Kristendomskunskap för realskolan.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961 (1959).

Ström, Ingvar, Olof Pettersson, Erland Sundström, and Håkan Wall. *Religion.* Stockholm: Läromedelsförlaget, 1972.

Sundén, Hjalmar, Gösta Hök, and Stellan Arvidsson. *Religionskunskap för gymnasiet.* Stockholm: Liber, 1968.

Sundström, Erland, and Bertil Zachrisson. *Religionskunskap för gymnasiet.* Stockholm: Läromedelsförlaget/Svenska bokförlaget, 1968.

Henrik Edgren

# Post-Christian Perspectives in Swedish Upper Secondary School Textbooks 1990 – 2018

## Introduction

In an editorial in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on January 5, 2022, the well-known Swedish columnist Richard Swartz wrote about his visit to the Church of Gustav Vasa in Stockholm, where he met one of his dearest childhood friends. Swartz was, to say the least, shocked when he saw how the church had organized the Christmas crib, since it consisted only of animals. There was no Virgin Mary, no Joseph, no shepherds, and no three wise men. Instead of the infant Jesus, the crib had a lamb.

Swartz was perplexed and concluded that in any other European country, especially in a Catholic one, such a Christmas crib would be seen as a scandal. Certainly, Swartz had perceived his motherland Sweden as increasingly unfamiliar for a while, but an installation of a Christmas crib that resembled the work of a Swedish animal protection association more than a traditional Christmas crib was too much for him. What was the next step? Should he confess as an atheist or as a heathen, or should he establish an underground sect of Swedish traditional Christians?

However, the unconventional Christmas crib in the church of Gustav Vasa did not surprise Swartz's friend, who ascertained that ordinary Swedes today are "cultural Christians." They do not believe in God, even if they regularly attend church services. He added that they probably have more faith in the Holy Spirit than in the Father and the Son, since Swedes in general connect the Holy Spirit with more or less anything.

Even if Swartz exaggerated in his interpretation of how Swedish cultural Christians nowadays feel free to transform traditional Christmas cribs into improvised animal cribs, in today's Sweden there exists a specific sort of relationship to Christianity. The scholar of religion David Thurfjell terms it "post-Christian," incorporating features like post-materialism and secular rationalism with a focus on science, relativism, and individualism.[1]

1 David Thurfjell, *Det Gudlösa Folket: De Postkristna Svenskarna och Religionen* (Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2015), 25 – 26. Other scholars call a similar phenomenon "post-ecclesiastical" (*post-kyr-*

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-009

Accordingly, Sweden today displays an exceptionally strong inclination towards secular ideas, such as cosmopolitanism, autonomy, self-expression, democracy, and tolerance.[2] Formerly a society whose paramount social and spiritual foundation had long been Christianity, Sweden today is one of the countries in the world whose commitment to religion is statistically weakest.[3]

The purpose of this chapter is to show how this post-Christian, objective, scientific, and individual way of interpreting Christianity also is reflected in Swedish curricula and upper secondary textbooks on religion. The study starts in the mid-1990s and ends around 2018. From the perspective of post-Christianity, I will highlight how Christianity is presented in the wider context of religious education and how the cultural significance of Christianity in contemporary Swedish society is expressed.

## Secularism and Post-Christianity

The Swedish institutional secularization process has been apparent since the end of the nineteenth century. Thenceforth, the Swedish Lutheran state church gradually lost its influence over education, health care, social care, politics, and the economy.[4] This development was symbolically and judicially manifested in 2000 when the Church of Sweden was separated from the Swedish state. Since then, membership of the Church of Sweden has clearly declined. In 2002, around 81 percent of the Swedish population were members, a proportion that decreased to 55 percent in 2020. Regarding the Christian Free Churches, the number of parishes has also declined: from 2,925 (in 2002) to 2,201 (in 2020).[5]

With this background, it is not surprising that Sweden belongs to the group of countries in the world with the weakest religious commitment when it comes to how often its citizens visit church services, regularly pray, or consider themselves

*kligt*). See, for example, Johan Liljestrand, David Carlsson, and Peder Thalén: "Moderniserad Kristendom i Läroböcker för Högstadiet," *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 11, no. 3 (2021): 55.

**2** Jessica Moberg, "Piety, Intimacy and Mobility: A Case Study of Charismatic Christianity in Present Day Stockholm" (PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2013), 9.

**3** Thorleif Pettersson, "Sekularisering," in *Religion i Sverige*, ed. Ingvar Svanberg and Daniel Westerlund (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016), 34.

**4** Pettersson, "Sekularisering," 33.

**5** Statistical information from the Church of Sweden (https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik); Øyvind Tholvsen, *Frikyrkoundersökningen. En Rapport om Frikyrkornas Utveckling i Sverige 2000–2020*, Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund 2021, https://www.myndighetensst.se/om-oss/nyheter/nyhetsarkiv-aktuellt/2021-06-23-ny-rapport--frikyrkoundersokningen-2000-2020.html.

religious. The European Survey of 2004 showed that in Europe only the Czech Republic had a lower religious commitment than Sweden. Only around 13 percent of Swedes surveyed found or stated that religious communities and churches had relevant answers to existential questions. Around half the Swedish population considered churches and communities more or less useless in giving pertinent answers to complicated life dilemmas.[6] Moreover, eighteen years later there are no signs of a change in this trend regarding the waning commitment to formal religious actions.

The Swedish religious landscape has also changed due to the globalization process, a process that refers to how economy, politics, social life, and culture are increasingly globally intertwined.[7] This globalization also has weakened the privileged position of the Church of Sweden and the "competition" from other 'globalized' alternative religions and outlooks on life is evident. Accordingly, Sweden today is a multi-religious meeting place. All world religions and all the branches of the Christian church are represented.[8]

However, even if, owing to secularization and globalization, many Swedes do not formally acknowledge an affiliation to Christianity, it does not mean that the role of Christianity or religion has been played out in Swedish society.[9] As many surveys demonstrate, Swedish people often believe in a "spirit" or "life force" and they often have a notion that there somehow exists an operative God, but not necessarily a specifically Christian one.[10] Swedes have accordingly adopted a sort of "from fate to-choice attitude," where the individual's search for a religious identity is quite flexible and private.[11]

This post-Christian way of addressing Christianity can be interpreted as a denunciation of the traditional, dogmatic, and institutionalized version of Christianity, officially represented by the Church of Sweden. Instead, the ideal is a more individualized and consumer-oriented approach where individually chosen ethics, traditions, and values of Christianity are continuously important in people's lives. Therefore, many Swedes still celebrate Christmas and Easter; they regard Sundays as a day of rest; they baptize their children in church and select biblical names such as Peter, Jakob, Hanna, or Maria; they get married in church and bury

**6** Pettersson, "Sekularisering," 33 – 44.

**7** Mattias Gardell, "Globalisering," in *Religion i Sverige*, ed. Ingvar Svanberg and Daniel Westerlund (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016), p. 23.

**8** Gardell, "Globalisering," 23.

**9** Thurfjell, *Det Gudlösa Folket*, 25.

**10** Thurfjell, *Det Gudlösa Folket*, 25.

**11** Moberg, "Piety," 7, 20; David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000), 38 – 39; Svanberg and Westerlund, *Religion i Sverige*, 7 – 8.

their parents in Christian funerals.[12] Consequently – and in spite of the secularization, globalization, and privatization of religion – Swedes still have attitudes, patterns of thinking, and self-perceptions deeply rooted in Christianity; however, personal integrity and individual autonomy – not traditional dogmas or the institutionalized Church of Sweden – determine and characterize religious faith.[13]

## Swedish Religious Education

Since 1996, Religious Education (*Religionskunskap*) has been a compulsory school subject in Sweden and it is assessed as non-confessional. In a European perspective, compulsory Religious Education is quite unique. In almost all other European countries it is possible to be exempted from a school subject that concerns religion if the parents so demand.[14] Furthermore, the Swedish curriculum is supposed to be neutral in relation to different religions and worldviews. In the syllabus of 2011 for Religious Education, the key words are openness and diversity.[15]

For this study, two curricula for Swedish upper secondary school education are relevant: the ones from 1994 (*Lpf 94*) and 2011 (*Lgy 2011*).[16] Compared to curricula from earlier in the twentieth century, especially the one from 1970 (*Lgy 70*), *Lpf 94* and *Lgy 2011* are more general and comprehensive. In both there is an apparent focus on the school's mission to promulgate the basic value principles that found a democratic society.[17]

*Lpf 94* was a result of a series of major changes that the Swedish school system underwent in the 1990s. One of the most important makeovers was the reformation of the governance of schools through the implementation of a steering system founded on a goal-oriented management inspired by New Public Management theories. The Swedish government formulated a number of general objectives to be reached in the various school subjects, for instance in Religious Education, but how these objectives were to be reached was up to the schools.[18] Each school,

**12** Thurfjell, *Det Gudlösa Folket*, 9.
**13** Thurfjell, *Det Gudlösa folket*, 25.
**14** Jenny Berglund, "Swedish Religion Education: Objective but Marinated in Lutheran Protestantism," *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*, 49, no. 2 (2013): 165.
**15** *Läroplan för Gymnasiet, Lgy 2011* (Stockholm: Skolverket, 2011), 11.
**16** *1994 års Läroplan för de Frivilliga Skolformerna, Lpf 94* (Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994); *Lgy 2011.*
**17** *Lpf 94*, p. 2.
**18** Karin Kittelmann Flensner, "Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden" (PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2015), 26.

with its unique teacher collectivity, was in charge of local syllabi, learning objectives, and grade criteria.

In 2009 – 10, a review of all National Syllabi of the Swedish school system was carried out. The conclusion was that Swedish society had changed a lot since 1994 and the schools were increasingly criticized for falling grades. The national syllabi for many school subjects were castigated for being too unspecific and for leaving too much space for the teachers to decide on the content on their own.[19]

Thus, in *Lgy 2011* the state once again took greater control over learning objectives and explicitly stipulated grade criteria for the school subjects, but even if *Lgy 2011* emphasizes factual knowledge to a larger extent than *Lpf 94*, it is far less detailed than *Lgy 70*. The local school and its teacher collectivity still have a significant leverage as regards what and how to teach in the classroom.

Additionally, *Lgy 2011* places more emphasis than *Lpf 94* on the importance of knowledge, critical thinking, analyzing abilities, the use of reason, argumentation skills, and ethical standpoints. Furthermore, it is underlined that schools should create appropriate learning conditions for the pupils to learn and to develop new knowledge.[20] In *Lpf 94*, the essential missions were more targeted on implementing democratic values, respect for each human being's intrinsic value and respect for the environment. Similar themes certainly exist in *Lgy 11*, but they are not as explicit as in *Lpf 94*.[21]

Structural categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality are also outlined more clearly in *Lgy 2011*. The same goes for the importance of objectivity and a scientific approach. Already in the first paragraphs of *Lgy 2011*, it is underlined that teaching must be based on science and proved experience.[22] Regarding Religious Education, it is emphasized that it has its scientific basis in the academic subject comparative religion, but that it also has a multidisciplinary approach.[23] Another addition in *Lgy 2011* is the extended focus on internationalization and globalization.[24]

Concerning how *Lpf 94* and *Lgy 2011* deal with Christianity, the post-Christian approach is quite obvious in both curricula. Christian tradition, together with Western humanism, is explicitly mentioned at the beginning of both curricula

**19** Berglund, "Swedish Religion Education," 168.
**20** *Lgy 2011*, 2.
**21** *Lpf 94*, 7.
**22** *Lgy 2011*, 1.
**23** *Lgy 2011*, 4 – 5.
**24** *Lpf 94*, 2.

as a foundation for the ethical perspectives that are supposed to educate pupils a sense of justice, tolerance, democracy, and responsibility.[25]

Furthermore, it is stipulated that pupils must learn about Christian faith and Christian values in order to understand how Christianity has, both historically and today, influenced Swedish culture, ethics, and societal development.[26] However, it is important to stress that pluralism and diversity – not at least regarding other religions than Christianity – also are explicitly mentioned in *Lgy 11.*

This pronounced "Christian return" has been interpreted in different ways. It has been contested and debated, not at least since the curricula also ascertain that education should be non-denominational. The formulation "ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism" could, according to some teachers, scholars, and politicians, be perceived as uncomfortable for students from non-Christian cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.[27]

Others interpret the reintroduction of Christianity as a given, since it had obviously played an important role in Swedish political, cultural, and societal history. This view is preferred by ecclesiastical and conservative representants. A third interpretation is to understand the formulation "Christian tradition and humanistic values" as more of a focus on values and ethics than on Christian dogmas and credos.[28]

It has also been a matter of discussion whether there really exists one single Christian tradition and which brand of humanism the syllabus actually refers to; different traditions, both within Christianity and the humanist tradition, contradict each other on certain points, while others are compatible.[29] Many school debaters and teachers think that it is difficult, if not impossible, to unite Christianity with Western humanism. The government committee that developed *Lpf 94* even carried out specific investigations on the association between typical Christian ethics and western humanism. One commission was led by the priest Anders Piltz. He concluded that divergences between Christian and humanistic ethics were exposed in the motivations behind the values. However, these differences did not have detrimental consequences for how Swedish schools should work with Christianity and humanism in classrooms.[30]

**25** *Lpf 94*, 7; *Lgy 2011*, 1.
**26** *Lpf 94*, 42.
**27** Berglund, "Swedish Religion Education," 176.
**28** Liljestrand, Carlsson and Thalén, "Moderniserad kristendom," 56.
**29** Kittelmann Flensner, "Religious Education," 36.
**30** Niclas Lindström and Daniel Lindmark, "Religionskunskap," in *Utbildningshistoria: en introduktion*, ed. Esbjörn Larsson and Johannes Westberg (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2019), 273.

The focus on individual religious perspectives, choices, and standpoints is heavily articulated in both *Lpf 94* and *Lgy 2011.* There are many examples of formulations about how religions could help the individual pupil build a solid identity; could create an awareness of cultural heritage; could be used as an inspiration for the pupil to reflect on religious questions; could steer ethical and moral questions; could be the start of a lifelong process of developing a conception of life; could be seen as a mode for the pupil to learn how to value, revalue, and take individual ethical and moral standpoints; and, finally, could be used as a stimulation to self-reflection.[31]

This individual and self-reflective way of approaching religion actually has quite a long tradition in Sweden. With the shift from Christian Religious Education to a non-denominational Religious Education, there was a need for a new way of teaching, and "life question pedagogy" gained wide attention since it was perceived as an alternative to the dogmatic heritage of Christian instruction.[32]

When teachers use life question pedagogy, the starting point is the student's own existential dilemmas: What is the meaning of life? What happens after death? Who are you and who would you like to be as a person? What is morally right? Thus, the main pedagogical idea is that students should try to find answers to these questions in the religion they are studying. This would bring about an understanding for different religions, and at the same time contribute to students' own ideas about their lives.[33]

Theoretically, the use of life questions has been perceived as a way to adapt to the demands of a non-denominational Religious Education. However, some religious scholars argue that a Christian – or rather a Lutheran Post-Christian – perspective still influences Religious Education in Sweden. Jenny Berglund, for instance, says that even if the self-image of the school system is one of objectivity and neutrality, from the outside it could be understood as deeply Lutheran: not only in terms of the factual history of the country, but also in terms of how people think and talk about religion in society; how religion is taught and how holidays are celebrated in schools; how institutions are built; which organizations receive funding by the state, and so on. Accordingly, the Lutheran heritage in Swedish Religious Education can be seen as a part of an unarticulated and unconscious preunderstanding, even if there is no explicit reference to this worldview.[34]

**31** *Lpf 94* and *Lgy 2011.*

**32** Berglund, "Swedish Religion Education," 177.

**33** Berglund, "Swedish Religion Education," 178; Sven Hartman and Tullie Torstensson-Ed, *Barns tankar om livet* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2007), 71

**34** Berglund, "Swedish Religion Education," 181.

Karin Kittelmann Flensner draws similar conclusions to Berglund when she explores and analyzes how Religious Education is socially constructed in contemporary Swedish upper secondary school classrooms.[35] She discusses different religious discourses and underlines how a secular way of talking about religion dominates when Christianity is discussed. But within this secular discourse it is obvious that upper secondary school students perceive Sweden as a Christian country, historically founded on Christian culture, where tolerance and individualism have become crucial. Furthermore, the notion "Christian" is not mainly interpreted in a religious or dogmatic way, but rather as a way of describing a Swedish culture or a Swedish identity. Kittelmann Flenser also argues that if the concept "Christian" is associated with a belief in God or in following the messages of the Bible, most of the students would not consider themselves Christians.[36]

Kittelmann Flensner's conclusion is that, in upper secondary classrooms, when Sweden is described as a Christian country there are only vague references to religiosity and spirituality. Nevertheless, Swedish society at large can be described as post-Christian and strongly influenced by a Lutheran Protestantism that has dominated Swedish society since the Middle Ages.[37]

## Earlier Research on Christianity in Upper Secondary School Textbooks

When it comes to investigating the correspondence between the post-Christian Swedish society and the contents of textbooks in Religious Education for upper secondary schools, two studies are particularly pertinent to this article: "Modernized Christianity in textbooks for secondary schools" (2021) and "How is Christianity mediated in teaching material texts for upper secondary school? An ideology critical analysis" (2018).[38]

The aim of the first study by Johan Liljestrand, David Carlsson and Peder Thalén is to demonstrate how Religious Education in Sweden not yet has cut its links with the Christian heritage. Even though this investigation focuses on secondary school textbooks, it is important for the present study. Specifically, Liljestrand

**35** Kittelmann Flensner, "Religious Education," 21, 47.
**36** Kittellmann Flensner, "Religious Education," 197–202.
**37** Kittelmann Flenser, "Religious Education," 24.
**38** Liljestrand, Carlsson, and Thalén, "Moderniserad Kristendom"; Viktor Aldrin and Emma Aldrin, "Hur Förmedlas Kristendomen i Läromedelstexter för Gymnasieskolan? En Ideologikritisk Analys," *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 8, no. 2 (2018): 23–44.

et al. emphasize how a modernized and secularized Christianity constantly plays an important role in Swedish Religious Education, and that does not only concern Swedish secondary education.[39]

Liljestrand et al. conclude that the textbooks they investigate present a Christianity that has adapted values and perceptions typical of a modern and liberal Swedish society where globalism, solidarity, individual freedom, equality between the sexes, questioning of old power structures, social justice, and denunciation of conservative traditional Christian dogmas are essential. The main statement of Christianity in the textbooks is not a religious dogmatic one but rather a cultural and modern liberal one, which correspond to the secular contents in Swedish curricula and syllabi.[40]

Viktor and Emma Aldrin investigate how the image of religion is constructed in Swedish upper secondary school Religious Education textbooks. They study what perspectives form the description of Christianity and what are the consequences of the chosen perspective. Their method is called "ideology critical" (*ideologikritisk*) and is a combination of linguistic and theological approaches.[41] In their analysis, Aldrin and Aldrin concentrate on the introductory presentations of each chapter dealing with Christianity; accordingly, they do not analyze all the contents on Christianity in each textbook. In addition to introductory texts they study headlines, point lists, and images.[42]

They conclude that the textbooks seem to mirror the transfer from Christianity to post-Christianity in Swedish society. Christianity is not presented as a common religious and cultural norm, but nor is it discussed as strange or unfamiliar. Rather, the contents vary between different subject positions and distinct entrance qualifications for the pupils. Aldrin and Aldrin suggest that this textual heterogeneity, often within the same textbook, indicates an uncertainty as to how to deal with Christianity in Sweden today. Thus, the role of Christianity in society seems to be ambiguous.[43]

In relation to earlier research, this chapter presents new knowledge on how Christianity is presented in Religious Education textbooks for Swedish upper secondary schools at the turn of the twenty-first century. Certainly, the studies by Liljestrand et al. and Aldrin and Aldrin discuss how post-Christian or modern Christian perspectives are visible in the textbooks, but they do not elaborate in detail on what it really means. Additionally, they do not deal with the main questions of this

**39** Liljestrand, Carlsson, and Thalén, "Moderniserad Kristendom," 52.
**40** Liljestrand, Carlsson, and Thalén, "Moderniserad Kristendom," 62 – 63.
**41** Aldrin and Aldrin, "Hur Förmedlas Kristendomen," 24.
**42** Aldrin and Aldrin, "Hur Förmedlas Kristendomen," 26.
**43** Aldrin and Aldrin, "Hur Förmedlas Kristendomen," 41.

study: how Christianity is presented as a part of Religious Education and how the cultural significance of Christianity in contemporary society is discussed. Moreover, all relevant earlier research focuses on the period after 2011, that is, after the implementation of *Lgy 2011*. This study includes an analysis of how both the curricula of 1994 and 2011 affected the contents of the textbooks.

## Seven Textbooks Investigated

This study involves seven textbooks in Religious Education: all have been used or are still used in Swedish upper secondary schools. Three of the textbooks were published before 2011 and four after 2011; therefore, the curricula of both 1994 and 2011 are represented in the sample.

To begin with, it is necessary to briefly describe how Christianity in general was portrayed in these textbooks. Like world religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in each book Christianity has its own chapter or section. Yet these sections or chapters are longer than those dealing with other religions. This corresponds directly to both to *Lpf 94* and to *Lgy 11*, since Christianity – even if the Swedish school must be non-denominational – is highlighted as more important than the other world religions.[44] In general, the narrative structure of each chapter or section on Christianity is also pretty similar. It often starts with an introduction that emphasizes Christianity as a world religion. Thereafter the structure is most often chronological, proceeding from the days of Abraham up until the present day.

Furthermore, the chapter on Christianity is often preceded by a section presenting Christianity in the context of the other Abrahamitic religions: Islam and Judaism. Both similarities and differences are underlined, but there is an obvious aspiration to discuss the former rather than the latter. This also corresponds to the objectives of pluralism and multiculturalism in *Lpf 94* and *Lgy 11*. As many of the immigrants who have arrived in Sweden during the last three decades are Muslims, it has become more important to highlight the connections between Islam and Christianity. These liaisons are in several textbooks described in the light of the association "The children of Abraham" (*Abrahams barn*), a pedagogic organization that uses stories in the Bible and in the Qur'an to offer the Swedish school

**44** Christianity is the only religion mentioned by name. In *Lpf 94*, 41, it is assessed how "teaching shall immerse students' knowledge on Christianity and other conceptions of life." In *Lgy 11*, the formulations are similar; see, e. g., p. 4.

pupils a better understanding for the common roots of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.[45]

Regarding the general themes, there is nearly always a presentation of the main messages of Christianity (for instance, the credo); the significance of Jesus; the role of the Bible and how it is interpreted in various ways. Thereafter follows a narrative on how Christianity was established in the Roman empire and finally became its only acknowledged religion by the end of the fourth century. Furthermore, there is a description of the role of the sacraments and of the main branches of Christianity (Catholicism, Orthodox churches, and Protestant/Calvinist churches). Thereafter comes a discussion on the importance of Martin Luther and the Reformation; how Christianity wielded major societal power during the Middle Ages and how its huge political, cultural, and economic influence gradually came to be questioned in the era of the Enlightenment by liberal and historical-critical perspectives on Christianity and its dominant role in society. Additionally, there are explanations of important festivals; descriptions of the establishment of the revival movements and Free churches from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and – finally – on how the power of the church in general has declined from the twentieth century until the present day.[46]

## Christianity in the Wider Context of Religious Education

To begin with the curricula that form the focus of in this study, both state that a Christian perspective is important in Swedish schools, but they also underline the non-denominational and individual approach to Religious Education. However, *Lgy 2011* provides more detail regarding stipulated contents and grade criteria. These

**45** Leif Eriksson, Malin Mattsson, and Uriel Hedengren, *Söka Svar: Religionskunskap. Kurs A and B* (Stockholm: Liber AB, 2007), 200; Ola Björlin and Ulf Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel: Religionskunskap för Gymnasieskolan* (Stockholm: Sanoma Utbildning, 2013), 127; Robert Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa – Två Världar* (Stockholm: Gleerups, 2015), 94.

**46** Lars-Göran Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet: Integrerad Lärobok för A- och B-kursen* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1999), 83 – 125; Börge Ring, *Religion och Sammanhang: Religionskunskap Kurs A-B* (Stockholm: Liber AB, 2001), 75 – 121; Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 239 – 83; Lennart Göth, Katarina Lycken Rüter, and Veronica Wirström, *Religion 1 för Gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2012), 76 – 102; Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 153 – 215; Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa,* 133 – 73; Gunilla Rundblom and Leif Berg, *Religion 1 and 2: Liv och mening* (Lund: NA Förlag, 2017), 74 – 140.

guidelines are also discernible in the textbooks when they discuss the meaning of Religious Education and its relation to Christianity.

Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet* (1999), for instance, discusses how much freedom each teacher has in the planning and effectuation of Religious Education, since the syllabi are regulated locally. Accordingly, Alm's textbook offers many teaching opportunities but no obligations. It presents comprehensive teaching material and it is up to each teacher and student group to decide what to prioritize.[47]

The aim of Alm's textbook is also to pose more or less existential questions in order to encourage reflection and critical discussions among the students; these questions correspond to the life question ideal that has long characterized Swedish Religious Education. There are also direct associations with *Lpf 94* in as much as religion is described as consisting of two main perspectives: one about knowledge and facts and the other about existential dilemmas. It is obvious that the latter is perceived as equally important as the former.[48]

Similar approaches to the individual and reflective perspective are obvious in Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar* (2007). In the introductory section, it is underlined that the contents will help the individual student find his or her own "life compass" (*livskompass*). This objective also corresponds to *Lpf 94*'s emphasis on the non-denominational character of teaching in Religious Education, the main mission of which is to help the pupil find his or her individual uniqueness. Furthermore, knowledge in Religious Education is supposed to help the pupil reflect on religious, ethnic, moral, and existential issues, such as: Who am I? Why do I exist? What is the meaning of my life? Does God exist? How am I supposed to live a good life? What happens when I die?[49] These questions also evidently correspond to the life question pedagogical theory.

In Eriksson et al., it is also underlined that a religious belief does not necessarily answer existential dilemmas. These questions could equally be answered with conceptions of life or defined as a certain view on the world, on historical development, on humans and their nature, and on what objectives humans strive after.[50]

The individual, critical, and reflective perspective is furthermore emphasized by the numerous subjects of discussion that are continuously presented in the textbooks. In general, these subjects are supposed to encourage the students to form their own opinions on sometimes quite complicated issues. Some examples connected to Christianity include: Discuss different ways of interpreting the Bible

**47** Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, 9.
**48** Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, p. 9.
**49** Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 13–15.
**50** Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 13–15.

and describe the pros and cons of each type of interpretation. What are the benefits and the disadvantages of a National Church that is connected to the state? What are the opinions of different Christian branches concerning abortion, euthanasia, and LGBT+ rights? What motivates your opinion? Is the ethics formulated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount possible to live up to in today's society? Can you be a serious Christian and at the same time be a scientist?[51]

Textbook explanations of the purpose of Religious Education take Christianity as the obvious benchmark, even if it is not often explicitly mentioned. One peculiar example can be found in Eriksson et al., where the political ideology of Marxism is compared to Christianity by means of four themes: views on the history and the world; views on the meaning of a human being; views on humans' different living conditions; views on diverse ways to understand the meaning of life.[52]

In the textbooks' discussions of the purpose of Religious Education after 2011, there are more discussions of how religion must be regarded or considered in the context of general cultural and social conditions. In particular, they underline how Sweden is a global, pluralistic, and multicultural society. Furthermore, there is an explicit will to relate religion to structural categories of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. These ambitions correspond to the changes in *Lgy 11*, where it is stipulated that teaching in Religious Education must be discussed in a global and international context. Additionally, *Lgy 11* highlights how pupils need to learn how to analyze and value the associations between religion and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic background.[53]

In Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1* (2015) this change of focus is obvious. When the purpose of Religious Education is presented in the book introduction, Tuveson writes that learning about religion must have a global perspective, since Sweden today is a multicultural and pluralistic society. Furthermore, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are mentioned as crucial categories, since they all in various ways influence how people develop their individual identities. For instance, it is concluded that one feature or characteristic that unites many religions is that they have one or several gods with clear guidelines on how men and women should behave, on their mutual hierarchy, and on their sexuality. It is also ascertained that many religions have complementary views on the nature of the relationship between men and women, based on the implication that men are fundamentally perceived as more important and valuable than women. Furthermore, Tuveson highlights the problem of how in some religions, fundamental views on heteronor-

**51** See, for instance, Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, 103, 114, 123; Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 277–78; Rundblom and Berg, *Religion 1 and 2*, 312, 344.

**52** Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 22–23.

**53** *Lgy 11*, 3–6.

mativity risk resulting in homophobic opinions and downgrading attitudes towards people who are not heterosexual.[54]

By comparison to *Lpf 94*, *Lgy 11* also underlines the importance of scientific and critical perspectives.[55] This is also reflected in Tuveson's introduction of Religious Education as a school subject for upper secondary school education. When different religions are presented in the textbook, he prefers to analyze them by means of the historical-critical method. Therefore, holy scriptures are seen as stories created by human persons, rather than visons delivered by a God.[56]

The textbook by Tuveson is also a good example of a discussion on how the modern Swedish, secular, and post-Christian society creates specific conditions for Religious Education. It emphasizes that Christianity and its ethics no longer have the same influence over culture and legislation as they once had. Additionally, Tuveson underlines that "private religiosity" is more common in Sweden than a traditional practice of religion.[57] This is a typical characteristic of a post-Christian society.

## Christianity in Contemporary Society

> A bishop in the Swedish National Church recently said something like: The general Swede today is a "just-in-case-Christian." The church building should be heated and the vicarage illuminated. If not, the Swede does not feel comfortable. It is not that significant to worship, but you should be a member of the Church of Sweden, just in case you at some point would need it.[58]

When the textbooks describe Christianity in contemporary Swedish society, they unanimously emphasize how Sweden today is dominated by secular and post-Christian approaches. The typical post-Christian characteristics of post-materialism, individualism, autonomy, self-expression, critical and rational thinking, tolerance, and democracy are pivotal in the aim to convey that Christianity certainly still has societal and cultural significance. However, at the same time, it should be placed in the background.[59] The citation above is a telling example. The Church

**54** Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En människa*, 17.
**55** *Lgy 11*, 1.
**56** Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 24.
**57** Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 24.
**58** Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 198. My translation.
**59** Thurfjell, *Det Gudlösa Folket*, p. 26.

of Sweden and Christianity should be pressed into service only when they are really needed.

Recurring textbook themes on Christianity in contemporary Swedish society include discussions of how Sweden today is a country with old Christian roots that still affect Swedish culture and social life; how Sweden is a multicultural and pluralist country where the Church of Sweden and many other Christian associations coexist with other religions and conceptions of life; how the Church of Sweden, in a very modern way, deals with questions about gender and homosexuality; how some fundamental Christian values and modes of interpreting the human existence are present in everyday ethics; and how science and critical thinking are a pivotal part of how religion and Christianity should be perceived.

Several textbooks underline how many Swedes, even if they are not dogmatic Christians, perceive themselves as "cultural Christians." They highlight how Swedes are constantly surrounded by Christian symbols and traditions, for example the stipulation in the Swedish constitution that the regent must confess as an Evangelical-Lutheran, the Christian cross in the Swedish flag, the three golden crowns (symbols of the three holy kings) as specific symbols for Sweden (for example, the emblem of the popular Swedish national ice hockey team Tre Kronor or "Three crowns"), and a number of phrases in the Swedish language translated directly from the Bible. Additionally, it is underlined how Christian holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Halloween are pivotal in the Swedish calendar.[60]

In most of the textbooks, it is furthermore stressed how Swedish society once was very homogenous, given the major influence of Christianity regarding political life, social and economic living conditions, art, literature, and music. However, due to globalization and immigration this uniform culture has disintegrated. Therefore, a typical Swedish identity is not as evident in the cultural landscape at it has been before. This is especially the case in big cities where there are mosques, synagogues, Buddhist and Hindu temples, different clothing and music styles, and restaurants and supermarkets with food from all over the world. Moreover, the messages of the Bible and from the Church of Sweden are no longer the basis of the judicial system. Teaching in Religious Education in Swedish schools has for a long time been non-denominational and the school subject Christianity (*Kristendomskunskap*) has disappeared from the school schedules. Furthermore, most of the super-

**60** Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 200; Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 39 – 44, 154, 198; Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 159.

markets and stores nowadays are open on Sundays. Back in the old days they were all closed, since Sunday, according to the Christian tradition, was a day of rest.[61]

Many of the textbooks also emphasize how the numbers of people attending church services have decreased during the last fifty years. The same applies for the members of the Church of Sweden and the number of baptisms, church weddings, and confirmations. They also describe how religious life in Sweden in many ways has become individualized and privatized. Still, some Christian traditions or institutions are quite important. At least 80 percent of all the funerals in Sweden are carried out in the church. School prize days are also often celebrated in churches.[62]

Concerning comparisons between Swedish Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity and other denominations of Christianity, there is one theme that stands out as especially important: gender and sexuality. This subject is discussed in all textbooks and it is underlined how the Swedish National Church has made great progress concerning the equality between men and women. It is highlighted how, for a long time, women in Sweden have not accepted to be treated as second-class citizens; an inequality legitimized by texts in the Bible on unequal gender, family, and societal conditions. The textbooks furthermore describe how Swedish Christian women have criticized – sometimes in the context of feminist theology – how the Bible and Christian traditions are shaped too much by a specifically male perspective: God is always depicted as a man; the actors in biblical texts are mostly men (94 percent men versus 6 percent women). The conclusion is that the Bible is above all written by men and for men.[63]

The Swedish National Church – together with some of the free churches, such as the Swedish Baptist Association (Svenska Baptistförbundet) and the Swedish Mission Association (Svenska Missionsförbundet) – is also put forward as a

**61** Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 39 – 44, 154 – 55, 358. For similar observations on how a rather homogenous contemporary Christian society has become secularized, and more heterogenous in terms of religion, see Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, 12, 120 – 21; Göth, Lycken Rüter, and Wirström, *Religion 1*, 102 – 3; Rundblom and Berg, *Religion 1 and 2*, 12.

**62** Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 39 – 44, 360 – 61. For similar reports on the declining number of Church membership, baptisms, confirmations, and so on, and on the diminishing role of the Church of Sweden and of Christianity, see Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, 123, 200; Ring, *Religion och Sammanhang*, 75. Ring states that the religious habit in Sweden is – just as it was during the Reformation period in the sixteenth century – in the process of fundamental change. He also describes the present-day Church of Sweden as being more or less a "spokesman for its members". On the new role of Christianity and the Church of Sweden after 2000, see Ring, *Religion och Sammanhang*, 113; Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 134; Rundblom and Berg, *Religion 1 and 2*, 27, 136.

**63** See Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, 99; Ring, *Religion och Sammanhang*, 99.

model from an international perspective, since it is one of few Protestant churches in the world that accepts women as priests; women have been ordained since the 1950s. In 2010, half of the total number of all ministers in Sweden were women. It is also stressed that women today are very active in Swedish church life and are even appointed bishops and archbishops. It is worth pointing out that between 2014 and 2022, the Swedish Archbishop was a woman – Antje Jackelén. This specific Swedish gender equality is explicitly contrasted with the fact that neither the Catholic Church nor the Orthodox Churches have plans to open the ministry to women. However, it should also be acknowledged that in Sweden there is some resistance to women priests among a handful of Swedish Christian groups and communities.[64]

Regarding sexuality and how the Christian church approaches homosexuality, the textbooks also highlight the Church of Sweden as a model. They underline how it advocates a pluralistic church that also is open to homosexuals. In 2009, it was one of the first churches in the world to accept marriages between homosexual couples. Furthermore, homosexuals can also be ordained in Sweden.[65]

Additionally, the textbooks often underline how homosexuality is refuted in many Christian communities and that homosexuals are not fully accepted within the Christian church, either historically or today. However, it is also stressed that the reception of homosexuals has gradually improved in a global perspective, though in general they are still barred from church marriages and from becoming priests.[66]

## Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to show how a post-Christian, objective, scientific, and individual way of interpreting Christianity is reflected in Swedish curricula and upper secondary textbooks in Religious Education from the 1990s to around 2018.

Even if the textbooks in Sweden are not formally controlled by the state, it is obvious that dominating societal and cultural discourses such as secularism, post-

**64** Alm, *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet*, 99; Ring, *Religion och Sammanhang*, 99, 299 – 300; Göth, Lycken, and Wirström, *Religion 1*, 100; Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 209; Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 156; Rundblom and Berg, *Religion 1 and 2*, 405.

**65** Ring, *Religion och Sammanhang*, 97; Eriksson, Mattsson, and Hedengren, *Söka Svar*, 262; Göth, Lycken Rüter, and Wirström, *Religion 1*, 226; Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 159.

**66** Göth, Lycken Rüter, and Wirström, *Religion 1*, 226 – 28; Björlin and Jämterud, *Under Samma Himmel*, 210; Tuveson, *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa*, 158.

Christianity, and life question pedagogy very much affect the content of both curricula and textbooks.

The investigated textbooks are imbued with individualism, autonomy, self-expression, critical, scientific and rational thinking, tolerance, and democracy. It is stressed that Christianity certainly has a societal and cultural role to play in contemporary Swedish society, but it should be placed in the background.

It is up to each individual student, by means of the life question pedagogy, to discover and decide how Christianity – and other religions or conceptions of life – could assist in finding answers to difficult individual, ethical, or societal dilemmas. The same goes for finding a general answer to the much-debated question on the message in *Lpf 94* and *Lgy 11* that teaching in Swedish schools must be compatible with ethics mediated by Christian tradition and Western humanism. In none of the seven investigated textbooks was there a comprehensive discussion on what "ethics mediated by Christian tradition" really mean. This is perhaps not a surprise, since the topic is immensely complicated due to the many different – and not seldom contradictory – interpretations of the main messages in Christianity, not least in the Bible.

Concerning this study's position in relation to earlier research, it underlines the conclusions of other scholars that Christianity in Swedish secondary and upper secondary textbooks in Religious Education above all depict a cultural, liberal, and rather modern Christianity that is today quite stable and not really questioned. The number of similar themes and interpretations in the textbooks investigated here is also evidence of the fairly homogenous Swedish post-Christian approach.

## References

*1994 års Läroplan för de Frivilliga Skolformerna*, *Lpf 94.* Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994.

Aldrin, Viktor, and Emma Aldrin. "Hur Förmedlas Kristendomen i Läromedelstexter för Gymnasieskolan? En Ideologikritisk Analys." *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 8, no. 2 (2018): 23 – 44.

Alm, Lars-Göran. *Religionskunskap för Gymnasiet. Integrerad Lärobok för A- och B-kursen.* Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1999.

Berglund, Jenny. "Swedish Religion Education: Objective but Marinated in Lutheran Protestantism." *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 49, no 2 (2013): 165 – 84.

Björlin, Ola, and Ulf Jämterud *Under Samma Himmel: Religionskunskap för Gymnasieskolan.* Stockholm: Sanoma Utbildning, 2013.

Eriksson, Leif, Malin Mattsson, and Uriel Hedengren. *Söka Svar. Religionskunskap: Kurs A and B.* Stockholm: Liber AB, 2007.

Gardell, Mattias. "Globalisering." In *Religion i Sverige*, edited by Ingvar Svanberg and Daniel Westerlund, Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016.

Göth, Lennart, Katarina Lycken Rüter, and Veronica Wirström. *Religion 1 för Gymnasiet.* Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2012.

Hartman, Sven, and Tullie Torstensson-Ed. *Barns tankar om livet.* Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2007.

Kittelmann Flensner, Karin. "Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden." PhD diss., Univeristy of Gothenburg, 2015.

Liljestrand, Johan, David Carlsson, and Peder Thalén. "Moderniserad Kristendom i Läroböcker för Högstadiet." *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 11, no. 3 (2021): 51 – 70.

Lindström, Niclas, and Daniel Lindmark. "Religionskunskap." In *Utbildningshistoria: en introduktion*, edited by Esbjörn Larsson and Johannes Westberg, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2019.

Lyon, David. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times.* Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000.

*Läroplan för Gymnasiet, Lgy 2011.* Stockholm: Skolverket, 2011.

Moberg, Jessica. "Piety, Intimacy and Mobility: A Case Study of Charismatic Christianity in Present Day Stockholm." PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2013.

Pettersson, Thorleif. "Sekularisering." In *Religion i Sverige,* edited by Ingvar Svanberg and Daniel Westerlund. Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016.

Ring, Börge. *Religion och Sammanhang. Religionskunskap Kurs A-B.* Stockholm: Liber AB, 2001.

Rundblom, Gunilla, and Leif Berg. *Religion 1 and 2: Liv och mening.* Lund: NA Förlag, 2017.

Tholvsen, Øyvind. *Frikyrkoundersökningen: En Rapport om Frikyrkornas Utveckling i Sverige 2000 – 2020.* Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund, 2021. Accessed May 6, 2024. https://www.myndighetensst.se/om-oss/nyheter/nyhetsarkiv-aktuellt/2021-06-23-ny-rapport--frikyrkoundersokningen-2000-2020.html.

Thurfjell, David. *Det Gudlösa Folket: De Postkristna Svenskarna och Religionen.* Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2015.

Tuveson, Robert. *Religionskunskap 1: En Människa – Två Världar.* Stockholm: Gleerups, 2015.

## The Netherlands

Sjaak Braster

# From National School to Societal Pillar: The Secularization of Public Education in the Netherlands (1801 – 1920)

## Introduction

The Netherlands is "still a nation of preachers and schoolteachers." These were the words of Dutch Queen Beatrix, spoken during a state visit to the United States in 1982.[1] In doing so, she explicitly highlighted the Protestant character of the Dutch nation. Calvinist faith and education were traditionally closely linked in Dutch history. A noteworthy fact in this regard was that at the founding of New Amsterdam in 1624 (present-day New York), the Dutch enlisted the help of a preacher in organizing the colony, and that preacher would in turn advocate the appointment of "a schoolmaster, who can instruct young people, both white and black, in the knowledge of Christ."[2]

Nowadays the Dutch Constitution provides parents with the freedom to found schools in line with a specific denomination. The state also guarantees the same financial support for private denominational schools as is given to public schools. This legal right goes back to the Constitution of 1917 and the Primary Education Act of 1920. The historical consequence was that the proportion of religious and other private schools fully funded by the government is higher in the Netherlands than anywhere else in the world. The public sector, on the other hand, is relatively small.

In this chapter we will go back in time to answer the question how the current educational system, with its distinguishing features related to the handling of religious diversity, came into being. In doing so, we will look at the way the identity of public education has been defined and changed over the years, and what the consequences of these changes have been for the content of the curriculum of primary schools.

This chapter will start in 1801 with the first national education law, which triggered a national system of education with public schools accessible to children of

**1** Arnout J. P. H. van Cruyningen, *Van Hortense tot Amalia: negen koninginnen en een kroonprinses* (Utrecht: Uitgeverij Omniboek, 2021).

**2** Rob Ruggenberg, "Zo leefden Nederlanders in Nieuw-Amsterdam," accessed November 7, 2023, http://www.manhatan.nl/frames-nieuwamsterdam.html.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-010

all denominations and based on a curriculum acceptable for all branches. An important element of this curriculum was the use of a list of schoolbooks approved by the government and supervised by a national team of school inspectors. The journey will end with the Primary Education Act of 1920, the moment in which the Dutch educational system found its own unique way of dealing with religious diversity: a pillarized system of education with equal funding for public and private denominational schools.[3]

Pillarization was the institutional arrangement of Dutch society in networks of organizations, ranging from political parties, trade unions, schools, and universities, to broadcasting corporations, welfare agencies, sport associations, and even social research institutes.[4] The process of pillarization resulted in distinctly curricular practices where publishing houses – another element of the Protestant, Catholic, and socialist/liberal pillars – produced separate strands of textbooks and educational material (such as wallcharts) for Protestant, Catholic, and public schools, respectively. But to understand how this "voluntary apartheid"[5] has become an accepted model for dealing with religious diversity, we must go back to the origins of state education in the Netherlands.

## The Batavian Revolution and the First Laws on Education (1795 – 1806)

When French armies, supported by Dutch patriots, attacked the country in 1795, it marked the end of regional autonomy, which had been an important characteristic of the Dutch Republic.[6] With the founding of the Batavian Republic, the Netherlands became a nation-state, guided by the principles of liberty, equality, and brotherhood.[7] The first constitution was introduced in 1798, and in 1801 the first education law applied to the entire country saw the light of day. The ideal was

**3** Johan Sturm, Leendert Groenendijk, Bernard Kruithof, and Julialet Rens, "Educational Pluralism: A Historical Study of So-Called 'Pillarization' in the Netherlands, Including a Comparison with Some Developments in South African Education," *Comparative Education* 34 (1998): 281 – 97.
**4** Jo E. Ellemers, "Pillarization as a Process of Modernization," *Acta Politica* 31 (1996): 524 – 38.
**5** Mark Halstead, "Voluntary Apartheid? Problems of Schooling for Religious and Other Minorities in Democratic Societies," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 29 (1995): 257 – 72.
**6** Jonathan I. Israel, *De Republiek, 1477 – 1806* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2001).
**7** Barry J. Hake, "The Making of Batavian Citizens: Social Organization of Constitutional Enlightenment in The Netherlands, 1795 – 98," *History of Education* 23 (1994): 335 – 53.

one general Christian public school.[8] A Minister of National Education, together with a group of national school inspectors, would oversee the implementation of the Education Act.[9]

The Batavian revolution ended the close connection between the state and the Protestant Church, which had become the dominant religion in the northern provinces of the Netherlands. In line with this, the new Minister of Education intended to ban the teaching of religious doctrines from the public schools. In the law of 1801, therefore, it was established that "all the doctrines that are understood differently by the various denominations" should not be part of the curriculum of public schools.[10] However, a regulation added to the law included the possibility of introducing children "outside regular school hours to the religious teachings of the denomination to which they belong."[11] In other words, it was not forbidden to teach religion or use the Heidelberg Catechism (written in 1563) as a textbook, but it was not going to be done by schoolteachers of public schools.

The state was concerned that the traditional textbooks of the old Calvinist Republic, including the Heidelberg Catechism, approved by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1619, were still part of the new curriculum in the Batavian Republic. But which books were allowed? In 1801, the idea was born to draw up a suitable list of textbooks for the intended educational reform that would put patriotic values front and center, and promote classroom teaching as a new didactic principle.[12] This list should not include books that might cause strife and discord, but rather books that, in addition to developing the mind and promoting good morals, would arouse patriotism.[13] It would take a while to make up the list. These were turbulent times for the new state: the Education Act of 1801 had to be replaced as early as 1803 by a second Education Act, which in turn was replaced by a third.

This third school law of 1806, which would remain in place for over half a century, consisted of several components. The goal for public education was included

**8** Pieter Th. F. M. Boekholt, "De onderwijswet van 1801 en het begin van de Staatszorg voor het onderwijs in Nederland," in *Tweehonderd jaar onderwijs en de zorg van de Staat*, ed. Pieter Boekholt et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000).

**9** Nan L. Dodde, *"Een speurtocht naar samenhang." Het rijksschooltoezicht van 1801 tot 2001* (The Hague: SDU, 2001).

**10** I. van Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving voor het lager Onderwijs, 1796–1907* (Groningen: Noordhoff, 1907), 89.

**11** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving,* 128.

**12** Sjaak Braster, *Passie en pragmatisme: De onderwijsinspectie en de opkomst en ondergang van het klassikaal onderwijs* (The Hague: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2012). Accessed November 7, 2023, http://hdl.handle.net/1765/32925.

**13** Pieter Th. F. M. Boekholt and Engelina P. De Booy, *Geschiedenis van de school in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen tot aan de huidige tijd* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987), 97.

in the general set of rules (Article 22). It read as follows: "All education at school shall be carried out in such manner that by learning suitable and useful skills the intellectual capacities of the children shall be developed and they themselves are educated on all societal and Christian virtues."[14] These societal and Christian virtues would be part of the goal for public education until the Primary Education Act of 1981.

It thus took quite some time before a new goal for public education was formulated. From 1985 onwards, the importance of public schools for dealing with the religious diversity in a multicultural society was stressed, and a choice was made for active pluralism instead passive neutrality as a guiding didactical principle for the public school.[15] The fact that from 1806 to 1981 the same set of virtues was mentioned as a component of the legal goal of the public school did not mean that the interpretation of these virtues did not change over time. To the contrary, the identity of public education has been discussed at various times, in different places, and with a variety of stakeholders. The reason for debate was obvious: the legal regulations did not provide a clear definition of what had to be understood by societal and Christian virtues.

## The "Societal and Christian Virtues" of 1806

In retrospect, we can say that the societal virtues fit the norms and values of the emerging bourgeois class such as decency, respect, diligence, obedience, and thrift. For the sake of cultural progress, but also for maintaining social order, these norms and values had to be internalized by the lower classes as well.[16] It was primarily the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen (Society for the common good) that would take on this task by developing plans for educational reform, distributing inexpensive educational prints to the population, and publishing textbooks for the public schools, but also by establishing saving banks, public libraries, and even

**14** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving,* 162.

**15** Sjaak Braster, "Het openbaar onderwijs als kameleon," in *Tot burgerschap en deugd: Volksopvoeding in de negentiende eeuw,* ed. Nelleke Bakker, Rudolf Dekker, and Angelique Janssens (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 123–37.

**16** Vic Veldheer, "Deugdzaam staatsburgerschap: de negentiende eeuw," in *De goede burger: Tien beschouwingen over een morele categorie*, ed. Paul Dekker and Joep de Hart (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2005), 34.

the first teacher training college.[17] Christian virtues were primarily family virtues, with an emphasis on labor, sobriety, and moral purity.[18]

In the law of 1806, societal virtues preceded Christian virtues. One might infer from this order that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the societal values appreciated by the state were more important than the religious values promoted by the church. In the period itself, the order of virtues was probably not an issue.[19] The order could be understood by referring to the opinion of administrator Adriaan van den Ende that the care for public education primarily rested with the state. The church must be regarded as an institution inside the state, and not the other way around.[20]

Apart from the societal and Christian virtues mentioned in the legal goal of public education, an important element of the identity of public schooling was the legal text that later would be referred to as the "neutrality" clause. It was stated that the education of school children in the doctrine of the denomination to which they belonged should not be done by the teachers working at the schools these children attended.[21] As stated above, the teaching of religious doctrines was a task for the church, not for the state. The state inspection, therefore, was responsible for ensuring that no schoolbooks were used other than those mentioned on a national list of books that was finally published by the public administration in 1810. The list contained over 700 schoolbooks written by 196 authors.[22] It included many works published by the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen. Also popular were the books of the Frisian preacher and school inspector Johannes Hendricus Niewold (1737–1812) and the Groningen teacher and later school inspector Hendrik Wester (1752–1821). In later years, Nicolaas Anslijn (1777–1838), a teacher, gained great fame with *De brave Hendrik* (The well-behaved Henry) and its counterpart *De brave Maria.*[23] They were reading books about children

**17** Wijnand W. Mijnhardt and A. J. Wichers, eds., *Om het Algemeen Volksgeluk: Twee eeuwen particulier initiatief 1784–1984* (Edam: Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, 1984).

**18** Joep de Hart, "Pretpark Hollandia: over enkele veranderingen in het burgerlijke waardepatroon," in *De goede burger: Tien beschouwingen over een morele categorie*, ed. Paul Dekker and Joep de Hart (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2005), 44.

**19** Nicolaas F. Noordam, "De 'christelijke en maatschappelijke deugden' van onze eerste schoolwetten," *Pedagogische Studiën* 43 (1966): 292.

**20** Adriaan van den Ende, *Geschiedkundige schets van Neêrlands schoolwetgeving* (Deventer: De Lange, 1846), 157.

**21** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving,* 225.

**22** Harry van der Laan, "Nederlandse schoolboeken in de vroege negentiende eeuw: De productie en verspreiding van schoolboeken tijdens de onderwijshervormingen," *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis* 8 (2001): 153–70.

**23** Boekholt and De Booy, *Geschiedenis van de school*, 103.

who were well-behaved, good, obedient, clever, and eager to learn. The two booklets were moralistic but also innovative, as they were based on the Enlightenment belief that children could be taught good behavior.[24]

For compiling a book list, the public administration could draw on a wide range of textbooks. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, partly due to the announcement of the upcoming book list, a schoolbook market had emerged on which several publishers were active. An important initiative in this respect was taken by the publisher David du Mortier (Leiden), who in 1801 started a monthly magazine in which new schoolbooks were reviewed.[25] In the first five years of the magazine's existence, 325 new textbooks were evaluated and were considered more or less suitable for the modernization of education. They came from fifty-seven publishers from various Dutch cities, predominantly located above the big rivers.[26]

It must be noted that the Bible did not appear on the booklist. But Van den Ende did not exclude the use of the Bible at school. It was self-evident that the teachers made use of the Bible "at regular intervals or during suitable occasions."[27] The reservations against the use of the Bible were mainly of a psychological-didactical nature: it was simply not a book for children. Or, in the words of Van den Ende, one should at least take "the susceptibility and the age of the children" into account if the Bible was going to be used.[28] But the exclusion of Bible education was not requested. According to Van den Ende, that would mean that "the higher objective of the Education Act, popular education, Christian popular education, would equally be destroyed for all pupils of those schools."[29]

In public school, children could also pray. In the General School Regulations of 1806, for example, article 6 stated: "School time shall – be it weekly or daily – be opened and closed with a short and suitable Christian prayer in a respectful manner, and during those occasions something appropriate may be sung as well."[30] The Christian character of the 1806 legislation furthermore appeared in articles 8 and

**24** "Nineteenth century schoolbooks," accessed November 7, 2023. https://geheugen.delpher.nl/en/geheugen/pages/collectie/Schoolboekjes+uit+de+negentiende+eeuw.

**25** Van der Laan, "Nederlandse schoolboeken," 159.

**26** Pieter Boekholt, "Op zoek naar de kinderlectuur van rond 1800," in *Tot volle waschdom: Bijdragen aan de geschiedenis van de kinder- en jeugdliteratuur*, ed. Berry Dongelmans et al. (Utrecht: Biblion, 1999), 87–100.

**27** P. L. van Eck, *De openbare lagere school en de bijbel in de 19e eeuw* (Groningen/Batavia: Wolters, 1938), 10.

**28** Adriaan van den Ende, *Handboek voor onderwijzers op de openbare lagere scholen binnen het Bataafsche Gemeenebest. Eerste deel* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1803), 127.

**29** Ende, *Geschiedkundige schets*, 89.

**30** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving*, 252.

11 on the decrees on the exams for teachers.[31] Prior to the exam, the teacher was investigated on his moral and religious thoughts and principles; during the exam, questions should also be asked regarding suitable means to educate the school children in Christian virtues.[32] The inclusion of such criteria in legislation was an expression of the idea that the main objective of education with respect to norms and values could only be achieved if the teacher would be the central figure in the education process.

## History Textbooks around 1806

According to the Education Act of 1806, history could also be taught, together with the basic subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic – although in practice, especially in the first decades, this would have been rare. Parents generally considered history less important than the basic subjects, and teachers were not properly prepared to teach history anyway. But the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen did see its importance, especially in the context of national education. As stated earlier, one of their pursuits was the publication of schoolbooks. These activities began at the end of the eighteenth century with their first and second volumes of biographies of patriotic men and women, published in 1791 and 1798, respectively. The Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen also published a textbook on the histories of the fatherland in 1801, written by Hendrik Wester, who had previously won an honorary medal for it.[33] The third volume of the biographical series followed relatively late, in 1834. All these volumes were published several times. The first volume, for example, was reprinted for the twelfth time in 1837. The list of twenty Dutchmen chosen in the first three volumes is obvious enough with regard to the sea heroes, painters, and poets included. More surprising is the choice of Pope Adrian VI (1459–1523), the first and only Dutch pope, in the first volume, the humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) in the second volume, and the late inclusion of William of Orange in the third volume. Also noteworthy was the mention of a scientist, Herman Boerhave (1668–1738) and four successful Dutch women, amongst them Anna Maria van Schuurman (1607–1678), the first female university student in the Netherlands (and probably in Europe).[34]

**31** Ende, *Geschiedkundige schets,* 45.

**32** Ende, *Geschiedkundige schets,* 98.

**33** Hendrik Wester, *Schoolboek over de geschiedenissen van ons vaderland*, 9th ed. (Leiden: D. du Mortier; Deventer: J. H. de Lange; Groningen: J. Oomkens, 1827).

**34** Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen: Een schoolboek*, vol. 1 (Haarlem: A. Loosjes Pz., 1791); Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, *Levens-*

Finally, it should not go unmentioned that in addition to the three-part series featuring exemplary patriots, the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen also had a booklet published in 1828 featuring twenty-one important figures from the Southern provinces, including four women, this time of royal blood.[35] Many of the personages that appeared in this booklet were born in the Southern provinces that nowadays we refer to as Belgium. The choice of heroes of the fatherland as part of the treatment of national history did make it clear that the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen wanted to do justice to the religious and sociocultural diversity that characterized Dutch society in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Moreover, the primary school subject of history in this period had a moralizing tone and so did reading education that should cover good behavior, diligence, obedience, and other virtues.[36] The Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen also published a textbook for the teaching of reading in 1791, which enjoyed some popularity: *De Trap der jeugd*, which went into its eleventh edition in 1827.[37] In this book (whose title – The stairs of youth – harks back to a reading book of 1620), the process of learning to read was combined with morals and virtues, like most textbooks in the first half of the nineteenth century.[38]

## The General Christian Public School and its Discontents (1806 – 1857)

After the fall of Napoleon, Willem I returned to the Netherlands in 1813 and two years later he became ruler of the new kingdom that would encompass the territories of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The end of the Batavian-French era meant that a new constitution had to be made. In 1815, the article about education in this constitution was formulated as follows: "Public education

*schetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen: Een schoolboek*, vol. 2 (Haarlem: Wed. A. Loosjes Pz., 1798); Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen: Een schoolboek*, vol. 3 (Haarlem: Wed. A. Loosjes Pz., 1834).

**35** Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen uit de zuidelijke provinciën: Een schoolboek* (Leiden: Du Mortier; Deventer: J. de Lange; Groningen: J. Oomkes, 1828).

**36** Bobbie O. Schoemaker, *Gewijd der jeugd voor taal en deugd: Het onderwijs in de Nederlandse taal op de lagere school, 1750–1850* (Utrecht: LOT, 2018), 148.

**37** Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, *Trap der jeugd*, 11th ed. (Leiden: D. du Mortier and Son; Deventer: Jan Hendrik de Lange, 1827 [1791]).

**38** Piet J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smets, *Bibliografie van Nederlandse school- en kinderboeken, 1700–1800* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997).

is a continuous cause of care for the Government. The King shall annually provide the parliament with an extensive report about the university, secondary, and primary schools."[39] What did not change, however, was the law on education of 1806. It had been a landmark in the move towards an education system accessible for all people and the introduction of new didactical methods. But not everyone was happy with the proposed changes.

From the very beginning, there were already signs that not everyone in the Netherlands was satisfied with the educational reforms that were advocated by the government, school inspectors, enlightened Protestants, and representatives of the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen.[40] This enlightened elite was confronted by a group of parents who were still attached to the orthodox Protestants beliefs and who were not happy about the Heidelberg Catechism being replaced by new teaching and reading books.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the dissatisfaction with the general Christian public school gradually became more apparent. In this period there were at least five groups that distanced themselves from this enlightened national model of education, characterized by a "Christianity beyond the divide of faiths," and supported by the mainstream of Dutch Protestantism.

The first group pursued a revitalization of the Protestant character of public school, whereas a second orthodox Protestant group believed public school should take up a neutral position towards religion. Both groups were part of a Christian revival movement that opposed the enlightened ideas that influenced Dutch society.

Besides these two orthodox Protestant groups, which remained part of the Reformed Church, there was a third group of orthodox believers, segregated since 1834 from the Reformed Church: the secessionists. Some of them even emigrated to the United States to find religious freedom.

The fourth group, made of up Catholics, was initially not unhappy with the idea of a general Christian school. That was because in some places this school was more neutral than it was Protestant. In other places, the school even had a Catholic identity because it adjusted its teaching to the wishes of the local religious environment. Later, like the orthodox Protestants, the Catholics opted for their own schools with a clear denominational identity.

The Jewish community, finally, took a different position, because the government allowed them to offer Jewish education in their own Jewish schools in an early stage.

---

**39** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving*, 296.

**40** Boekholt and Booy, *Geschiedenis van de school*, 132.

The growing discontent of these several religious groups has historically led to what historians later called historians a School War. But if we zoom in on the local level, that description would be somewhat exaggerated. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the "war" was limited to verbal skirmishes between the elite groups of the various religious denominations.[41] Furthermore, the controversy about the character and funding of schools was not an issue for most parents. That was not surprising because parents had other things to worry about. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Netherlands was a poor country where child labor was not exceptional, and where not all children were sent to school.[42] If the parents were sending their children to school, inspection reports on the functioning of the Dutch education system show little proof of discontent.[43] Potential tensions about the curricular content – for instance, the reading of the Bible, the disappearance of Heidelberg catechism, the singing of psalms, the new educational methods, or the teaching of National History – seldom resulted in unresolvable conflicts. A possible explanation is that the public school that supposed to have a general Christian character, adapting to the color of the local religious environment like a chameleon.[44]

This everyday practice, in which schools adapted their curriculum to the religious color of the environment, was even legitimized legally in 1842 by a Royal Decree whose purpose was to uphold the principles on which the School Act of 1806 was built – that is, that the national public school should still have a general Christian character. The decree stipulated that the religion of the inhabitants of a municipality had to be considered when selecting and hiring teachers. This also applied to the appointment of school inspectors, whose term was limited to a shorter period than before. Even the church could review curricular practices in public education. To do so, schools had to allow the inspection of their teaching materials, and in particular of course textbooks, which could be checked for anti-Catholic passages. If necessary, sensitive texts could be censored by blacking out certain parts; whole books could be even banned.[45]

---

**41** Andries A. de Bruin, *Het ontstaan van de schoolstrijd* (Barneveld: Bolland, 1985), 261.

**42** Sjaak Braster and Nan Dodde, "Compulsory Education in the Netherlands: A Problem in the Nineteenth Century and a Solution in the Twentieth Century," in *A Significant Social Revolution: Cross-Cultural Aspects of the Evolution of Compulsory Education,* ed. James Anthony Mangan (London: Woburn, 1994), 21–35.

**43** Riemer Reinsma, *Scholen en schoolmeesters onder Willem I en II* (The Hague: Voorheen Van Keulen Periodieken, 1965).

**44** Sjaak Braster, *De identiteit van het openbaar onderwijs* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1996).

**45** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving*, 312–20.

Whether the attempt to use the idea of relative neutrality to save the general Christian public school of 1806 was successful remains to be seen. Again, a closer look at the national inspection reports, and especially the provincial school reports, do not show many important changes in school culture over time. From the provincial school reports, we can gain quite an accurate picture about the role religion played in the daily life of school. Thus, we can read that the school day began and ended with a prayer; there was the singing of psalms, and sometimes also reading from the Bible. In the period before and after 1842, such events of a Christian character were reported in equal measure.[46] There are also reports of Catholic authorities exercizing their right to censor textbooks, but incidents were rare.

What was obvious, however, was the move of the advocates of the orthodox Protestant school in the direction of founding their own schools instead of transforming the existing public schools by strengthening the impact of the Bible and biblical history in the curriculum. They succeeded in Nijmegen in 1844 with the establishment of the first orthodox Protestant school, run by a private association. The wish to set up private denominational schools, an idea that Catholics groups had put forward earlier, fitted perfectly with the liberals' desire for freedom. It was this political group that believed that men in every sphere of life should be free and independent to make decisions. In their view, such freedom was the starting point for the development and civilization of the nation.[47]

## The Constitution of 1848: The Introduction of Freedom of Education

Freedom of education, or in other words, the right to found private denominational schools, would finally be included in a new Constitution in 1848. This mainly happened because the liberals, led by Johan Rudolf Thorbecke (1798–1872), came to power in government in that year. The majority of Parliament accepted the freedom of education, but only if several conditions were met. Pressure was exerted to preserve the statement dating back to 1815: "Public education is a sub-

**46** Ruth van de Pol, "Het onderwijs vruchtbaar maken voor verstand en hart: Rapporten van het schooltoezicht, het publieke debat en wetgeving in de periode 1836–1863" (master's thesis, Leiden University, 2014).

**47** Philip J. Idenburg, *Schets van het Nederlandse schoolwezen* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1964), 89–90.

ject of continuous care for the Government."[48] The government agreed; it also included a new section, which read: "Everywhere in the Kingdom the Government shall provide sufficient public primary education."[49] With these statements it was established that a quantitative increase of private education would not threaten the dominant position of public education. With these additions, the main objections to modifying the constitutional article on education were resolved, and the new clause passed in both Houses with only a few votes against it.

The freedom of education desired by Catholics became a reality. For their part, the liberals had succeeded in reducing the concentration of power in the national government and shifting the responsibility to make decisions to the lower authorities and individual citizens.[50] From the way the education article was debated in parliament, the legislator certainly did not have a non-religious public school in mind. The constitutional article was more against a certain way of dealing with the content of subjects, rather than excluding certain subjects.[51] However, not all parties agreed with this interpretation of the "neutrality" clause, which now had become part of the education article of the Constitution. It read: "The organization of public education shall be arranged by the law, with due respect of everyone's religious concepts." The disagreement became apparent when the new constitutional article on education had to be translated into a new law on primary education.

## The "Christian and Societal Virtues" of 1857

The acceptance of the Constitution of 1848 meant that the law on education of 1806 had to be replaced. It would take until 1855 before a draft law was tabled that had the support of a majority in parliament. Education was "made in service of the enhancement of morality and religion" and relative neutrality was introduced: the teachers should refrain "from educating, doing or not doing something that is harmful for the religious concepts of the denomination or denominations whereto the school-going children belong."[52] In a previous draft, absolute neutrality was still mentioned: the teacher was not permitted to harm any religious group, whereby it did not matter whether or not children of such group were present at school.

**48** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving*, 296.
**49** Hoorn, *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving*, 327.
**50** Boekholt and Booy, *Geschiedenis van de school,* 144.
**51** Johannes T. Buys, *De grondwet: Toelichting en kritiek*, vol. 2 (Arnhem: Quint, 1887), 772.
**52** F. M. C. E. Koksma, *Het karakter van het openbaar lager onderwijs* (Utrecht: Van de Weijer, 1888), 20.

In the latter draft, the presence of certain religious denominations at school proved to be decisive. In this respect, then, the law was in line with the way schools worked in everyday practice.

The draft law of 1855 would have been accepted, but the king refused to sign it. He made this decision when, in 1856, part of the orthodox Protestant population expressed their complaints against the law on education, fearing a "de-Protestantization" of public education. That same year, the government's power about education fell into the hands of an orthodox Protestant minister, Justinus van der Brugghen (1804–1863), who opted not for the re-profiling of the Protestant character of public education, but for the freedom to establish private denominational schools. It was therefore stated in a draft law on primary education that, if "the children are withheld from visiting public school by virtue of religious objections from the parents," there should be an option to found private denominational schools. The state should thereby aid by means of providing subsidy. In accordance with the desires of the proponents of the general Christian public school, article 21 of the draft also included a provision that public education should be at the service of "the development of the mental capacities of the children as well as of their education to all Christian and societal virtues." The teacher should once again refrain from teaching, doing, or not doing things that were in violation of the respect due to the religious concepts of others. Religious education was in the hands of religious denominations that could even have classrooms at their disposal "outside school hours." Article 16 of the draft established that in each municipality a "sufficient number of schools, accessible to all children, without distinction of religious conviction" should be available.

The draft clearly had the nature of a compromise. The objective was to satisfy both the majority and the minority. But the possible provision of state subsidy to private denominational schools for meeting the objections of the minority did not stand a chance. This idea was rejected in the end. To assure the majority that the public school of 1857 was based on the same principles as that of 1806 and would remain accessible for children of all religious faiths, the Government maintained the stipulation in which a reference was made to the "Christian and societal virtues." However, this did not mean that one should interpret those "virtues" in the same way as in 1806.[53]

We should not attach too much value to the fact that the "Christian virtues" preceded the "societal" ones in 1857. The "virtues" of 1857 have more of a secularized focus than a religious, Christian meaning (as they had had in 1806). The min-

**53** Nan L. Dodde, *Het Nederlandse onderwijs verandert: Ontwikkelingen sinds 1800* (Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1983), 44.

ister responsible for the law of 1857 himself stated, in 1860, that the education of Christian virtues of 1806 should be regarded as an "education into Christianity." According to him, the law of 1806 prescribed "religious education, neutralized Christianity." At the state school of 1857, "no religious education, in whichever form, [was to] be taught"[54] That was a task for the church, and the state should stay out of it.

The idea of the 1857 Act was that public schools should adopt a more restrained attitude towards religion and philosophy of life than had been intended in 1806. But Van den Brugghen never opted for absolute neutrality or a non-religious school. Indeed, he advocated positive neutrality where teachers, even in a mixed school, could create a Christian atmosphere – even if they were acting as silent witnesses.[55] However, it is questionable whether he could clarify this in 1857. What was clear was that after the law was approved in 1857, the neutrality principle took on a more negative aspect than had been intended.[56]

## The Road to a Neutral Public School (1857 – 1878)

After 1857, the chameleon model still applied to education: the public school absorbed the color of its surroundings.[57] In many villages and towns, public schools adapted to the denomination predominant in a particular region. This strategy met local needs and avoided potential conflicts with parents. It could also mean that in some public schools the Bible was still read, even though, strictly speaking, this was not allowed. Even when Jewish students attended a school, it could happen that the Bible was used. The New Testament was then discussed by the teacher on Saturdays when Jewish children celebrated Sabbath. There are also cases in which the Bible was introduced in a public school to prevent the establishment of a new private denominational school. Furthermore, it was common – with the approval of the school inspection – for school to begin or end with a prayer.[58]

A strategy based on adaptation to local circumstances not only occurred in Protestant regions but was as often used in the provinces of Noord-Brabant and Limburg, where until the beginning of the twentieth century many public schools

**54** Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, "Herziening van eenige artikelen der wet tot regeling van het lager onderwijs enz.," 65ste Vergadering (4 april 1905, Talma), p. 1576.
**55** Philipp Kohnstamm, *J. J. L. van der Brugghen* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, n.d.), 26.
**56** Pieter Oosterlee, *Geschiedenis van het christelijk onderwijs* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1929), 176.
**57** Bruin, *De Contourennota,* 246 – 78; Braster, *De identiteit van het openbaar onderwijs.*
**58** Rinze W. Feikema, *De totstandkoming van de schoolwet van Kappeyne: Bijdrage tot de kennis van de parlementaire geschiedenis van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Paris, 1929), 98.

had a Roman Catholic heritage.[59] In view of that, it is not surprising that in the decades before the financial equalization of 1920 – the year in which private denominational schools got the same subsidy from the state as public schools – in the south of the Netherlands the number of confessional schools compared to other parts of the country has always been extremely low.[60] Within this context it is also meaningful that the six Catholic Members of Parliament who voted in favor of the law of 1857 came from the south of the Netherlands, whereas the other six Catholic Members of Parliament who voted against the bill came from the North. It can be assumed that the people from the south were aware of the relative nature of neutrality of public education.

For that matter, the expected national growth of the number of private denominational schools lagged behind the expectations after the granting of freedom of education. In 1858, only thirteen Christian schools were built, in 1859 no more than six, and in 1860 we note the modest total of eleven. Public schools remained acceptable educational institutions for many parents. Furthermore, it was also the school where most of them received their own education, so they were quite familiar with it. The decline of the percentage of pupils who attended a public school over the period 1857–1876 was therefore modest: from 79 to 75 percent.[61]

## History Education after 1857

In 1806, history was not yet a compulsory part of the curriculum in public schools. That changed with the School Act of 1857, when history became a compulsory subject. Christian and societal virtues had not yet disappeared from the scene. Piety and obedience were still important virtues for the citizens of the Dutch state. But society had changed in the meantime. This had consequences for the public school and its curriculum.[62] The Belgian Revolution of 1830 led to Belgium's secession from the Netherlands and the country's independence. The revolutions of 1848 in France and Germany did not leave the Netherlands untouched, either. The role of the king was reduced, and democracy was strengthened with the introduction of a parliamentary system. The increase in trade, the beginning of industrialization, and the constitutional changes allowing freedom of speech, religion, and ed-

**59** Johannes T. Buys, *Studiën over staatkunde en staatsrecht* (Arnhem: P. Gouda Quint, 1889), 298.
**60** Bernard Kruithof, Jan Noordman, and Piet de Rooy, *Van opvoeding en onderwijs: Inleiding. Bronnen. Onderzoek* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1982).
**61** Braster, *De identiteit van het openbaar onderwijs*, 124–25.
**62** Jasper Jans, "Vaderlandse geschiedenis en de participerende burger: Onderwijs in burgerschap in het midden van de negentiende eeuw," *De negentiende eeuw* 36 (2012): 104–19.

ucation, also placed new demands on citizens. In these changing times, citizens would have to actively engage in the development of society. Children had to be taught to be productive, economically useful, and politically self-aware. For history education, this meant teaching pupils how society worked and what contribution they could make to its development. Passivity or instilling pride in the heroes of the past were no longer functional requirements for a prosperous future.

Once again, it was the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen that would be responsible for publishing a textbook on the history of the Netherlands, one that enjoyed a certain popularity after 1857.[63] The author was a teacher at a public school in Amsterdam. This was also the case with a National History reading book, which was especially written to be used in schools for the working class.[64]

The structure of this book was typical of the new era. The traditional part told the story about how the Netherlands used to be, and how it had become in 1865. But what was new was that the book started with how the Netherlands was governed. It explained the parliamentary system, it commented on the constitutional freedoms, and it gave an overview of relevant institutions in Dutch society.

The last section started with several types of educational institutions (with the universities mentioned first), followed by organizations which cared about the moral and material interests of the people, and it ended with institutions related with trade, industry, and agriculture. It may be noteworthy that churches were not mentioned in the category of institutions that addressed the moral needs of the people, and that the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen was ranked first in this category, followed by several organizations working to improve the living conditions of the working class. Even in his historical section, the author avoided talking about church and religion, seemingly taking a secular stance on history education.

Apart from this conspicuous absence of the church in this textbook, in general we must state that around 1860 a new type of history education emerged in schoolbooks, which moved away from passivity, obedience, and loyalty toward civic self-awareness and active participation in society.[65] This did not reduce the need to present historical facts and years in textbooks. On the contrary, a timeline in an 1871 history textbook, for example, included as many as forty-eight important years of

**63** Cornelis Vierhout, *De geschiedenis van Nederland, leesboek voor de volksschool* (Amsterdam: Fred. Muller; Deventer: A. H. de Lange; Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1860).

**64** Willem Degenhardt, *Vaderlandsche geschiedenis, een leesboek, ingericht met het oog op de behoefte der volksschool* (Amsterdam: C. L. Brinkman, 1865).

**65** Jans, "Vaderlandse geschiedenis en de participerende burger."

the Eighty Years' War with Spain.[66] Of course, the book mentioned the "famous" battles, but also the foundation of the first three Dutch universities – Leiden, Groningen, and Utrecht.

## The Tightening of the Neutrality of Public Schools (1878–1920)

The example of a history textbook in which universities are given prominence and churches are left out of the picture illustrates the fact that, by the end of the nineteenth century, thinking about biblical truths had changed with the progress of the sciences. Theological dogmas became less important than ethical principles. So-called *ethical modernism* gained significance within the Protestant church and in society.[67] Its adherents no longer believed in miracles or in the absolute authority of the Bible as a source, preferring instead to be guided by "ideals of duty, love of truth, development and education."[68]

A new generation of liberals, the so-called *social liberals*, were animated by this new modern philosophy of life. Consequently, the moment they gained political power, they would work to improve the quality of Dutch schools, promote school attendance, and tighten the neutrality of public education.[69] Teaching morality in the spirit of *De brave Hendrik* was no longer an important issue in public schools. The focus should be on the transfer of knowledge and the intellectual development of pupils instead. Education was also increasingly understood by the liberals as an instrument for individual social mobility.[70]

The new Primary Education Act of 1878 by the social liberal Jan Kappeyne van de Coppello (1822–1895) emphasized the idea of the public school as a neutral education institution. Although its legal goal did not change in the law of 1878, the public school continued its journey towards a more neutral destiny.

---

**66** Albert Nuiver and O. J. Reinders, *Vaderlandsche geschiedenis, schetsen en tafereelen voor de hoogste klasse der volksschool* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1871).

**67** Mirjam F. Buitenwerf-van der Molen, *God van vooruitgang: De popularisering van het modern-theologische gedachtegoed in Nederland (1857–1880)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017).

**68** Steven Blaupot ten Cate and Anthony Moens, *De wet op het lager onderwijs met aantekeningen* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1890), 52.

**69** Aart Strang, *Een historische verhandeling over de liberale politiek en het lager onderwijs van 1848 tot 1920* (Utrecht: Kemink & Son, 1930).

**70** Dolly Verhoeven, *Ter vorming van verstand en hart: Lager onderwijs in oostelijk Noord-Brabant ca. 1770–1920* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

A proposal from the orthodox Protestants in Parliament to remove the "Christian virtues" from the law and only mention societal virtues was rejected by fifty-three votes to twenty-eight. Thus, in the end, article 33 of the law still mentioned Christian and social virtues in the first paragraph and the respect owed to the religious notions of others in the second paragraph. The government, however, did add a third paragraph, which stipulated that public school teachers who neglected the previously mentioned duties could be suspended.[71] This certainly did not encourage public school teachers to introduce certain religious or political points of view in their classrooms.

The Liberal Education Act of 1878 was not well received among denominational groups because the increased quality requirements for schools also applied to denominational schools which, after all, could not rely on state subsidies. Opponents of public education even organized a petition to ask the king not to sign the law, but this initiative failed. It did mean, however, that Protestants and Catholics, who in previous decades have been involved in many vicious verbal battles, had miraculously found common ground in their joint opposition to the neutral public school influenced by secular modernism.

Thus, after the liberal government was replaced by a coalition cabinet, in which Protestants and Catholics cooperated for the first time, the first subsidies were provided to the schools that were governed by religious denominations. In the new Primary Education Act of 1889, a partial subsidizing of private denominational education became possible thanks to the government of the orthodox Protestant Mackay (1838–1909). When in 1901 another confessional coalition was formed that increased the public funding of private education, the battle between public and private denominational schools was reaching its final phase.

The earlier opposition of the liberals, and in later years of the socialists, against subsidizing private denominational schools, ceased when the Protestants and Catholics gave up their resistance against universal suffrage, and the liberals and socialists were able to obtain universal suffrage in exchange for the full funding of private denominational education. The financial equalization of public and private education was finally established in the new Constitution of 1917, and some years later in the Primary Education Act of 1920.

The article in the Primary Education Act of 1920 still contained the paragraphs which referred to the "education in all Christian and societal virtues" and "the respect due to the religious concepts of others." But with the growing number of Protestant and Catholic schools, which had their own religious educational profiles, the identity of public education had already developed in a more neutral di-

71 Feikema, *De totstandkoming van de schoolwet van Kappeyne*, 102.

rection. Modernism had left its mark, and socialism would also have an impact on the public school system. For example, from 1904 the Union of Dutch Teachers defended the absolute neutrality of public education, which meant that teachers should not express a preference for a particular religion in their classrooms, but neither for a particular political constellation.[72]

In the latter case, it meant that teachers could not be forced to support the monarchy. Or, to refer to a real world example, in 1909, public school teachers did not have to celebrate the birth of Crown Princess Juliana.[73] The underlying reason, of course, was that socialist educators might prefer a republic instead of a monarchy.

This principle of absolute neutrality was conceptualized in an amendment to the 1920 Act proposed by a socialist MP who also happened to be the president of the Union of Dutch Teachers. The idea of the amendment was that public teachers should refrain from teaching anything that was in violation of the respect due to the religious *and political* concepts of others. But it was rejected by fifty-one to twenty-four votes.

A second amendment, tabled by a communist MP, sought to replace the words "Christian and societal virtues" with only the words "societal virtues." This amendment was also rejected with seventy-three votes against and only two in favor.

With the enactment of the 1920 Act on January 1, 1921, the School War was over. The pacification of the Protestant, Catholic, liberal, and socialist factions of society had become a reality. The Netherlands got its educational system with distinctive features, such as the freedom to found private denominational schools and financial equality between public and private schools. This eventually led to a public education sector that, unlike those of many other countries, has a minority position: the percentage of public primary schools dropped from 70 in 1890, to 62 in 1910, to 45 in 1930, to 34 in 1950 and finally to 30 in 2023.[74]

---

**72** Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers, *De pacificatie van 1920: Rapport van de Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers met pleidooien voor en tegen de verplichte neutrale staatsschool* (Amsterdam, 1929), 41; Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers, *Maak front voor de Openbare School!* (Utrecht: J. C. ten Geuzendam, 1905).

**73** J. A. A. H. de Beaufort, "Vijftig jaren uit onze geschiedenis (1868–1918)," *De Gids* 92 (1928): 80–98.

**74** Braster, *De identiteit van het openbaar onderwijs*, 137, 160.

## The Battle of the Books

The codification of freedom of education in 1848 gave associations and foundations the freedom to establish schools with a denominational identity to their liking, which, by extension, also implied the freedom to choose textbooks and teaching materials, and to select teachers and pupils. With the growth of the private denominational sector after the increase of subsidies in 1889 and 1901 (the year in which it also became compulsory for children to go to school), there was a growing need to choose textbooks that suited the religious character of the newly founded schools. This need could be satisfied in two ways.

The first option was to adapt the textbooks already used in public schools. For example, if fairy tales were part of textbooks used in public schools, action had to be taken so as not to hurt the feelings of others. Of course, a bit of fantasy could be fun for kids. Fairy tales would make the books more attractive. But Protestants rejected such forms of superstition on biblical grounds.[75] So publishers came up with a strategy to adapt existing books to make them acceptable to a new readership. To give one example: Wolters of Groningen, a publisher of textbooks that were mostly used in public schools, commissioned an editor with a Protestant background to create a new version of a reading book that would be acceptable to Protestant children. It was a success: the first edition (1911) sold out in no time; the tenth edition was published in 1934.[76]

A second option was to write new textbooks from the perspective of a particular religion. The call for Catholic education led in 1844 to the founding of two educational congregations in Tilburg (by Joannes Zwijsen), and in Maastricht (by Louis H. Rutten). In 1846, the brothers founded their own publishing house in Tilburg, which published textbooks for Catholic schools, particularly the schools run by the congregation from 1850 onwards for "boys with poor and needy parents." The congregation in Maastricht was closely involved in the establishment of the Malmberg publishing house in Nijmegen in 1885, specializing in schoolbooks for primary education, which were bought by both the congregation's fifty schools and many other Catholic schools.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the publishers Zwijsen and Malmberg started making an inventory of the neutral textbooks already available for public schools, to adapt them for a Catholic

**75** Jacques Dane, "Protestantse sprookjes? De Toveracademie en het (orthodox-)protestantisme," *Pedagogiek* 25 (2005): 299–307.

**76** Jacques Dane, "'Neutraal onderwijs?' Onderwijsvrijheid en het schoolboek 1900–1940," *SGKJ Berichten* 102 (2022): 9–13.

readership.[77] Later, they also adapted their own Catholic textbooks for being used in public schools.[78]

With the funding of schools of different denominations, the need for a diverse supply of textbooks increased. The position of the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen as main provider of moral schoolbooks for all was weakened. Several publishers, in the north and south of the Netherlands, were eager to provide schools with textbooks acceptable to children of (orthodox) Protestant, Catholic, or non-religious parents.

After the introduction of the Compulsory Education Act in 1900, which stated that all children were supposed to be present in the classrooms and all of them should be taught simultaneously, publishers could count on a steady demand for textbooks. The diversity in content is clearly visible when we zoom in on the category of history textbooks.

As we have said before, the Netherlands was built on pillars. Supporters of the two denominational pillars were closely associated with the Protestant and Catholic streams in Dutch education, while those who felt at home with the socialist and general/liberal pillars preferred public schools. These pillars also represented different ideas about history – and because there were also different publishing houses, there would be textbooks with different stories about the Netherlands as a nation, its heroes, and its historical events.

In the liberal education law of 1878, there were no changes with respect to the subjects that had to be taught at the primary school. What had to be done with history was explained as follows:[79]

> History as a subject is limited to national history. One should not demand too much of the young mind, nor impose too heavy a burden on the teacher. Complete treatment of national history should therefore not be given at primary school. It is enough if the child learns in which country it lives, and to which people it belongs. The Batavians and Julius Caesar, the Frankish Empire and even the times of the Counts can provide material for instructive and entertaining stories, but imprinting dates and names that are forgotten soon after leaving school is of no use. Only that part of national history, which gives the pupil a comprehensible

---

**77** Jacques Dane, K. Ghonem-Woets, R. Ghesquière, P. Mooren, and J. J. H. Dekker, "For Religion, Education and Literature: A Comparative Study of Changes in the Strategy and Profile of Traditionally Religious Publishing Houses in Belgium and the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century," *Paedagogica Historica* 42 (2006): 707–26.

**78** Verhoeven, *Ter vorming van verstand en hart,* 302–13; Pieter Calje, "Onderwijs in het tijdperk van de natiestaat," in *Limburg: Een geschiedenis,* vol. 3, ed. Paul Tummers (Maastricht: Koninklijk Limburgs Geschied- en Oudheidkundig Genootschap), 323–54.

**79** Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Vergaderjaar 1877–1878, Kamerstuk 130, nr. 3, "Herziening der wet van 13 Augustus 1857 tot regeling van het lager onderwijs," Memorie van Toelichting (March 1, 1878, Kappeyne), 13.

> overview of the development of the Dutch state and teaches him the great deeds of the ancestors, by whose perseverance, under the leadership of Orange, our independent nationhood was founded, deserves the broader development which, as the means to arouse a warm patriotism, should be part of the national education in the people's school.

History in the primary school is about the history of the nation. Not all topics had to be dealt with, so teachers could make choices, and skip topics that could be controversial. Memorizing dates or names was not recommended, but telling stories that aroused patriotism was. Speaking about the House of Orange seemed to be compulsory, probably because it was assumed that liberal, Protestant, and Catholic groups would be united in their acceptance of the king. But we must also note that in the explanation of the law there is no specific reference made to the Eighty Years' War. This was probably intentional, because the Revolt against Philip II was not everyone's idea of the most glorious moment in Dutch history.[80]

In a history textbook that was published by the congregation in Tilburg in 1893, the Revolt was described as follows: "a revolt against the Pope and the Church, which has left the most terrible disasters and misery and robbed millions of people of their greatest treasure, the only beatific faith."[81] The Eighty Years' War was not seen as a battle for the liberation of the Netherlands, but as the downfall of the true faith. William of Orange was not a hero, but a villain, while his adversary Philip II was an outstanding monarch of great virtue. The troops of the prince of Orange plundered, looted, murdered, kidnapped people, set fires, and in particular, they targeted Catholic priests and monks. Their atrocities were described with horrifying details on many pages of the textbooks.[82]

In contrast, Protestant history books spoke of Spanish atrocities and oppression by Philip II, who was blinded by his superstitious faith from Rome. In these booklets William of Orange was the hero, the father of the fatherland, and the final Dutch victory over the Spanish oppressors was a miracle provided by God.[83]

In the neutral textbooks, the focus was on the unity of the nation. In these textbooks the writers avoided taking sides with either the Catholic or Protestant reli-

---

**80** Houwelingen and Dane, *1572: De geboorte van Nederland in het geschiedenisonderwijs*.

**81** Frater Tharcisius Bogaers, *Schets onzer vaderlandsche geschiedenis voor de hoogste klas der lagere school* (Tilburg: Drukkerij van het RK Jongensweeshuis, 1893), 78. Quoted in: Judith Geudens, "De vorming van de jonge Nederlander: De katholieke, regionale en nationale identiteit in het geschiedenisonderwijs van de fraters van Tilburg, 1868–1917" (master's thesis, Leiden University, 2020).

**82** Geudens, *De vorming van de jonge Nederlander*, 24.

**83** Berdine de Bruin, "Om het behoud van de eigen identiteit: Inhoud en doel van de vaderlandse geschiedenisboekjes voor de lagere scholen 1880–1940" (master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2008).

gion. Mistakes were made by all sides. In fact, with their books these authors hoped to contribute to a reconciliation between the Catholic and Protestant inhabitants of the Netherlands. Tolerance, according to the writers of these neutral textbooks, was an important lesson learned from history.[84]

## History Education in 1918

A content analysis of history textbooks in the period between 1880 and 1940 may show clear differences between the stories that could be told in public, Protestant, and Catholic schools. But to get a glimpse of what really was going on inside classrooms, we should read the reports made by school inspectors. The year 1918 is perfect for this, because in this year all inspectors were given the assignment to report about the state of the art with respect to the subject of history in primary education.[85] Unfortunately, studying the inspection reports yields a disconcerting story, with disappointing conclusions about the usefulness of history education.

The report on history as a primary school subject consisted of three parts: one for each inspection district. In the southern provinces, the Catholic part of the first district, it was noticed that in relatively many areas the subject was not taught systematically. The inspectors were not satisfied with the knowledge gained. It could all be done much better.

To stimulate historical interest and the development of students' character, it was especially recommended to treat the great personalities as the centerpieces of an era, make use of the vividness of visual representations, and give warm and inspiring lectures. Lectures could be given using wall charts, and this educational material was not lacking in classrooms, but when pupils were asked how the charts were used, the answer was "as decoration" and not as teaching tools.

Another problem was that teachers were insufficiently prepared to teach history. Whether the attention to history as a subject had achieved results in terms of its purpose, that is, intellectual and moral education, could not be answered in district 1.

In the second inspection district, which was localized in the western and central parts of the Netherlands, history education was not in the best shape, either. Most teachers knew little about history and did not know their way around it. Some teachers at public schools even suggested that history should be eliminated as a primary education subject.

**84** Bruin, "Om het behoud van de eigen identiteit," 28.

**85** Onderwijsverslag, 1918.

In Christian schools, there was more enthusiasm for the course and more time was devoted to it. An advantage of Christian schools was that there was also an interest in biblical history. These schools, according to the inspection, were also not as timid as public schools to show that God played a role in the history of the Dutch people and the house of Orange.

In general, it was noted that the pupils were far too passive in history: too much was told by the teachers and there was no independent activity. In district 2 it was also emphasized that the biographical method for teaching history was more successful than merely memorizing names and years. The cultural-historical approach as part of a new pedagogy, with less attention to wars, and starting with everyday matters and then ending in the past, was not recommended, however.

In the third inspection district, the north and east of the Netherlands, the subject of history was considered too difficult for primary education. It offered too little satisfaction because the knowledge evaporated too quickly. In fact, the subject could only be taught with enthusiasm if it was linked to a philosophy of life.

Another inspector noted that everyday events are also history, even though these events are not yet recorded in a booklet with dates and names to memorize. Focusing on regional history or linking everyday events to world history was recommended to encourage a love of history. Furthermore, after comparing public and private denominational schools, it was noted that different books were used, but that in private education, lecturing was more often chosen as a method, while in public education the focus was generally on the textbook.

Additionally, in the north and east, attempts had been made to replace the old-fashioned learning of names and facts with the so-called history of civilization. However, this approach was quickly abandoned because it was not successful. In this respect, an elderly superintendent remarked that not much had changed when he compared history education in his time and the present, except for better textbooks and more beautiful historical wall charts. Those wall charts were then also said to be underused; but they should also support the teacher's stories.

It was agreed that giving lectures should be the main form of history teaching; in this regard, the textbook was merely a surrogate, and there was a danger that lazy teachers could use textbooks to replace oral recitations. In that case, the inspectors conclude, textbooks would do more harm than good.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to answer the question of how the current educational system, with its distinguishing features related to the handling of religious diversity, came into being. We have seen that with the pursuit of national unity, a public

school was designed that should pay attention to the development of "social and Christian virtues." These words, included in the primary education laws of 1806, 1857, 1878, 1889 and 1920, would not change. However, their meaning did.

Under pressure from orthodox Protestants and Catholic groups, the general Christian public school of 1806 developed in the direction of a neutral institution which, from the introduction of compulsory education, would increasingly be flanked by private schools with a Protestant or Catholic identity.

The religious diversity typical of Dutch society from the start of the national educational system was accommodated in juxtaposed pillars. The schools of these pillars developed separate curricula. Conceptions of Dutch identity were laid down in Protestant, Catholic, and neutral textbooks that contained different narratives about the history of the Dutch nation-state.

In 1918, however, the way that history was taught in schools did not meet in practice the quality criteria envisioned by the government and its education inspectors. Pupils were not being provided, or not sufficiently provided, with knowledge of Dutch history, and the formation of a national character or a shared identity did not come to pass.

When Queen Beatrix gave her speech in the United States of America, she reverted to the old idea that the Netherlands was a Protestant nation, where schoolmasters told others with a raised finger what was right and wrong. Her daughter-in-law Maxima said, after her first introduction to her new homeland, "The Dutchman does not exist." By this she meant to say that there are many kinds of Dutch people, but her statement received a lot of criticism. The general idea was that the Netherlands did indeed have a national identity, but only a few could tell exactly what it was. The role schools in the Netherlands can play in fleshing out that identity, and the extent to which textbooks can be of service in doing so, is a question for further research.

## References

Beaufort, J. A. A. H. de. "Vijftig jaren uit onze geschiedenis (1868 – 1918)." *De Gids* 92 (1928): 80 – 98.

Blaupot ten Cate, Steven, and Anthony Moens. *De wet op het lager onderwijs met aantekeningen.* Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1890.

Boekholt, Pieter Th. F. M. "De onderwijswet van 1801 en het begin van de Staatszorg voor het onderwijs in Nederland." In *Tweehonderd jaar onderwijs en de zorg van de Staat*, edited by Pieter Th. F. M. Boekholt, Hans Van Crombrugge, N. L. Dodde, and Jeffrey Tyssens. Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000.

Boekholt, Pieter. "Op zoek naar de kinderlectuur van rond 1800." In *Tot volle waschdom: Bijdragen aan de geschiedenis van de kinder- en jeugdliteratuur*, edited by Berry Dongelmans, Netty van Rotterdam, Jeroen Salman, and Janneke van der Veer, 87 – 100. Utrecht: Biblion, 1999.

Boekholt, Pieter Th. F. M., and Engelina P. De Booy. *Geschiedenis van de school in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen tot aan de huidige tijd.* Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987.

Bogaers, Frater Tharcisius. *Schets onzer vaderlandsche geschiedenis voor de hoogste klas der lagere school.* Tilburg: Drukkerij van het RK Jongensweeshuis, 1893.

Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers. *Maak front voor de Openbare School!* Utrecht: J. C. ten Geuzendam, 1905.

Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers. *De pacificatie van 1920: Rapport van de Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers met pleidooien voor en tegen de verplichte neutrale staatsschool.* Amsterdam, BNO, 1929.

Braster, Sjaak. *De identiteit van het openbaar onderwijs.* Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1996.

Braster, Sjaak. "Het openbaar onderwijs als kameleon." In *Tot burgerschap en deugd: Volksopvoeding in de negentiende eeuw*, edited by Nelleke Bakker, Rudolf Dekker, and Angelique Janssens, 123 – 37. Hilversum: Verloren, 2006.

Braster, Sjaak. *Passie en pragmatisme: De onderwijsinspectie en de opkomst en ondergang van het klassikaal onderwijs.* The Hague: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2012. Accessed November 7, 2023. http://hdl.handle.net/1765/32925

Braster, Sjaak, and Nan Dodde. "Compulsory Education in the Netherlands: A Problem in the Nineteenth Century and a Solution in the Twentieth Century." In *A Significant Social Revolution. Cross-Cultural Aspects of the Evolution of Compulsory Education,* edited by James Anthony Mangan, 21 – 35. London: Woburn, 1994.

Bruin, Andries A. *Het ontstaan van de schoolstrijd.* Barneveld: Bolland, 1985.

Bruin, Berdine de. "Om het behoud van de eigen identiteit: Inhoud en doel van de vaderlandse geschiedenisboekjes voor de lagere scholen 1880 – 1940." Master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2008.

Buijnsters, Piet J., and Leontine Buijnsters-Smets. *Bibliografie van Nederlandse school- en kinderboeken, 1700 – 1800.* Zwolle: Waanders, 1997.

Buitenwerf-van der Molen, Mirjam F. *God van vooruitgang: De popularisering van het modern-theologische gedachtegoed in Nederland (1857 – 1880).* Hilversum: Verloren, 2017.

Buys, Johannes T. *De grondwet: Toelichting en kritiek.* Vol. 2. Arnhem: Quint, 1887.

Buys, Johannes T. *Studiën over staatkunde en staatsrecht.* Arnhem: P. Gouda Quint, 1889.

Calje, Pieter. "Onderwijs in het tijdperk van de natiestaat." In *Limburg: Een geschiedenis*, vol. 3, edited by Paul Tummers, 323 – 54. Maastricht: Koninklijk Limburgs Geschied- en Oudheidkundig Genootschap, 2015.

Cruyningen, Arnout J. P. H. van. *Van Hortense tot Amalia: negen koninginnen en een kroonprinses.* Utrecht: Uitgeverij Omniboek, 2021.

Dane, Jacques. "'Neutraal onderwijs?' Onderwijsvrijheid en het schoolboek 1900 – 1940." *SGKJ Berichten* 102 (2022): 9 – 13.

Dane, Jacques. "Protestantse sprookjes? De Toveracademie en het (orthodox-)protestantisme." *Pedagogiek* 25 (2005): 299 – 307.

Dane, Jacques, K., R. Ghonem-Woets, P. Mooren Ghesquière, and J. J. H. Dekker. "For Religion, Education and Literature: A Comparative Study of Changes in the Strategy and Profile of Traditionally Religious Publishing Houses in Belgium and the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century." *Paedagogica Historica* 42 (2006): 707 – 26.

Degenhardt, Willem. *Vaderlandsche geschiedenis, een leesboek, ingericht met het oog op de behoefte der volksschool.* Amsterdam: C. L. Brinkman, 1865.

Delpher. "Nineteenth Century Schoolbooks." Accessed November 7, 2023. https://geheugen.delpher.nl/en/geheugen/pages/collectie/Schoolboekjes+uit+de+negentiende+eeuw

Dodde, Nan L. *"Een speurtocht naar samenhang." Het rijksschooltoezicht van 1801 tot 2001.* The Hague: SDU, 2001.

Dodde, Nan L. *Het Nederlandse onderwijs verandert: Ontwikkelingen sinds 1800.* Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1983.

Eck, P. L. Van. *De openbare lagere school en de bijbel in de 19e eeuw.* Groningen/Batavia: Wolters, 1938.

Ellemers, Jo E. "Pillarization as a Process of Modernization." *Acta Politica* 31 (1996): 524–38.

Ende, Adriaan van den. *Geschiedkundige schets van Neêrlands schoolwetgeving.* Deventer: De Lange, 1846.

Ende, Adriaan van den. *Handboek voor onderwijzers op de openbare lagere scholen binnen het Bataafsche Gemeenebest.* Vol. 1. Amsterdam: n.p., 1803.

Feikema, Rinze W. *De totstandkoming van de schoolwet van Kappeyne: Bijdrage tot de kennis van de parlementaire geschiedenis van Nederland.* Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1929.

Geudens, Judith. "De vorming van de jonge Nederlander: De katholieke, regionale en nationale identiteit in het geschiedenisonderwijs van de fraters van Tilburg, 1868–1917." Master's thesis, Leiden University, 2020.

Hake, Barry J. "The Making of Batavian Citizens: Social Organization of Constitutional Enlightenment in The Netherlands, 1795–98." *History of Education* 23 (1994): 335–53.

Halstead, Mark. "Voluntary Apartheid? Problems of Schooling for Religious and Other Minorities in Democratic Societies." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 29 (1995): 257–72.

Hart, Joep de Hart. "Pretpark Hollandia: over enkele veranderingen in het burgerlijke waardepatroon." In *De goede burger: Tien beschouwingen over een morele categorie*, edited by Paul Dekker and Joep de Hart. The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2005.

Hoorn, I. van. *De Nederlandsche schoolwetgeving voor het lager Onderwijs, 1796–1907.* Groningen: Noordhoff, 1907.

Idenburg, Philip J. *Schets van het Nederlandse schoolwezen.* Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1964.

Israel, Jonathan I. *De Republiek, 1477–1806.* Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2001.

Jans, Jasper. "Vaderlandse geschiedenis en de participerende burger: Onderwijs in burgerschap in het midden van de negentiende eeuw." *De negentiende eeuw* 36 (2012): 104–19.

Kohnstamm, Philipp. *J. J. L. van der Brugghen.* Amsterdam: Ten Have, n.d.

Koksma, F. M. C. E. *Het karakter van het openbaar lager onderwijs.* Utrecht: Van de Weijer, 1888.

Kruithof, Bernard, Jan Noordman, and Piet de Rooy. *Van opvoeding en onderwijs: Inleiding. Bronnen. Onderzoek.* Nijmegen: SUN, 1982.

Laan, Harry van der Laan. "Nederlandse schoolboeken in de vroege negentiende eeuw: De productie en verspreiding van schoolboeken tijdens de onderwijshervormingen." *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis* 8 (2001): 153–70.

Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen. *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen: Een schoolboek.* Vol. 1. Haarlem: A. Loosjes Pz., 1791.

Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen. *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen: Een schoolboek.* Vol. 2. Haarlem: Wed. A. Loosjes Pz., 1798.

Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen. *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen: Een schoolboek.* Vol. 3. Haarlem: Wed. A. Loosjes Pz., 1834.

Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen. *Levensschetsen van vaderlandsche mannen en vrouwen uit de zuidelijke provinciën: Een schoolboek.* Leiden: Du Mortier; Deventer: J. de Lange; Groningen: J. Oomkes, 1828.

Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen. *Trap der jeugd.* 11th ed. Leiden: D. du Mortier and Son; Deventer: Jan Hendrik de Lange, 1827 (1791).

Mijnhardt, Wijnand W., and A. J. Wichers, eds. *Om het Algemeen Volksgeluk: Twee eeuwen particulier initiatief 1784 – 1984.* Edam: Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, 1984.

Noordam, Nicolaas F. "De 'christelijke en maatschappelijke deugden' van onze eerste schoolwetten." *Pedagogische Studiën* 43 (1966): 289 – 303.

Nuiver, Albert, and O. J. Reinders. *Vaderlandsche geschiedenis, schetsen en tafereelen voor de hoogste klasse der volksschool.* Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1871.

Oosterlee, Pieter. *Geschiedenis van het christelijk onderwijs.* Haarlem: Bohn, 1929.

Pol, Ruth van de. "Het onderwijs vruchtbaar maken voor verstand en hart: Rapporten van het schooltoezicht, het publieke debat en wetgeving in de periode 1836 – 1863." Master's thesis, Leiden University, 2014.

Reinsma, Riemer. *Scholen en schoolmeesters onder Willem I en II.* The Hague: Voorheen Van Keulen Periodieken, 1965.

Ruggenberg, Rob. "Zo leefden Nederlanders in Nieuw-Amsterdam." *Manhatan.* Accessed November 7, 2023. http://www.manhatan.nl/frames-nieuwamsterdam.html.

Schoemaker, Bobbie O. *Gewijd der jeugd voor taal en deugd: Het onderwijs in de Nederlandse taal op de lagere school, 1750 – 1850.* Utrecht: LOT, 2018.

Strang, Aart. *Een historische verhandeling over de liberale politiek en het lager onderwijs van 1848 tot 1920.* Utrecht: Kemink & Son, 1930.

Sturm, Johan, Leendert Groenendijk, Bernard Kruithof, and Julialet Rens. "Educational Pluralism: A Historical Study of So-Called 'Pillarization' in the Netherlands, Including a Comparison with Some Developments in South African Education." *Comparative Education* 34 (1998): 281 – 97.

Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. Vergaderjaar 1877 – 1878. Kamerstuk 130, nr. 3. "Herziening der wet van 13 Augustus 1857 tot regeling van het lager onderwijs." Memorie van Toelichting. March 1, 1878, Kappeyne, p. 13.

Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. "Herziening van eenige artikelen der wet tot regeling van het lager onderwijs enz. 65ste Vergadering, April 4, 1905, Talma, p. 1576

Veldheer, Vic. "Deugdzaam staatsburgerschap: de negentiende eeuw." In *De goede burger: Tien beschouwingen over een morele categorie*, edited by Paul Dekker and Joep de Hart. The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2005.

Verhoeven, Dolly. *Ter vorming van verstand en hart: Lager onderwijs in oostelijk Noord-Brabant ca. 1770 – 1920.* Hilversum: Verloren, 1994.

Vierhout, Cornelis. *De geschiedenis van Nederland, leesboek voor de volksschool.* Amsterdam: Fred. Muller; Deventer: A. H. de Lange; Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1860.

Wester, Hendrik. *Schoolboek over de geschiedenissen van ons vaderland.* 9th ed. Leiden: D. du Mortier; Deventer: J. H. de Lange; Groningen: J. Oomkens, 1827.

John Exalto

# Bridge between Tradition and Situation: Titus M. Gilhuis and the Changes in Confessional Education in the Netherlands, 1945 – 1985

## Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the changes in confessional education in the Netherlands during the period from roughly 1945 to 1985. I describe these changes through an outline of the developmental trajectory of one of the key figures in Protestant denominational schooling. The changes in his thinking about Christian education reflect the transformations that we can observe in the entire confessional schooling during this period.

I have chosen this case because it provides a meaningful addition to the existing historiographic narrative of confessional education, which predominantly focuses on increasing government involvement, internal and external secularization, and a flattening of Christian identity. Threat and defense play a significant role in this narrative. By closely examining how the participants themselves constructed their own narrative in response to these new developments, we add depth to the historiography and align with recent studies on Dutch education in this period. In a broader sense, this chapter tests the influential proposition by the Dutch-American historian James Kennedy that the Dutch elites in the 1960s accommodated the rapid modern developments to the extent that they partly facilitated and even stimulated them. They believed that modernization was inevitable and that it was better to move in sync with the modern youth than to be left behind by them.[1]

This chapter follows a chronological, thematic structure. The focus is on the evolution of Titus Menno Gilhuis (1914 – 1990), which I will portray based on his publications. The main question is how he situated confessional education ideologically, pedagogically, and didactically within a changing context. I limit myself to his most significant works, published as standalone writings with a popular character, as they were intended to directly engage with the field of education. Gilhuis's work did not go unnoticed: several publications went through multiple reprints

1 James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1995).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-011

and often sparked further discussions. The choice of Gilhuis is not based on his originality or groundbreaking ideas. However, in his time, Gilhuis was a prominent figure in confessional, more specifically, Protestant denominational education, evident in his commentaries on education featured on the front page of the newspaper *Trouw* between 1953 and 1963.

The period 1945–1985 was a time of rapid changes for the Netherlands, as well as for the entire Western world. This also applied to denominational education, which before the war was in self-imposed isolation to a much greater extent than it was afterwards. Societal and cultural developments such as individualization, secularization, and multiculturalism were also evident in denominational circles. From the 1960s onwards, private education underwent some significant transformations. The implicitness of pillarization gradually disappeared, ecclesiastical boundaries lost their plausibility, ecumenism, the Third World, and peace education came into focus, and heaven was no longer located at the horizon of earthly life but in the nearby, intra-worldly future. In this context, leaders had to reconsider and redefine their positions. This was also true for Titus Gilhuis.

## A Neo-Calvinist Environment

Titus Menno Gilhuis was born in Hardenberg in the province of Overijssel, located in the northeast of the Netherlands. His father, Pieter Gilhuis (1877–1954), had been the head of the Christian school there since 1907. After having worked at the Christian school in Bennekom and the Christian *mulo* (a type of secondary school) in Sneek, Gilhuis spent sixteen years in Hardenberg. In 1923, he became a teacher and assistant director of the newly established Rehoboth Reformed teacher training college in Utrecht. The school's identity and administrative dominance were shaped by the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, the Reformed Churches established in the nineteenth century as a result of the Secession, an orthodox split of the more liberal Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (the Dutch Reformed Church).

On the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1949, L.W.G. Scholten, the then director and former colleague of Gilhuis characterized education at Rehoboth. According to him, the education was founded on the principles of the "Calvinistic Reformation," focusing on nurturing national awareness, emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of the Dutch nation, and fostering a love for the royal family. This educational approach thus had a clear identity and a pronounced religious foundation. Another element was the emphasis on authority: "Authority

as a nation-forming element was traced back to its divine foundation."[2] In commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary, another former teacher wrote about the Rehoboth: "Imparting factual knowledge used to be highly important. The teacher training college resembled a 'diluted' secondary school with a sprinkling of pedagogy. Looking back, I believe that we did not adequately convey how knowledge should be presented in primary schools."[3] Although the specifics of the curriculum are unknown, there would likely have been significant focus on subjects such as biblical history, church history, and Dutch history. The treatment of pedagogy is also unclear. Gilhuis taught pedagogy, as well as Dutch and French. In 1929, he obtained his degree in pedagogy under Jan Waterink (1890–1966) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, who had recently been appointed as the (first) professor of pedagogy at this neo-Calvinist institution of higher education.[4]

The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was founded by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), leader of the *kleine luyden* (the "small folk," a term referring to the ordinary Reformed people) among the Reformed community, who, through an emancipation process, rose socially, politically, and economically. Kuyper worked to promote Christian education and establish independent, denominational schools. Thanks in part to his efforts, the long-standing *Schoolstrijd* ("School Struggle") ended when financial equality between public and private education was enshrined in law in 1920. Private confessional education soon surpassed public education.[5] Kuyper was an advocate of a pluralistic society, as he believed that various segments of society had the right to their own existence and expression. This, in his view, applied to the organization of their own education as well. Waterink and Gilhuis followed in his footsteps; like Kuyper, they were convinced that Re-

**2** Lubbertus W. G. Scholten, "De nationale betekenis van 'Rehoboth,'" in *25 jaar Rehoboth*, ed. B. van Ginkel (Utrecht: Rehoboth, 1949), 2–3.

**3** T. van Veen, *Rehoboth 1923–1973: Extra uitgave ter gelegenheid van het vijftigjarig bestaan der school* (Utrecht: Rehoboth, 1973), 17.

**4** For Waterink and the Neocalvinist pedagogy, see Johan C. Sturm, *Een goede gereformeerde opvoeding: Over neo-calvinistische moraalpedagogiek (1880–1950), met speciale aandacht voor de nieuw-gereformeerde jeugdorganisaties* (Kampen: Kok, 1988); Johan C. Sturm (ed.), *Leven en werk van prof. Dr. Jan Waterink, een Nederlandse pedagoog, psycholoog en theoloog (1890–1966)* (Kampen: Kok, 1991); Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden, Doret J. de Ruyter, and Leendert F. Groenendijk, "Jan Waterink (1890–1966): A Dynamic Dutch Pioneer of Special Education," *International Journal of Special Education* 24, no. 3 (2009): 21–28.

**5** John Exalto, *Van wie is het kind? Twee eeuwen onderwijsvrijheid in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2017).

formed principles were beneficial for society as a whole and should be promoted with conviction.[6]

Beyond the school environment, Pieter Gilhuis served as an elder in the Reformed Churches and was a board member of the Reformed Association for Alcohol Control. He was also active in the Reformed Workmen's Union Patrimonium.[7] He embodied a typical representative of the Reformed pillar, hailing from the *kleine luyden* and participating in an emancipation process through denominational institutions. Gilhuis came from a family of simple artisans and small livestock farmers in Sneek. He was the only one in his family to pursue further education. Through his marriage to Geurdina de Gooijer, he became part of a family that had received slightly more education. His father-in-law was a Reformed minister, and two brothers-in-law – married to his wife's sisters – were also heads of Christian schools. His own children ascended the social ladder further. Two sons studied theology, became ministers, and earned doctorates in theology at the Vrije Universiteit. One of his sons-in-law was the principal of a Christian secondary school in Leeuwarden, while another son-in-law, a doctoral minister, played a pivotal role as chairman of the Netherlands Christian Broadcasting Corporation in the developments of the Reformed pillar in the second half of the twentieth century.[8]

Titus followed in his father's footsteps, studying at the Rehoboth teacher training college and pursuing a long teaching career. Shaped within the Reformed Churches, the neo-Calvinist teacher training college, and the Reformed pillar, his views on education were undoubtedly influenced by these environments. Gilhuis attended the Rehoboth from 1930 to 1933 and only much later, in 1960, did he earn his history degree through evening studies at the Vrije Universiteit. He worked as a teacher in Pijnacker and The Hague. In 1942, he married Wilhelmina Gesina Nijenhuis (1912–1999), with whom he had four children. In 1944, he became the head of the Christian school in Heinenoord; he held the same position from 1949 in Weesp and from 1955 in Katwijk aan Zee. In 1959, he became a history teacher at the Christian Lyceum in Dordrecht. In 1965, he became the principal of the Christian Lyceum on Moreelsestraat in Amsterdam-Zuid, and in 1972, he started his last paid role as the academic senior lecturer in history didactics at the Vrije Universiteit. Here, he trained students who, after completing their history studies, obtained a teaching qualification. This was not always an easy task as

**6** Johan Sturm and Siebren Miedema, "Kuyper's Educational Legacy: Schooling for a Pluralist Society," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999), 238–47.

**7** *Trouw*, October 19, 1954.

**8** "Kwartierstaat Pieter Cornelis Gilhuis (1946–2005)," H. J. Michiel Wijers, accessed January 30, 2024, http://www.hjmwijers.nl/KTiUH/Gilhuis-PC-kwst.htm#kw02.

many students in this era tended to lean towards a Marxist societal and philosophical viewpoint.[9]

Gilhuis was not regarded as progressive at the Vrije Universiteit or in Christian teacher training colleges during the 1970s. Instead, his greatest influence was on the more conservative school boards and primary school teachers.[10] Gilhuis gained particular renown as the chairman of the Unie School en Evangelie (a Protestant NGO which was founded in 1879 as part of the school struggle, originally called Unie Een School met de Bijbel), a role he held from 1970 to 1982. It was primarily in this capacity that he developed his vision on Christian education in a changing societal context.[11] Gilhuis retired in 1982.

## In the Footsteps of the Forefathers

Shortly after the Second World War, Gilhuis began to make his presence felt in the public arena. He clearly followed in the path of the neo-Calvinist forefathers. In 1947, he authored a brochure by the Unie Een School met de Bijbel – of which he would become president years later – entitled *De christelijke school een noodwoning?* In that same year, he delivered a lecture at the Christian Teachers' Association's Pentecost Conference in Leeuwarden, which was later published in 1948 as *Isolement èn apostolaat.*[12] Both publications emphasized the importance of the independent Christian school and rejected the alternative of the Christian state school. Gilhuis aimed to continue the trajectory of denominational segregation.

**9** D. G. Bijl, H. G. Leih, and H. J. van Maanen, eds., *In dienst: De Unie en Gilhuis – Gilhuis en de Unie* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1982), 18.

**10** Cf. Maurits Groen and Arie Wilschut, "'Dat gaat langzaam, dat gaat veel langzamer': Gesprek met drs. T. M. Gilhuis over polarisatie," *VU Magazine* 5, no. 7 (1976): 29–33.

**11** Klaas de Jong Ozn., "Gilhuis, Titus Menno," in *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme,* vol. 6, ed. Cornelis Houtman (Kampen: Kok, 2006), 91–93; Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst.* For the process of emancipation of the Reformed circle, especially via education, see Dick Th. Kuiper, *Tussen observatie en participatie: Twee eeuwen gereformeerde en antirevolutionaire wereld in ontwikkelingsperspectief* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 87–100; examples can also be found in John Exalto and Gert van Klinken, eds., *De protestantse onderwijzer: Geschiedenis van een dienstbaar beroep, 1800–1920* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2015).

**12** Titus M. Gilhuis, *De christelijke school een noodwoning?* ('s-Gravenhage: Unie Een School met de Bijbel, [1947]), 12–13. Cf. Klaas de Jong Ozn., *Een verhaal dat verdergaat: Geschiedenis van de Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs 1879–1979* (Amersfoort: Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs, 1999), 115. Titus M. Gilhuis, *Isolement èn apostolaat: Bijdrage tot de beantwoording van de vraag: De christelijke staatsschool of de vrije christelijke school?* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Sons, [1948]).

This stance put him in opposition to the postwar movement known as the *Doorbraak* (Breakthrough), which aimed to dismantle the prewar system of denominational segregation that had divided society into compartments, the so-called pillarization. According to the proponents of the *Doorbraak*, it was time for a new society in which Christian party politics and separate Christian schools were no longer desired. This vision took shape in a new political party, the Labor Party, in which Christians and non-Christians collaborated towards a social-democratic ideal. The *Doorbraak* also sought to abolish Christian denominational schools by offering Bible education in public schools, thereby working towards the apostolic and missionary task inherent in Christianity. The *Doorbraak* was inspired by the influential German theologian Karl Barth. Although the *Doorbraak* did not realize its ideals, it did spark an intense discussion in the 1940s in the field of education regarding the survival of denominational schools. The fact that this discussion engaged people's minds is evident from the approximately three hundred Christian teachers who transitioned from denominational to public education during that period.[13]

According to Gilhuis, it was not a new phenomenon to question the legitimacy of the denominational confessional school, which he framed as the "free Christian school." This questioning had already occurred during the time of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876), the father of the Protestant *volksdeel*, the Protestant segment of society in the nineteenth century. The concept of the independent Christian school is now, just as it was then, viewed by some Christians as a makeshift solution, a temporary dwelling. These Christians are critical and negative towards the Christian school as a separate entity alongside public schools: they see it as nurturing sectarianism, promoting a "sterile isolation," and sometimes even threatening to become a "counter-church" if it tries to proclaim the Gospel alongside the church. Above all, the independent Christian school lacks compassion for the needs of the Dutch child because it retreats into a shelter and closes its windows to the world. Therefore, say the critics, the Christian school should be no more than a shelter, a temporary dwelling that we should abandon once there is a new school for the entire nation, a school where Christianity serves as a guiding and spiritual force.

In response to this new challenge for Christian denominational education, Gilhuis initially sought answers that had been formulated in the past by proponents of the Christian community and education, such as Groen van Prinsterer and Abra-

**13** De Jong, *Een verhaal dat verdergaat*, 115; Peter Kromdijk, *Eenheid in verscheidenheid: Doorbraak in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk en de samenleving tijdens het interbellum* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017).

ham Kuyper. According to Gilhuis, these are questions that were already asked in their time, and they developed convincing answers that remain valid today. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, Groen van Prinsterer had concluded that, due to political developments, the Netherlands was no longer a Christian state. Consequently, he abandoned the ideal of a Christian public school in favor of the independent, the "free" Christian school. Kuyper consistently followed in Groen's footsteps by working towards the formation of a Christian community. Yet the ultimate goal of both Groen and Kuyper remained the re-Christianization of society, bringing the child into contact with the Bible. They aimed to achieve this by fully teaching the message of the cross on the independent Christian school – something that was no longer feasible in public schools due to the diversity of opinions. According to Gilhuis, their views and solutions also contained the answers for his own time:

> Whoever wishes to do something against the ongoing de-Christianization today – as we live amidst the demons that will increasingly grip the masses and the child of the people – in a country that will predominantly change in character due to technological advancements and ongoing industrialization, further de-Christianizing and dehumanizing man and his child – can only do so in the barbarism of our Western European society with the *full* Gospel.[14]

Interestingly, Gilhuis's concern about the de-Christianization of society was shared by proponents of the *Doorbraak* – even as early as 1945, immediately after the war, this was an important theme in education. According to Gilhuis, this de-Christianization could not be combated with the superficial religion taught in public schools, but only with the "totalitarian Gospel" of the independent Christian school – through the Christian *volksdeel*, that is, the Protestant pillarized part of society, the nation could be re-Christianized.

Ideas about the identity of the Protestant homeland occupied him during the same period when, in the spring of 1948, he published a report on the teaching of national history in Roman Catholic primary schools.[15] This report was released by the Willem de Zwijgerstichting, which aimed to strengthen the Protestant character of the Dutch nation and thereby advocated a form of Protestant nationalism. Gilhuis compared thirteen Roman Catholic textbooks and concluded that they focused more on church history than on national history. In line with the Amsterdam socialist pedagogue Gerrit van Veen (1880–1964), he considered the perspec-

**14** Gilhuis, *De christelijke school een noodwoning?*, 12–13.

**15** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Rapport in opdracht van de Willem de Zwijgerstichting uitgebracht over het vaderlandse geschiedenisonderwijs op de rooms-katholieke lagere scholen in Nederland* ('s-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1948; repr. 1949).

tive presented in these textbooks to be "nationally subpar."[16] The church was central to the narrative of national history in these textbooks. The process of Christianization and the Middle Ages garnered much more attention than the time of the Reformation. Figures like Luther and Calvin were portrayed as false teachers. The Protestant founders of the Netherlands were labeled opportunists. Gilhuis referred to "Roman Catholic religion" as a danger to democracy, highlighting that twentieth-century dictatorship first emerged in Catholic Italy – a significant accusation so shortly after the end of the Second World War. According to Gilhuis, only an active Protestantism could prevent us from falling under the sway of power-hungry Romanism once again.

Gilhuis's report received widespread distribution and was sent to eight hundred municipal governments. It was reprinted in 1949 and garnered considerable attention in the media. In the same year, one of the textbook authors discussed by Gilhuis, clergyman Thomas Doodkorte (1885–1954), a member of the Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Utrecht, responded with a brochure.[17] Doodkorte's arguments can be summarized as three main points. Firstly, he stated that the Netherlands has never been solely a Protestant nation; Catholics, among others, have always lived in this country and made their contributions. Doodkorte considered Gilhuis's assumption of a national Protestant past to be based on a fallacious premise. Secondly, Doodkorte argued that Catholics also have the right to their own perspective on the past. In this context, the Christianization process and the medieval period play a crucial role, showcasing the historical significance of Catholicism. Lastly, under the motto of freedom as a national virtue, Doodkorte pointed out that freedom of belief existed in the Netherlands, allowing for the coexistence of different viewpoints. He asserted that the Willem de Zwijgerstichting should not dictate how Catholics perceive history. Implying that imposing a historical perspective mirrored Nazi practices and would revive old anti-papal sentiments, Doodkorte was essentially saying that Catholics were as much full-fledged inhabitants of the country as anyone else, and had their place and history that they wanted to freely share.[18]

In 1950, a brochure by the Protestant history teacher Dr. J. C. H. de Pater (1887–1971) followed, and in November of that year, a brief commentary by the Catholic professor in history L. J. Rogier (1894–1974) was published in the newspaper *De*

**16** Gerrit van Veen, "Beschouwingen over het geschiedenisonderwijs," *Paedagogische Studiën* 18 (1937): 10–21.

**17** Thomas J. Doodkorte, *Nationaal beneden de maat?* (Tilburg: Drukkerij van het R.K. Jongensweeshuis, 1948).

**18** Cf. Karen Ghonem-Woets, *Boeken voor de katholieke jeugd: Verzuiling en ontzuiling in de geschiedenis van Zwijsen en Malmberg* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2011), 186, 193, 198.

*Tijd.*[19] Rogier mentioned that the quotes presented in Gilhuis's report surprised, irritated, and amused readers, but he pointed out that a selection from Protestant textbooks would elicit a similar reaction. The polemical exchange between Gilhuis, Doodkorte, and De Pater demonstrated, according to Rogier, that confessional textbooks were still influenced by nineteenth-century historical paradigms and were not aligned with contemporary historical scholarship.[20] Simultaneously – though Rogier skirted the issue somewhat – the polemic revealed that there existed a fundamental difference in the perspective on the nature of the Dutch nation. In 1953, the Catholic clergyman Carolus Pauwels rightfully highlighted this aspect when discussing several brochures from the Willem de Zwijgerstichting, referring to the Protestant segment of the population "that would like to represent the entire nation."[21] The polemical debate between Gilhuis, Doodkorte, and De Pater revealed that the sixteenth century was the battleground for their differing views, particularly concerning the role of William of Orange, the significance of Protestantism, and the interpretation of freedom of faith and conscience.

Gilhuis demonstrated himself as an advocate of history education that propagated Protestant nationalism and sought to imprint his views on education. He followed the same path of the forefathers in his brochures on the denominational Christian school, invoking figures like Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper, and viewing the Protestant *volksdeel* as the core of the nation from which societal re-Christianization could stem. Thus, Gilhuis positioned himself as a fervent defender of the pillarization model that came under criticism shortly after the Second World War and was increasingly challenged from within the Christian community itself.

## Didactic Profiling

In the 1950s, Gilhuis reiterated this viewpoint through a series of didactic publications. In 1952, he published a brochure about the daily Bible story in Christian schools. He believed that the Bible story often turned into a mere moral tale, conveying a few lessons and a pleasant narrative. However, according to him, the Bible story should center around Jesus Christ and possess a proclaiming nature: a proclamation of salvation and grace. Gilhuis asserted that the failure of Protestant

**19** J. C. H. de Pater, *Nationaal beneden de maat* ('s-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1950).
**20** Louis J. Rogier, "Nationaal geschiedenisonderwijs, een onverkwikkelijke oorlog," *De Tijd*, November 30, 1950.
**21** C. F. Pauwels O.P., "De kern van het debat: Gaat het gesprek tussen katholieken en protestanten wel diep genoeg?," *De Volkskrant*, September 19, 1953.

teachers in this regard had contributed to the process of secularization. Such a Bible story requires educators with strong convictions and a biblical way of life. By presenting this argument, Gilhuis seemed to assign the school a role almost akin to that of a church – specifically, the role of conveying the message that is unique to the Christian faith.[22]

Gilhuis was firmly convinced of the historical significance of the school struggle and emphasized, in a lesson plan on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Unie Een School met de Bijbel in 1954, that this had been a fight for freedom – the freedom of parents against the guardianship of the state. This theme remained a continuous topic in circles of denominational Christian education until the mid-1960s. Through historical narratives from the time of the school struggle, the foundation of the Unie, and stories of past fighters, Gilhuis aimed to approach the subject of the school struggle in a didactic manner, using storytelling.[23] In the 1950s and 1960s, he was especially engaged – in addition to his regular job – in developing didactic materials for national and church history, two fields for which he had a special affinity.

In the early 1950s, national history was his primary focus, aligning him with the prevalent didactic practices of his time. During this period, history education in the Netherlands, as well as in other European countries, was characterized by a focus on (religious) identity. Gilhuis's perspective on Protestantism as the core of the nation was not uncommon.[24] He published a wall chart with a corresponding booklet of historical years for primary schools, which highlighted the Golden Age, the House of Orange, and Protestant history.[25] The same approach was taken in the three-volume series *Hun naam leeft voort: Historisch leesboek voor de christelijke school*, which he co-authored with teacher Joh. van Hulzen. This series was published in 1951 and was in its fourth edition by 1956, making its way into numerous Protestant classrooms. The series aimed, according to its preface, to present engaging historical biographies that would linger in memory. The authors restricted

**22** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Venster op Jezus: De school met de Bijbel en de verkondiging* (Delft and Bandung: Uitgeverij Van Keulen, 1952).

**23** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Wachters bij de wissel: Schets van een les voor leerlingen van 12–14 jaar over de geboorte van het Volkspetitionnement en van De Unie "Een School met den Bijbel"* ('s-Gravenhage: Unie Een School met de Bijbel, 1954).

**24** See Arie Wilschut, *Beelden van tijd: De rol van historisch tijdsbewustzijn bij het leren van geschiedenis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2011), 10–18; cf. also Tina van der Vlies, *Echoing Events: The Perpetuation of National Narratives in English and Dutch History Textbooks, 1920–2010* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022).

**25** L. A. de Gans and Titus M. Gilhuis, *Vlug gekend met tekst en prent: GeÏllustreerde jaartallen voor de lagere school* (Groningen: Jacob Dijkstra, [1951]). On the wall map, see Hans Piena, "Van spel tot ernst: 300 jaar Canon van Nederland," *Volkskunde* 124, no. 1 (2023): 27–46.

themselves to forty-five lives of individuals "for whom God had prepared a place and task in the Netherlands, whether of a religious, political, military, or cultural nature." They justified the relatively high number of female individuals as an attempt to rectify the frequent disregard of women's significance in history education.[26] However, this emancipatory motive only manifested in seven of the forty-five biographies, and even then, they concerned political figures whose positions were attained through birth or marriage.

The series presented a familiar canon of figures who shaped Protestant history. The connection to the existing power structure is evident in the chapter dedicated to prewar Antirevolutionary Prime Minister Hendrikus Colijn (1869–1944), the political successor of Abraham Kuyper. Colijn is portrayed as a revered leader and depicted as a devout man, even though modern biographies assess him quite differently as a colonial administrator and a type of masculine leadership.[27] The series by Gilhuis and Van Hulzen still echoes the sentiments of the Protestant interbellum:

> He was a Christian statesman, the beloved leader of the anti-revolutionary people. When he addressed that people at large meetings, speaking simply and in terms everyone could understand, it felt a strong connection to him – that was the bond of faith. That people were loyal to him and loved him, regardless of how much his opponents maligned and slandered him. Slander and libel did not affect him; the people's loyalty refreshed his heart.[28]

In 1963, a new and more elaborate booklet with historical years was released, with the same focus as the earlier booklet. This meant that the seventeenth century took center stage, the nineteenth century received limited attention, and Protestant history formed the core of the narrative.[29] In the same year, Gilhuis co-authored two church history textbooks with a colleague, using the same method as in *Hun naam leeft voort:* biographical narratives in chronological order, selected to highlight Protestant profiling. Starting from Polycarpus and Augustine and progressing through Boniface in the Netherlands, Jan Hus, Geert Grote, and then treating Luther and Calvin, the series introduces Protestant faith heroes such as John Bunyan and Abraham Kuyper, before ending with Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft (1900–1985), the

**26** Titus M. Gilhuis and Joh. van Hulzen, *Hun naam leeft voort: Historisch leesboek voor de christelijke school*, 3 vols. (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1951), vol. 1, preface, 3–4.

**27** Herman Langeveld, "De canonisering van het Colijn-beeld, 1930–1990," *Oorlogsdocumentatie '40–'45* 10 (1999): 200–17; cf. Langeveld's biography *Hendrikus Colijn 1869–1944*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Balans, 1998 and 2004).

**28** Gilhuis and Van Hulzen, *Hun naam leeft voort*, vol. 3, 73.

**29** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Kort en goed: Repetitieboekje vaderlandse geschiedenis voor de christelijke school voor het vierde en vijfde leerjaar* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1963).

Dutch Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches, who was still alive at that time. This conclusion is meaningful because, although the series emanates a Protestant spirit and consequently exudes a degree of anti-papal sentiment, particularly when discussing the sixteenth century, it concludes with a positive account of the ecumenical movement under the title "That they all may be one." Gilhuis demonstrated here that he was somewhat less strictly Reformed than he was in the 1940s and was open to new developments, at least within Protestant circles.[30]

This was also evident in a presentation he gave in 1962 about the didactics of church history, in which he considered the ecumenical movement the most significant event of the twentieth century and negatively judged past church schisms. According to Gilhuis, church history was often treated with neglect, despite its crucial role in instilling love for the church. He once again highlighted the biographical method through storytelling as the primary didactic approach and pointed to similar exemplary figures as in *Getuigen van het Licht.* This time, he included a caution that this method should not lead to glorification of individuals: "Always be cautious about creating a black-and-white schema. For instance, when discussing Calvin, talk about Servetus and do not omit the fact that the reformer advocated for a much broader and more rigorous suppression during the gruesome witch trials of 1545, where thirty-four unfortunate individuals were tortured to death, an effort that went beyond the intentions of the Geneva Council."[31]

## Renewed Zeal

In the 1950s, the debate over isolation and *apostolaat*, the missionary openness to the world, would intensify and persist until the mid-1960s. The *Gereformeerde Kerken*, in which Gilhuis was deeply rooted, adhered to the idea of isolation, particularly in relation to the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* and the *Raad voor de Zaken van Kerk en School*, the Council for Church and School within it, which saw a missionary role for Christians in public education. Gilhuis often disagreed with the

**30** Gerrit van Heerde and Titus M. Gilhuis, *Getuigen van het Licht: Momenten uit de geschiedenis der kerk*, 2 vols. (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1963; second print without date), 2:90–99.

**31** Titus M. Gilhuis, "De jonge kerk volgt het Lam: Hoe behandelen we de Kerkgeschiedenis op de lagere school?" in *Kerkgeschiedenis en zendingsonderwijs: Verslag conferentie voor personelen* [sic] *van l.o.– en u.l.o.-scholen gehouden op 2 en 3 januari 1962 in het conferentieoord "Woudschoten" te Zeist*, ed. J. Wedzinga ('s-Gravenhage: Christelijk Paedagogisch Studiecentrum, [1962]), 5–36, quotation at 33.

policies of this Council.[32] The debate within denominational Christian education centered on preserving tradition on the one hand, and the necessity of educational innovation on the other. In addition to knowledge acquisition, the importance of character formation was acknowledged. Until that time, there had been little consideration for didactics in denominational schools – most of the attention had been focused on the political struggle for equal rights between religious and public education.

As this discussion began to unfold within denominational education, the process of secularization and the diversification of worldviews led to the gradual unraveling of pillarization, particularly visible from the second half of the 1960s. Christian education faced new challenges due to these changes, and actively sought answers. The focus shifted from socialization in a religious tradition to a more general religious education and attention to rituals. The entities that sustained denominational Christian education – associations, boards, administrations, staff, parents – quietly adapted to the new discourse of individualization. In society as a whole, the rights of the individual and their freedom of choice took center stage. The same process occurred in denominational Christian education, where collective militancy gave way to personal conviction, which only mattered if it was sincere, authentic, and individual. Affiliation with the pillars was no longer taken for granted. As Bram Mellink argued, an individualized religion thus transformed into a new form of group discipline.[33]

The process of individualization also sparked discussions about whether the dual, pillar-based structure should be abolished. Opinion leaders from within the denominational education community openly questioned the role of segmented education and wondered whether its inward focus and conserving effect remained desirable. Paradoxically, this discussion unfolded at a time when the final touches were being applied to the segmented system. School boards had long cooperated within pillar-based associations, which were now uniting under umbrella organizations for the sake of having a say in government policy, thereby gaining more influence over schools and their policies.[34] The process of individualization aligned with the self-development regime of the 1960s and manifested in education by emphasizing the personal faith and individual religious experience of Christian educators, rather than safeguarding tradition.

---

**32** L. Kalsbeek, *Theologische en wijsgerige achtergronden van de verhouding van kerk, staat en school in Nederland* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1976).

**33** Bram Mellink, *Worden zoals wij: Onderwijs en de opkomst van de geïndividualiseerde samenleving sinds 1945* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2014).

**34** Jan M. G. Thurlings, *Van wie is de school? Het bijzonder onderwijs in een veranderende wereld* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998), 81.

With the decrease in attention to tradition, the old concept of antithesis was increasingly set aside in favor of the ideal of making a contribution to this world. This manifested in a focus on the Third World, development of cooperation, and world peace. However, societal depillarization and the decline in church attendance did not lead to the abolition of denominational Christian education. By adapting to societal trends, faith-based education actually maintained a strong position. Even though parents were not necessarily all still religious, they appreciated Christian education because it not only emphasized academic achievements but also instilled values such as compassion.[35]

It was during this time of transformation that Titus Gilhuis assumed the role of chairman of the Unie School en Evangelie. He initiated the series *Cahiers voor het christelijk onderwijs*, which sparked an intensive process of reflection on the contemporary issues facing faith-based education. Gilhuis demonstrated in the 1970s that he was moving with the times, where the antithesis had been replaced by a focus on development cooperation, and where the mandate to make a meaningful impact in the world had become more important than Christian dogma per se. However, he continued to advocate strongly for the unique Christian school, as it was a place where the gospel could be proclaimed fully. He realized that secularization could not be stopped by the school, but he believed "that the Christian school could serve as a space to preserve and transmit biblical values in society, flawed as it might be."[36] The Christian school is a place where faith, doubt, and celebration occur, a place where there is not only counting but also telling. The Christian school was, to quote the title of one of his publications, "the playground of salvation," where justice on earth was promoted by opening the Holy Scriptures.[37]

Gilhuis made traditional school boards realize that in order to be a modern school, they did not have to abandon their identity; instead, they could infuse it with new energy by working from a place of personal engagement. Identity was receiving more attention than it had before. In his publications, Gilhuis played with a range of quotes from contemporary thinkers and theologians to support

**35** Mellink, *Worden zoals wij*; Mellink, "Having Faith: Religious Optimism in Dutch Parochial Schools during the 1960s as a Case for Secularisation," *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 1 (2013): 139–48; Wim de Jong, *Heer en meester: Vrijheid van onderwijs 1917–2017* (Woerden: Verus, 2017); Exalto, *Van wie is het kind?*.

**36** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Pleidooi voor een school met de Bijbel* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1979), 49.

**37** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Op de speelplaats van het heil: De school met de Bijbel en de gerechtigheid op aarde* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1973).

his case for Christian education.[38] His use of metaphors sometimes blurred distinctions. For instance, he consciously bypassed the horizontal–vertical dichotomy by speaking of a journey, which involved being filled by the Holy Spirit (a concept he borrowed from the German liberation theologian Dorothee Sölle) through a celebration centered around salvation in Jesus, through biblical storytelling, prayer, song – a turn towards the Bible and God's heart, which then necessitated a return journey, from God's heart to the world, to the neighbor nearby and far away.[39] This vagueness drew criticism from the conservative factions within denominational Christian education, claiming he did not give enough attention to the Reformed foundation of the school and that the substitutionary suffering and death of Christ didn ot receive sufficient emphasis.[40] This was partly because Gilhuis's description was closely related to that of the leftist cultural philosopher Feitse Boerwinkel (1906–1987) – a socialist, pacifist, and ecumenist – who placed the cultural mandate of humanity at the center of his influential notion of "messianic education."[41]

On two points, Gilhuis was certainly clear. In 1980, together with Reformed theologian and missiologist Johannes Verkuyl (1908–2001) of the Vrije Universiteit, he publicly spoke out against membership of the Dutch Communist Party, deeming it incompatible with a position in a Christian school. Since communism is essentially atheism, parents cannot entrust their children to such teachers for religious education.[42] This stance brought Gilhuis criticism from the left wing of his support base. He had previously expressed his opposition to the so-called *samenwerkingsschool*, the "cooperation school" or pluralistic school, a new type of school that could be established in shrinking areas, where public and denominational education merged into one. Gilhuis noted three reasons for his opposition: firstly, on principled grounds, because the gospel has a universal and unique character, thus being paramount in Christian education; secondly, for pedagogical reasons, as children at the primary school age are not ready to be confronted with various worldviews; and thirdly, based on the constitutional freedom of education that is undermined in the case of the pluralistic school. Although Gilhuis encountered

**38** Cf. also Titus M. Gilhuis, *En tóch is het anders: Over de herkenbaarheid van het christelijk onderwijs* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1978).

**39** Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*, 23–27.

**40** See the critique of W. H. Velema in Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*, 110; cf. Piet Kuijt, *Om welke waarden gaat het in de christelijke school: Weerwoord op de cahiers Unie "School en Evangelie"* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1974); for the rise and growth of orthodox Reformed schools in the 1970s, see John Exalto and Gerdien Bertram-Troost, "Strong Religion in a Secular Society: The Case of Orthodox Reformed Schools in The Netherlands," *Education Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

**41** Titus M. Gilhuis and Jaap Hordijk, *Gaat het al beginnen? De erfenis van Feitse Boerwinkel voor opvoeding en onderricht* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1989).

**42** Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*, 26.

some opposition within his own circle, his resistance against the pluralistic school garnered significant support and made him a meaningful political voice.[43]

Gilhuis's formulations in the 1970s were more horizontally focused, less antithetical, and dogmatic. While he moved with the times, he continued to emphasize the importance of the denominational Christian school as an initiation into the religious tradition. This was also reflected in his didactic work, particularly in the biblical stories he published after his retirement.[44] For the purpose of teaching faith in the family, church, and school, Gilhuis compiled collections of biblical stories, using the Westhill method. This approach centered on the child and included other stories, which Gilhuis referred to as "mirror stories," drawn from children's literature.[45]

His sensitivity to stories was also evident in a 1983 contribution on religious education. Gilhuis argued that the Bible is keen on passing down the story to the next generation; it is the tradition we must convey. We go to church and school to hear God's stories repeatedly and for an extended period until they become our own stories. It is therefore the task of educators and teachers to bridge the gap between the (past) religious tradition and our current situation. There is a divide between young people's world and the older generation's religious experience. Elders

**43** Titus M. Gilhuis, *De gezamenlijke school: vóór of tégen?* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1972); in several later *Cahiers*, Gilhuis repeated his opinion against the pluralistic school until the end of the 1970s. Cf. De Jong, *Een verhaal dat verdergaat*, 161–62, and Antonius H. W. M. Pelkmans, *Samenwerkingsscholen in ontwikkeling: De geschiedenis van de samenwerkingsschoolgedachte 1945–1983 en een onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van de samenwerkingsscholen voor voortgezet onderwijs* (Nijmegen: Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociologie, 1984).

**44** As a didactic of history education he developed a "thematic exemplary method" for secondary education, based on the *Lehrkunst* of the German physicist and pedagogue Martin Wagenschein (1896–1988). The method appeared as *De wereld in een druppel: Modellen, vragen en opdrachten bij het onderwijs in de geschiedenis volgens de thematisch-exemplarische methode (v.w.o./h.a.v.o./m.a.v.o.)* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1974). We recognize Gilhuis's preference for storytelling and the (biographical) example, however, the defense of confessional identity is missing. On the other hand, he pays a lot of attention to the religious factor in history.

The history of the school struggle was one of Gilhuis's favourite topics, as is clear from his popular studies *Memorietafel van het christelijk onderwijs: De geschiedenis van de schoolstrijd* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1974; rev. ed. 1975) and *De tien jaren 1879–1889: De Savornin Lohman als voorzitter van de Unie "Een School met den Bijbel"* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1987).

**45** Titus M. Gilhuis, *Vertel mij toch…: Bijbelse verhalen – nieuw gehoord* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1988); Gilhuis, *Nu dan, luister: Bijbelse verhalen – nieuw gehoord: Een werk- en vertelboek* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1990); Gilhuis, *Lees maar mee: De Bijbel erbij* (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap; Brussels: Belgisch Bijbelgenootschap, 1990). Cf. Willem van der Meiden, *Zoo heerlijk eenvoudig: Geschiedenis van de kinderbijbel in Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009).

must begin by listening to the youth, recognizing that the questions of young people are more important than the answers of the past. For educators, it is crucial to connect with the child's situation and place the Bible story within the child's experiential world. As belief is not a set of truths offered independently of people, but an experiential reality, attention should be given not only to the story but also to celebration. The Christian education system needs to harness both aspects now that secularization poses a significant threat. The question of how the Christian school can bridge tradition and situation needs to be rethought in this new context.[46]

With this testament, Gilhuis demonstrated that, over half a century, he had remained consistent in some respects while undergoing radical changes in others. In 1947, the emphasis was on proclaiming the gospel in schools, but by 1983, the biblical story needed to be integrated into children's lives. In 1948, he provided strong answers from a firm Reformed tradition, while in 1983, he had to rethink the bridge function of the Christian school. What remained unchanged was Gilhuis's Christian inspiration and his dedication to initiating young people into the Christian faith tradition.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, through the lens of works by a key figure in denominational Christian education in the Netherlands, I have shown the transformation that the ideological justifications of confessional schools have undergone. Until the early 1960s, Gilhuis defended the pillarized model from a well-defined Reformed identity perspective. In the 1970s, he underwent a shift towards a more horizontal, engaged justification that focused on earthly reality, with responsibilities for the world and the pursuit of justice on earth as core notions. Due to the universal nature of the gospel, Gilhuis was not willing to distance himself from the institution of the Christian school, but rather aimed to revitalize it. Gilhuis's shift aligns with the recent historiography of Dutch religious history. The postwar period up to 1965 is characterized by the continuation of subcultural organization with a strong ecclesiastical orientation. The period from 1965 to 1985 is considered a time of religious-ethical engagement during which old ecclesiastical and theological distinc-

**46** Titus M. Gilhuis, "Tussen traditie en situatie: Over geloofsopvoeding anno 1983," in *Wijkende horizon: Facetten van Nederland in de periode 1958–1983*, ed. H. G. Leih. (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1983), 117–36. Gilhuis's viewpoint is reminiscent of progressive pedagogy from the 1970s, partly inspired by John Dewey; he, however, does not refer to this.

tions lost their significance.[47] Gilhuis's work further demonstrates that religious elites moved with the times. In his case, this was not seen as an inevitability but rather as an attempt to generate new enthusiasm. This attempt succeeded, as he managed to inspire many school boards to contemporarily reconsider their Christian identity. Despite being in an era dominated by leftist, progressive, and Marxist ideas at the Vrije Universiteit and Christian teacher training institutions, he was known as a conservative thinker and his body of work was not highly regarded.

From a didactic perspective, this development is reflected in his initial strong interest in national history from an explicitly Protestant and anti-papist motivation. Gilhuis also paid significant attention to church history. His interest in Dutch history diminished over time, and a significant didactic shift can be observed in his focus on biblical stories: from teaching that emphasizes grace and the cross to an attempt to integrate biblical stories into the lives of children and youth. In this, there is a certain uneasiness in dealing with the religious tradition on the one hand, but on the other hand, a conviction that the tradition is significant enough to explore new forms. The ideal of re-Christianizing the nation, adhered to by Gilhuis and others in the 1940s, was formulated as a response to the already perceived threat of secularization at that time. Over time, secularization came to be seen less as a threat and more as a reality that required a renewed approach.

## References

Bijl, D. G., H. G. Leih, and H. J. van Maanen, eds. *In dienst: De Unie en Gilhuis: Gilhuis en de Unie.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, 1982.

Dam, Peter van, James Kennedy, and Friso Wielenga, eds. *Achter de zuilen: Op zoek naar religie in naoorlogs Nederland.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014.

Doodkorte, Thomas J. *Nationaal beneden de maat?* Tilburg: Drukkerij van het R.K. Jongensweeshuis, 1948.

Exalto, John. *Van wie is het kind? Twee eeuwen onderwijsvrijheid in Nederland.* Amsterdam: Balans, 2017.

Exalto, John, and Gerdien Bertram-Troost. "Strong Religion in a Secular Society: The Case of Orthodox Reformed Schools in The Netherlands." *Education Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

47 James C. Kennedy, "Recent Dutch Religious History and the Limits of Secularization," in *The Dutch and Their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950*, ed. Eric Sengers (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), 27–42; cf. Peter van Dam, James Kennedy, and Friso Wielenga, eds., *Achter de zuilen: Op zoek naar religie in naoorlogs Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

Exalto, John, and Gert van Klinken, eds. *De protestantse onderwijzer: Geschiedenis van een dienstbaar beroep, 1800 – 1920.* Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2015.

Gans, L. A. De, and Titus M. Gilhuis. *Vlug gekend met tekst en prent: GeÏllustreerde jaartallen voor de lagere school.* Groningen: Jacob Dijkstra, [1951].

Ghonem-Woets, Karen. *Boeken voor de katholieke jeugd: Verzuiling en ontzuiling in de geschiedenis van Zwijsen en Malmberg.* Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2011.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *De christelijke school een noodwoning?* 's-Gravenhage: Unie Een School met de Bijbel, [1947].

Gilhuis, Titus M. *De gezamenlijke school – vóór of tégen?* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1972.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Isolement èn apostolaat: Bijdrage tot de beantwoording van de vraag: De christelijke staatsschool of de vrije christelijke school?* Wageningen: H. Veenman & Sons, [1948].

Gilhuis, Titus M. "De jonge kerk volgt het Lam: Hoe behandelen we de Kerkgeschiedenis op de lagere school?" In *Kerkgeschiedenis en zendingsonderwijs: Verslag conferentie voor personelen* [sic] *van l.o.– en u.l.o.-scholen gehouden op 2 en 3 januari 1962 in het conferentieoord "Woudschoten" te Zeist*, edited by J. Wedzinga, 5 – 36. 's-Gravenhage: Christelijk Paedagogisch Studiecentrum, [1962].

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Kort en goed: Repetitieboekje vaderlandse geschiedenis voor de christelijke school voor het vierde en vijfde leerjaar.* Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1963.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Lees maar mee: De Bijbel erbij.* Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap; Brussels: Belgisch Bijbelgenootschap, 1990.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Memorietafel van het christelijk onderwijs: De geschiedenis van de schoolstrijd.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1974; second revised edition 1975.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Nu dan, luister: Bijbelse verhalen – nieuw gehoord: Een werk- en vertelboek.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1990.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Op de speelplaats van het heil: De school met de Bijbel en de gerechtigheid op aarde.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1973.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Pleidooi voor een school met de Bijbel.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1979.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Rapport in opdracht van de Willem de Zwijgerstichting uitgebracht over het vaderlandse geschiedenisonderwijs op de rooms-katholieke lagere scholen in Nederland.* 's-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1948; reprinted 1949.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *De tien jaren 1879 – 1889: De Savornin Lohman als voorzitter van de Unie "Een School met den Bijbel."* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1987.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *En tóch is het anders: Over de herkenbaarheid van het christelijk onderwijs.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1978.

Gilhuis, Titus M. "Tussen traditie en situatie: Over geloofsopvoeding anno 1983." In *Wijkende horizon: Facetten van Nederland in de periode 1958 – 1983*, edited by H. G. Leih, 117 – 36. Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1983.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Venster op Jezus: De school met de Bijbel en de verkondiging.* Delft and Bandung: Uitgeverij Van Keulen, 1952.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Vertel mij toch...: Bijbelse verhalen – nieuw gehoord.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1988.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *Wachters bij de wissel: Schets van een les voor leerlingen van 12 – 14 jaar over de geboorte van het Volkspetitionnement en van De Unie "Een School met den Bijbel".* 's-Gravenhage: Unie Een School met de Bijbel, 1954.

Gilhuis, Titus M. *De wereld in een druppel: Modellen, vragen en opdrachten bij het onderwijs in de geschiedenis volgens de thematisch-exemplarische methode (v.w.o./h.a.v.o./m.a.v.o.).* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1974.

Gilhuis, Titus M., and Joh. van Hulzen. *Hun naam leeft voort: Historisch leesboek voor de christelijke school*, 3 vols. Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1951; second print without year, third print 1954, fourth print 1956.

Gilhuis, Titus M., and Jaap Hordijk. *Gaat het al beginnen? De erfenis van Feitse Boerwinkel voor opvoeding en onderricht.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1989.

Groen, Maurits, and Arie Wilschut. "'Dat gaat langzaam, dat gaat veel langzamer': Gesprek met drs. T.M. Gilhuis over polarisatie." *VU Magazine* 5, no. 7 (1976): 29 – 33.

Heerde, Gerrit van, and Titus M. Gilhuis. *Getuigen van het Licht: Momenten uit de geschiedenis der kerk*, 2 vols. Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1963.

Jong Ozn., Klaas de. "Gilhuis, Titus Menno." In *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme* vol. 6, edited by Cornelis Houtman, 91 – 93. Kampen: Kok, 2006.

Jong Ozn., Klaas de. *Een verhaal dat verdergaat: Geschiedenis van de Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs 1879 – 1979.* Amersfoort: Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs, 1999.

Jong, Wim de. *Heer en meester: Vrijheid van onderwijs 1917 – 2017.* Woerden: Verus, 2017.

Kalsbeek, L. *Theologische en wijsgerige achtergronden van de verhouding van kerk, staat en school in Nederland.* Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1976.

Kennedy, James. *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig.* Amsterdam: Boom, 1995; republished 2017.

Kennedy, James C. "Recent Dutch Religious History and the Limits of Secularization." In *The Dutch and Their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950*, edited by Eric Sengers, 27 – 42. Hilversum: Verloren, 2005.

Kromdijk, Peter. *Eenheid in verscheidenheid: Doorbraak in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk en de samenleving tijdens het interbellum.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2017.

Kuiper, Dick Th. *Tussen observatie en participatie: Twee eeuwen gereformeerde en antirevolutionaire wereld in ontwikkelingsperspectief.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2002.

Kuijt, Piet. *Om welke waarden gaat het in de christelijke school: Weerwoord op de cahiers Unie "School en Evangelie".* Utrecht: De Banier, 1974.

Langeveld, Herman. "De canonisering van het Colijn-beeld, 1930 – 1990." *Oorlogsdocumentatie '40 – '45* 10 (1999): 200 – 17.

Langeveld, Herman. *Hendrikus Colijn 1869 – 1944.* 2 vols. Amsterdam: Balans, 1998 – 2004.

Mellink, Bram. "Having Faith: Religious Optimism in Dutch Parochial Schools during the 1960s as a Case for Secularisation." *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 1 (2013): 139 – 48.

Mellink, Bram. *Worden zoals wij: Onderwijs en de opkomst van de geïndividualiseerde samenleving sinds 1945.* Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2014.

Meiden, Willem van der. *Zoo heerlijk eenvoudig: Geschiedenis van de kinderbijbel in Nederland.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2009.

Pater, J. C. H. de. *Nationaal beneden de maat.* 's-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1950.

Pauwels O. P., C. F. "De kern van het debat: Gaat het gesprek tussen katholieken en protestanten wel diep genoeg?" *De Volkskrant*, September 19, 1953.

Pelkmans, Antonius H. W. M. *Samenwerkingsscholen in ontwikkeling: De geschiedenis van de samenwerkingsschoolgedachte 1945 – 1983 en een onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van de samenwerkingsscholen voor voortgezet onderwijs.* Nijmegen: Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociologie, 1984.

Piena, Hans. “Van spel tot ernst: 300 jaar Canon van Nederland.” *Volkskunde* 124, no. 1 (2023): 27 – 46.

Rietveld-van Wingerden, Marjoke, Doret J. de Ruyter, and Leendert F. Groenendijk. “Jan Waterink (1890 – 1966): A Dynamic Dutch Pioneer of Special Education.” *International Journal of Special Education* 24, no. 3 (2009): 21 – 28.

Rogier, Louis J. “Nationaal geschiedenisonderwijs, een onverkwikkelijke oorlog.” *De Tijd*, November 30, 1950.

Scholten, Lubbertus W. G. “De nationale betekenis van ‘Rehoboth.’” In *25 jaar Rehoboth*, edited by B. van Ginkel, 2 – 3. Utrecht: Rehoboth, 1949.

Sturm, Johan C. *Een goede gereformeerde opvoeding: Over neo-calvinistische moraalpedagogiek (1880 – 1950), met speciale aandacht voor de nieuw-gereformeerde jeugdorganisaties.* Kampen: Kok, 1988.

Sturm, Johan C., ed. *Leven en werk van prof. dr. Jan Waterink, een Nederlandse pedagoog, psycholoog en theoloog (1890 – 1966).* Kampen: Kok, 1991.

Sturm, Johan, and Siebren Miedema. “Kuyper’s Educational Legacy: Schooling for a Pluralist Society.” In *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work*, edited by Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn, 238 – 47. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999.

Thurlings, Jan M. G. *Van wie is de school? Het bijzonder onderwijs in een veranderende wereld.* Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998.

Veen, Gerrit van. “Beschouwingen over het geschiedenisonderwijs.” *Paedagogische Studiën* 18 (1937): 10 – 21.

Veen, T. van. *Rehoboth 1923 – 1973: Extra uitgave ter gelegenheid van het vijftigjarig bestaan der school.* Utrecht: Rehoboth, 1973.

Vlies, Tina van der. *Echoing Events: The Perpetuation of National Narratives in English and Dutch History Textbooks, 1920 – 2010.* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022.

Wilschut, Arie. *Beelden van tijd: De rol van historisch tijdsbewustzijn bij het leren van geschiedenis.* Assen: Van Gorcum, 2011.

Wijers, H. J. Michiel. “Kwartierstaat Pieter Cornelis Gilhuis (1946 – 2005).” Accessed January 30, 2024. http://www.hjmwijers.nl/KTiUH/Gilhuis-PC-kwst.htm#kw02.

Tina van der Vlies

# History Textbooks as Discursive Mediators: The Case of Dutch Tolerance, 1920–1990

## Introduction

In the summer of 2020, Dutch politician Thierry Baudet visited the city of Hoorn and laid flowers at the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, which has an imposing appearance, standing at 3.25 meters tall. Via the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), he shared a photo with the caption, "We honor our heroes. We love our country." While some people "liked" his message, others expressed outrage. Coen (1587–1629) is known as a maritime hero for founding colonial Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, but he is also infamous for killing 15,000 inhabitants of Banda. As a result of this genocide, he is nicknamed "the Butcher of Banda." The Coen statue has been a disputed monument since its unveiling in 1893 and has been plastered with graffiti and red paint along the way.[1] In 2020, discussions about this statue reached a new intensity as a result of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter protests in countries worldwide, including the Netherlands. A few days after Baudet had paid tribute to Coen, people gathered in Hoorn to demonstrate for either the preservation or removal of Coen from the public space. The day ended with riots; regular police officers and the mobile police office (ME) were called in to intervene. Apparently, monuments can evoke strong emotions. In many countries, statues are kicked, defaced, and deconstructed – or, conversely, passionately embraced and defended.

Although the example above touches upon the relation between religion and nation – the secular and sacred intertwine in the Coen statue and related performances[2] – starting a chapter about Dutch tolerance with such a contested historical person and the polarizing effect of his "afterlife" seems strange. What is less well known, however, is the fact that the statue was replaced by a sculpture entitled "The Angel" in 2011. In August that year, Coen had fallen off his feet by accident:

1 KNAW, *Wankele Sokkels. Omstreden monumenten in de openbare ruimte* (Amsterdam: KNAW, 2023), 76–83.

2 Markus Balkenhol, "Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands," in *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion,* ed. Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 213.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-012

while busy with the lamp posts, a crane truck had hit the governor-general, who fell backwards with a hard landing. On the evening of the accident, local inhabitants spontaneously celebrated his fall during a "liberation party."[3] The empty space on the pedestal was quickly filled with "the Angel," created by artist Tinus D., since it was high time that "the headhunter was replaced by an angel."[4] Moreover, an anti-Coen movement was erected to prevent the return of the original statue. Due to threats addressed to the initiator Eric van de Beek, however, the movement stopped its activities and Coen was replaced on the pedestal, albeit with some adaptations.

The contrast between "the Butcher of Banda" and "the Angel" could not have been sharper, yet they both reflect the image of Dutch national history and identity. Juxtaposed with a colonial past with the afterlives of pride and shame is the well-known and widespread idea of "Dutch tolerance," rooted in history to a certain extent but also referred to as a myth or grand narrative.[5] The idea of Dutch tolerance is a vital element of Dutch society as a culturally defined community and of a constructed identity related to the Netherlands as a cultural nation.[6]

This chapter will scrutinize how and why the shared national narrative of Dutch tolerance was constructed, adapted, and perpetuated in twentieth-century Dutch history textbooks, a widespread genre that has provided many people with collective memory and identity, while communicating "cultural truths."[7] In addition to the idea that religion led to varying – sometimes contrasting – historical interpretations and narrations in Dutch textbooks, this chapter adds a new perspective by showing how religion led to unification in the interpretation of national history under the heading of Dutch tolerance. Hence, this chapter aims to

**3** HoornRadio HoornGids, "Coen is gevallen: bevrijdingsfeestje gevierd," last modified August 17, 2011, accessed March 16, 2023, https://www.hoornradio.nl/nw-7951-7-3347264/nieuws/coen_is_gevallen_bevrijdingsfeestje_gevierd.html.

**4** Jasper Rijpma, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen op school. Historisch besef en geschiedenisonderwijs in Nederland, 1857–2011* (master's thesis: Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2012).

**5** Alex van Stipriaan, "Dutch Tolerance in Black and White: from Religious Pragmatism to Racialized Ideology," in *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion,* ed. Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 175. See also Martijn de Koning, "De beleefde tolerantie," *Nieuw Wij*, April 22, 2013, accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.nieuwwij.nl/opinie/de-beleefde-tolerantie/.

**6** Willem Frijhoff, "The Relevance of Dutch History, or: Much in Little? Reflections on the Practice of History in the Netherlands," *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 125 (2010): 35.

**7** Tina van der Vlies, "Echoing National Narratives in English History Textbooks," in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education,* ed. M. Carretero, S. Berger, M. Grever (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

show that history textbooks do not simply "transmit" societal values but function as mediators and adapters of discourses instead.

The equal religious segmentation of education within a Dutch national framework raises questions about the interconnection between religion and nationalism in history textbooks. Whereas religion and nationalism have often been narrated as rivals within a competitive framework, this chapter will highlight their entanglement. The analysis starts in 1920, when the Dutch school act enabled financial equalization for public and confessional schools. By ending in 1990, this chapter discusses change and continuity from a long-term perspective.[8]

## Pillarized Historiography and the Dutch Revolt

The image of the Netherlands as being important to the development of ideas and practices of tolerance is historically rooted in early modern European history, for example, in the writings by Desiderius Erasmus. Influential thinkers of tolerance, such as Baruch Spinoza and Pierre Bayle, found their home in Dutch cities as Leiden and Amsterdam, and John Locke wrote *A Letter Concerning Toleration* while in exile in Holland in 1689. Religious dissenters, such as the French Huguenots and Jews from Spain, were welcomed and were not persecuted on basis of their faith or viewpoints. Economic factors and ideas about free trade played an essential role in these ideas. Tolerance became a key element of the Republic of the United Netherlands, acknowledged in 1648 after years of bloodshed between Protestants and Catholics.[9] Since 1566/1568, the Low Countries had started to revolt against the rule of the Habsburg King Philip II of Spain, the hereditary ruler of the provinces and a Catholic. This revolt, known as the Eighty Years' War, is regularly interpreted as "the birth of the Netherlands" in Dutch collective memory.[10]

**8** Parts of this chapter and the empirical analysis are also published in Tina van der Vlies, *Echoing Events: The Perpetuation of National Narratives in English and Dutch History Textbooks, 1920 – 2010* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022); Tina van der Vlies, "Historicizing and Pluralizing Wertsch's Narrative Templates: Freedom and Tolerance in Dutch History Textbooks," in *Reproducing, Rethinking, Resisting National Narratives. A Sociocultural Approach to Schematic Narrative Templates in Times of Nationalism*, ed. Ignacio Brescó and Floor van Alphen (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2022), 23 – 36.

**9** In this article I use the term Catholic(s) to refer to Roman Catholics and Roman Catholicism.

**10** See, for example, 1572: Geboorte van Nederland, "450 jaar op zoek naar vrijheid, verdraagzaamheid, verbondenheid, verscheidenheid," accessed May 12, 2023, https://geboortevannederland.nl/; MAX Vandaag, "Het jaar 1572, het begin van de 'geboorte van Nederland,'" accessed May 12, 2023, https://www.maxvandaag.nl/sessies/themas/terug-naar-toen/het-jaar-1572-het-begin-van-de-geboorte-

Many historians have written about the Habsburg Netherlands and the causes of the Dutch Revolt, which included the Reformation, anti-heresy and centralization politics by the Catholic King Philip II, taxation, repression, and disputes about the rights and privileges of the nobility and cities. Prince William of Orange – stadtholder of Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht – played a key role in the revolt and the advent of the Dutch Republic. In 1580, Philip II declared the prince an outlaw and put a price of 25,000 guilders on his head. The prince was murdered by the Catholic Balthasar Gerards in 1584. The revolt continued and ended with the Treaty of Münster in 1648, which recognized the Dutch Republic as an independent state. Hence, the seven northern provinces (characterized by Calvinism and republicanism) were separated from the southern provinces (characterized by Catholicism and absolutist rule).

A well-known event of the Dutch Revolt or Eighty Years' War is the capture of Brielle on April 1, 1572. This Dutch town was taken by the Sea Beggars, who gained a foothold on land for the first time. In historiography, the Sea Beggars have been described as Dutch malcontents, such as nobles, prosecuted Calvinists, seamen, and unemployed people, who operated from the sea against Philip II and his soldiers in support of Prince William of Orange. They were regarded as either heroes or pirates, depending on their actions, outcomes, circumstances, motivations, and backgrounds.[11] After further capture, the Sea Beggars arrived at Gorcum in June 1572, where they arrested several Catholics for adhering to their faith. As a result of the tension this provoked, the Sea Beggars decided to transport the Catholic prisoners to Brielle. After ten days of torture and humiliation, nineteen Catholics were hanged on July 9, 1572. It is said that the victims were even dishonored after their deaths: their clothes were sold, and body parts – such as their noses, ears, and penises – were cut off and used to decorate the Sea Beggars' hats.[12]

Whereas Dutch Catholics have often associated 1572 and the Sea Beggars with the assassination of these nineteen Catholics, other groups such as liberals and protestants have commemorated the capture of Brielle in 1572 as a hopeful turning point in the Dutch Revolt, which led to the "liberation" of other towns as well. For the Catholics, however, 1572 had been a tragedy rather than a hopeful turning point

van-nederland/; "80 Jaar Oorlog: De geboorte van Nederland," YouTube, accessed May 12, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFbZwdNy8Wk.

**11** See, for example, Albert van der Zeijden, *Katholieke identiteit en historisch bewustzijn: W. J. F. Nuyens (1823–1894) en zijn "nationale' geschiedschrijving* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 280.

**12** Chris van der Heijden, "De zwarte canon: Pleidooi voor een eerlijke geschiedschrijving," *De Groene Amsterdammer* 10 (2012), 25, accessed April 14, 2023, www.groene.nl/artikel/de-zwarte-canon.

and in later attempts to commemorate this year, they protested against the national character of the organized celebration (for instance, in 1872).[13]

According to historian Van der Heijden, the "Martyrs of Gorcum" were only taught in Catholic schools during pillarization, a time when Dutch society was divided into various "pillars" in which people shared a common ideology or world view and could organize their own education. He argues that nobody else ever acknowledged the history of these victims because recognition of such a war crime by the Sea Beggars would be harmful for the interpretation of the Dutch Revolt as founding narrative of the Netherlands.[14] He is not the only historian; the Martyrs of Gorcum function regularly as the examples par excellence of Dutch pillarized historiography in popular and professional media.[15]

While discussing the theme of Dutch tolerance in history textbook series published for pupils in secondary schools, this chapter will debunk the widespread idea of the Martyrs' absence in non-Catholic textbooks and reveal how and why non-Catholic history textbooks also mention these victims. An in-depth study of various Catholic and non-Catholic history textbook series published for pupils in secondary school reveals that pillarization is not visible in the presence or absence of the Martyrs in these books but, rather, in processes of narrative framing – that is, the constructed narrative as organizing principle, providing a meaningful structure.[16] The following sections discuss the Calvinist and Catholic narrative frames, respectively, by paying attention to how history is narrated, contextualized, and presented through particular representational choices.

## A Calvinist Founding Narrative

An example of a widely circulated Dutch textbook series is *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis* (Textbook of national history), first published in the 1920s and reprinted until the 1950s. Its author, dr. Dirk Langedijk, was a history teacher

**13** Van der Zeijden, *Katholieke identiteit en historisch bewustzijn*, 234 – 296.

**14** Van der Heijden, "De zwarte canon."

**15** See also Els Kloek, "De martelaren van Gorcum (1572)," in *Verzameld verleden: Veertig gedenkwaardige momenten en figuren uit de vaderlandse geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 46; Harco Hielkema, "In Brielle ligt de geschiedenis op straat: van de Watergeuzen en de martelaren," *Trouw,* March 26, 2005, 1; Wim Schrijver, "Martelaren," *Korte metten*, November 29, 2008, accessed April 14, 2023, http://lc-kortemetten.blogspot.com/2008_11_01_archive.html.

**16** Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 11. Gregory Bateson introduced the concept of framing in "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," *Psychiatric Research Reports* 2(1954): 39 – 51. See also Barry Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 911.

and published history textbooks on national history, European history, and biblical history. He starts his narration of the Dutch Revolt with a section on the rise of Calvinism in the Netherlands and argues that Calvinism is in line with democracy and freedom. He also explains how Calvinism shaped the national character of the Dutch people: it gave them strength to resist enemies and to fight against Philip II as a Catholic ruler. It was their duty to resist a ruler who threatened the honor of God. In his narration about the past, he intertwines national and religious values: important political events are explained in the light of Calvinism and the "national character" is described in relation to democracy, freedom, and Calvinism.[17] This narrated frame explains the upcoming events: the revolt against Philip II and, finally, the birth of the Dutch Republic.

The Sea Beggars, however, are portrayed as self-interested, bitter, and intolerant pirates who sold their gain instead of helping the prince. According to the author, their actions were motivated by bitterness against the enemy.[18] Their acrimony and mercenary motives are contrasted with the "holy" obligation of the Calvinists to defend the honor of God.[19] The author also states that the Sea Beggars had given very little support to the Dutch Revolt.[20] Although the taking of the city Den Briel was significant in the author's opinion, since other cities took the prince's side afterwards, Langedijk explains that the Sea Beggars could have taken Den Briel by accident. Hence, the Sea Beggars are not the heroes in this narrative, and this is reinforced by remarks on how the Catholics had to suffer from their grudge. The author mentions the Martyrs of Gorcum as an example.[21] Langedijk clearly distinguishes Calvinists, portrayed as sympathetic, from the wrongs of others who were not "real" Calvinists. In this way, the author could mention the Mar-

**17** Dirk Langedijk, *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche geschiedenis: Deel 1. Van de oudste tijden tot 1795* (Groningen: Wolters, 1932), 70–101. See, for example, at 70–71: "Calvijn evenwel was van oordeel, dat wanneer de ere Gods door de overheid wordt aangerand, de onderdanen het recht hebben zich tegenover die regering te stellen, om aan het Evangelie de zegepraal te verschaffen. Hieruit volgt, dat de Calvinisten gemakkelijker overgingen tot de strijd om het geloof dan de Lutheranen." At 71–72: "Ook in Nederland vond het Calvinisme ingang, daar het door zijn democratische opvattingen met het volkskarakter meer overeenkwam dan het Lutheranisme." At 81: "Want het is het Calvinisme geweest, dat de "kleine luyden' met moed heeft bezield en het doorzettingsvermogen heeft geschonken, dat uiteindelijk de strijd heeft gewonnen, toen hogere en lagere adel die reeds lang hadden opgegeven."

**18** Dirk Langedijk, *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis: Deel 1. Van de oudste tijden tot 1795* (Groningen: Wolters, 1938), 87–88.

**19** Langedijk, *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis*, 100–101.

**20** Langedijk, *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis*, 88.

**21** Langedijk, *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis*, 89–90.

tyrs of Gorcum without defaming the Dutch Revolt as a national Calvinist founding narrative.

This can also be seen in other history textbook series published for secondary education during the interbellum period. For example, textbook author De Boer describes the Sea Beggars as a wild and lawless bunch who were feared by the Spaniards as well as the Dutch. He argues that their boldness initially helped the Revolt, but that this boldness quickly turned into unaccountability and unbridled cruelty, which made them useless as allies of the prince.[22] Another famous history textbook author argues that the Sea Beggars were not only a "terror" for the Spanish but also Dutch inhabitants.[23]

Prince William of Orange is portrayed as a hero for all Dutch inhabitants. Although Langedijk describes the Prince as a Calvinist, he stresses his tolerance and openness towards the Catholics. The author explains that the prince's initial resistance to Philip II was not motivated by his religion but by his belief in religious and political freedom and his dislike of "foreign" or "strange" powers ruling the Dutch.[24] The textbook series highlights how the prince acted as "the Father of the Nation" and how he sacrificed everything for the Dutch people in order to free them from the Spanish: he gave material goods to help, never aimed for dominance over his men, was not corrupt, and stood firm in his cause, no matter what people offered him.

This sketch is also visible in other textbook series from the interbellum period: for example, textbook author Rijpma introduces the Martyrs of Gorcum not in April but in July 1572, when he discusses the First Assembly of the Free States of Holland in Dordrecht and argues that the Prince of Orange "had to" fire Lumey − the admiral of the Sea Beggars who had become *stadhouder* of Holland and military commander-in-chief of the conquered territories − because of his incompetence and rude behavior. The assassination of the priests and monks of Gorcum is mentioned as an example of Lumey's cruelty and illustrates why the admiral was dismissed. In this way, Rijpma explicitly contrasts Lumey's cruel deeds with the prince's ideal of tolerance.[25]

---

**22** Michael Georg de Boer, *Beknopt Leerboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1904), 50.

**23** J. W. Pik, *Overzicht der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis* (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1928), 102. "Vele ruwe bandelooze personen bevonden zich onder de Watergeuzen, die, vol wraak bepaaldelijk tegen den Spanjaard, toch ook een schrik voor de Nederlandsche ingezetenen waren."

**24** Langedijk, *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis*, 79 – 80.

**25** E. Rijpma, *Ontwikkelingsgang der historie II* (Groningen: Wolters, 1938), 64, 65.

This contrast is visible in other well-known Dutch history textbook series, such as that by J. W. Pik, who introduces the Martyrs in 1573, the year in which Lumey was arrested and briefly imprisoned by the Prince:

> For now, Lumey was made head of the military force. However, he was already removed in 1573 for his cruelties and his unruly actions. Lumey had an exasperating habit of raging against clergymen and monks. A particularly notorious feat was accomplished when he hanged several clergymen from Gorcum, after severely maltreating them, in Brielle (the so-called Martyrs of Gorcum), acting entirely against the spirit and the instructions of the Prince of Orange, who expressly required that no one be harmed for his station or his faith.[26]

In these last two textbook narratives by Rijpma and Pik, we also see the effect of narrative framing in relation to periodization as social construction: the Martyrs of Gorcum are not always mentioned with the taking of Brielle in April 1572 – which is often seen as a national turning point – but they enter the story later in time, to create a sharp contrast between the prince's tolerance and Lumey's intolerance.

## A Catholic Counternarrative

Priest, pastor, and teacher August Commissaris published the Catholic history textbook series *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis* (Textbook of Dutch history) in the 1930s. The series was approved by the Catholic Church, published at the Catholic publishing company Malmberg, and reprinted until 1960. Commissaris also starts his narrative about the Dutch Revolt with a section on the rise of Calvinism; however, he portrays this religion in a negative light. Commissaris explains that other religions tried to avoid persecution and strived for freedom, whereas Calvinism aimed for monarchy by attacking other religions instead.[27] He sketches Calvin-

**26** Pik, *Overzicht der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis*, 104. "Aan het hoofd van de krijgsmacht werd voorloopig Lumey geplaatst; hij werd echter reeds in 1573 afgezet wegens zijne wreedheden en zijn eigenmachtig handelen. Op ergelijke wijze woedde Lumey n.l. tegen geestelijken en kloosterlingen. In "t bijzonder is berucht geworden, dat hij een aantal geestelijken uit Gorcum na zware mishandelingen te Den Briel liet ophangen (de Gorcumsche martelaren), daarbij geheel handelende tegen den geest en de voorschriften van Oranje, die uitdrukkelijk verlangde, dat niemand om zijn stand of zijn geloof leed mocht geschieden."

**27** August Cornelis Jacobus Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel* ('s Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1940), 69, 70.

ists as intolerant fanatics and blames them for the separation of the Netherlands in the north and south: Calvinism caused division.[28]

The episode of the Martyrs of Gorcum is not mentioned as a separate incident but as part of a longer list of victims who illustrate the oppression and persecution of Catholics during the Dutch Revolt.[29] Whereas other Dutch textbook authors often focused on the Duke of Alva and his Council of Blood against those suspected of rebellion and heresy (in this case, non-Catholic), Commissaris includes the Sea Beggars' Council of Blood, showing that the Sea Beggars vented their rage on Catholics and that they plundered their churches and cloisters. Moreover, he makes a clear link to the Calvinists by describing the Sea Beggars' leaders' backgrounds as "Calvinist nobility" and by stressing the fact that Catholics were murdered because of their faith.[30] As a result of the discrimination and even assassination by their fellow citizens, Catholics needed protection, according to Commissaris, and Philip II as a Catholic ruler could offer them this protection.

While tolerance is presented as the endpoint of the Dutch Revolt in many textbook series, this is not the case in the Catholic narrative. Although the northern Netherlands became independent, Commissaris highlights that Catholics were not free but oppressed over more than two centuries. His narrative of the Dutch Revolt is a Catholic history of their fight for freedom of religion against Calvinistic oppression. Hence, instead of a heroic and romantic narrative, Commissaris depicts the Dutch Revolt as a tragedy, which resulted in intolerance, lack of freedom, and the division of the Low Countries. This Catholic counternarrative of the Dutch Revolt explicitly attacks the initial Protestant frame by presenting an alternative view. This counter-frame is also apparent in other publications by Commissaris, such as in *Van toen wij vrij werden* (When we became free), in which he argues that the historical role of the Catholics has been underestimated:

> This will show that the share the Catholics had in the fates of the Netherlands is often badly underrated. […] It will also show that the history of their emancipation casts a surprising light on many historical events […], providing much greater depth and realism to the history of our entire nation.[31]

---

**28** Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel*, 69, 70, 92.

**29** Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel*, 85.

**30** Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel*, 84.

**31** August Cornelis Jacobus Commissaris, *Van toen wij vrij werden: Eerste deel: Van schuilkerk tot kathedraal 1795 tot 1853* (Groningen: Wolters, 1927), introduction. "Daarbij zal blijken, dat het aandeel dat de Katholieken gehad hebben aan de lotgevallen van Nederland gewoonlijk veel te gering geschat wordt. […] Ook zal men ervaren, dat de geschiedenis dier emancipatie op vele historische gebeurtenissen […] een verrassend licht werpt, waardoor het inzicht in de geschiedenis van geheel ons volk veel dieper en reëler wordt."

Textbook author Commissaris was inspired by the work of Nuyens, a Catholic historian who had written a new interpretation of the Dutch Revolt with much more appreciation for the Catholics, demanding recognition for their contribution to the founding of the nation and questioning the image of the Netherlands as a Protestant nation. This new interpretation of the past focused on historical recognition had a function in the present process towards identity formation and emancipation, also in education.

Commissaris himself draws different portraits of Prince William of Orange. He praises the tolerant and unifying intentions of the prince but does not portray him as a "Father of the Nation" as other Dutch authors did. Instead, he contradicts this image, arguing that the prince changed his religion as easily as he changed his clothes.[32] William of Orange is described as an opportunist: it was politics that decided his religion.[33] According to Commissaris, the prince's ideal of a tolerant, free, and peaceful society with Catholics and Calvinists fighting together against Spain had failed due to the intolerance of his most loyal supporters. "His partisanship in favor of the Calvinists condemned his work to failure and tore the Low Countries apart. The Northern Netherlands became independent from Spain, but this 'freedom' burdened the Catholics with over two centuries of suppression and retrogression."[34]

Commissaris's series became very popular and was reprinted until the 1960s. It is evident that Commissaris disagrees with the dominant interpretation of the Dutch Revolt. His textbook series includes a counternarrative that depicts an alternative reality by presenting the voices of a community that had been marginalized in historiography. Although I focus in this chapter on a "dominant frame" and a Catholic counternarrative in history textbooks and academic historiography, other voices were present as well. An example is the history textbook series by Arij Blonk and Jan Romein *Leerboek der Algemene en Vaderlandse Geschiedenis* (Textbook of general and national history), first published in the 1940s and reprinted until the 1960s. Blonk was a history teacher in The Hague, and Romein was a well-known history professor at the University of Amsterdam until 1942, when the Nazis disagreed with his Marxist sympathies. His ideas on class conflicts as the motor of history are present in his textbook series as his focus on socioeconom-

**32** Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse Geschiedenis: Eerste deel*, 93.

**33** Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel*, 82.

**34** Commissaris, *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel*, 100. "Zijn partijdigheid ten gunste van de Calvinisten doemde zijn werk tot mislukking en scheurde de Nederlanden uiteen. De Noordelijke Nederlanden werden onafhankelijk van Spanje, maar de 'vrijheid' kwam de Katholieken te staan op meer dan twee eeuwen onderdrukking en achteruitzetting."

ic structures. An example is the narration of the capture of the Dutch city Brielle in 1572 as a "social turnover."[35]

Although several textbook series from the interbellum were reprinted after 1945, newly written textbook series were also published, inspired by the latest ideas on politics, society, and education.[36] The Second World War and the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany from 1940 until 1945 stimulated cooperation, understanding, and engagement between people from various pillars. An example of such an idea is the "Breakthrough" (*Doorbraak-gedachte*), inspiring people to break through pillarization and to cooperate on shared and concrete political ideas. Persons with various backgrounds also cooperated in the Dutch People's Movement (Nederlandse Volksbeweging) and argued "that in particular the Christian antithesis and the class struggle were no longer fruitful bases for the solution of social problems" and that "free discussion was absolutely necessary."[37]

The next section discusses the period after the Second World War and will explain how and why the different interpretations of the Dutch Revolt converged into one national narrative under the heading of tolerance. National narratives can be defined as stories about the origin, achievements, and characteristics of a nation, gaining contemporary meaning by (re)constructing the past.[38] Hence, national narratives can be described as "protective shields" against events that a nation tries to obliterate, since they present a "usable past" instead: a set of heroes, events, and storylines that serve present needs.[39]

## Towards a Shared National Narrative

Despite their intention to cooperate, many people returned to their trusted "pillars" soon after the war and the plans for national renewal were overtaken by urgent postwar problems, such as the situation in the Dutch East Indies. However,

**35** Arij Blonk and Jan Romein, *Leerboek der Algemene en Vaderlandse geschiedenis* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1941), 74.

**36** Tina van der Vlies, "Van nationale heldenonderwijs tot 'vredesvak': Hoe twee wereldoorlogen het schoolvak geschiedenis veranderden," *Geschiedenis Magazine* 49 (2014): 52 – 55.

**37** Hans Daalder and Galen Irwin, *Politics in the Netherlands: How Much Change?* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1989), 24.

**38** Tina van der Vlies, *Echoing Events*, 24; Maria Grever and Tina van der Vlies, "Why National Narratives are Perpetuated: A Literature Review on New Insights from History Textbook Research," *London Review of Education* 15 (2017), 287.

**39** Yehudith Auerbach, "National Narratives in a Conflict of Identity," in *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Yaacov Bar-siman-Tov (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2010), 158 – 87.

nine history teachers – eight men and one woman, working in both public and religious schools – were determined to achieve a breakthrough in the pillarized textbook market. In 1954, they published together a textbook series entitled *Wereld in wording* (World in the making). This group of nine authors, known as Novem, included people from various denominations and included a social democrat, a pacifist, a Jew, and an anthroposophist. They aimed for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation and mutual understanding via history. One of these textbook authors was Gerrit Jan de Voogd, whose ideal was the "tolerance of Erasmus." Already in 1946, he had published on Erasmus and argued that this man had an important message to contemporary times:

> The times in which Erasmus lived are reminiscent of ours in many ways. Old traditions are abandoned; new ideas are coming in; fierce oppositions manifest themselves; the foundations of the social and intellectual structure of the world are shaking. [...] He stands at the dawn of an era of which we might be witnessing the end. And he enters the "raging world" of his day, proclaiming his misunderstood message of reasonableness, peace, and tolerance.[40]

De Voogd aimed to overcome the nationalism of his time by pointing towards Erasmus's idea of global citizenship since all human beings are connected in Christ. He explains that Erasmus rejected war as being unchristian, inhuman, and unreasonable, and in the conclusion of his book, he refers to Erasmus's standards for a global community of people: "standards derived from Christianity and human reason."[41]

The nine authors of the textbook series *Wereld in wording* highlight tolerance in their textbook narrative but in a balanced way. They do not adopt the widespread romantic narrative of "we" against the "foreign" Philip II and do not label Prince William of Orange as the "Father of the Nation." Instead, they refer to Erasmus as an example of tolerance, and they discuss his statue in Rotterdam to explain the complexities of the Dutch Revolt. By describing how the statue was removed by the Spaniards in 1572 and how Calvinistic preachers protested against

**40** Gerrit Jan de Voogd, *Erasmus en Grotius: twee grote Nederlanders en hun boodschap aan onze tijd* (Leiden: Nederlandse Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1946), 7. "In vele opzichten herinnert de tijd, waarin Erasmus leefde, aan de onze. Oude tradities worden doorbroken, nieuwe denkbeelden bieden zich aan, felle tegenstellingen openbaren zich; het maatschappelijk en geestelijk samenstel der wereld schudt op zijn grondvesten. [...] Hij staat aan het begin van een tijdperk, waarvan wij wellicht het einde beleven. En hij treedt in de "razende wereld" van zijn dagen, zijn niet begrepen boodschap brengende van redelijkheid, vrede en verdraagzaamheid."
**41** De Voogd, *Erasmus en Grotius*, 175.

a new Erasmus-statue in 1622, they highlight various opponents of Erasmus's tolerance.[42]

In the 1950s, publishing house Malmberg also launched a new history textbook series: *Van oermens tot wereldburger* (From primitive man to world citizen), written by dr. Piet Fontaine. It is important to note that times had changed, as had this originally Catholic publishing house, which started to depillarize in this period.[43] This depillarization trend is also visible in this newly published textbook series for secondary education. Fontaine explains that the prince achieved a situation in which the Protestant and Catholic denominations were both accepted and could coexist, but he could not "prevent" the Sea Beggars from treating Catholics badly. The Martyrs of Gorcum follow as an example, wherein the leader of the Sea Beggars is nicknamed a "bloodhound."[44] The prince and his efforts to attain tolerance are more positively valued than was the case in the series by Commissaris discussed above.

Tolerance is also an important theme in the textbook series *Mensen en Machten* (People and power), published by Meulenhoff in 1962 for the younger pupils n Catholic secondary schools. The series was written by two history teachers, A. Adang and F. E. M. Vercauteren. They used the above-mentioned Catholic textbook series by Commissaris in class, but found that this series was quite difficult for their pupils. They also used newspapers in their lessons to make history relevant by connecting it to contemporary issues. According to Adang and Vercauteren, history education can give insight into the structures and growth of "our" modern society and needs to contribute to mutual understanding.[45]

Their Whiggish idea of progress is also visible in their sketch of Erasmus, who is portrayed as "the great humanist" and the counsellor for tolerance between dif-

---

**42** Novem, *Wereld in Wording: Deel 2. Nieuwe Geschiedenis* (The Hague: Van Goor Zonen, 1961), 19. "Aanvankelijk richtte men in Rotterdam een houten beeld van Erasmus vóór zijn geboortehuis op. In 1557 werd dit vervangen door een gekleurd stenen beeld, dat de Spanjaarden in 1572 neerhaalden. In 1622 kwam toen het koperen beeld van Hendrick de Keyser, zij het onder hevig protest van de calvinistische predikanten."

**43** Karen Ghonem-Woets, *Boeken voor de katholieke jeugd: Verzuiling en ontzuiling in de geschiedenis van Zwijsen en Malmberg* (Zuthpen: Walburg Pers, 2011).

**44** Piet Fontaine, *Van oermens tot wereldburger: Derde deel. De nieuwe geschiedenis, 1517 – 1789* ('s Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1959), 101 – 2. "De verdraagzame Oranje wist te bewerken, dat de hervormde en katholieke godsdienst vrij naast elkaar zouden bestaan. Helaas kon hij niet verhinderen, dat woeste Geuzenaanvoerders ontstellende gruwelen bedreven tegen katholieken, vooral geestelijken. De bloedhond Lumey liet in Gorcum 19 priesters doodmartelen: de Gorcumse martelaren."

**45** A. Adang and F. E. M. Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten I* (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1967), introduction.

ferent religions. They argue that Erasmus's efforts were in vain for the time being, and they label the fifteenth century as a transition period: people "stood on the threshold of a new era," and for the first time, they had opinions that "sound familiar to us."[46] This new time arrived in the sixteenth century, explain the authors, when different countries struggled with questions about religion in relation to tolerance.

Adang and Vercauteren place even more emphasis on (in)tolerance in their reprint of 1971, and they clearly frame the Dutch Revolt in these terms. Chapters Five and Six are entitled "Tolerance or Intolerance," and based on this theme, sixteenth-century events are linked to twentieth-century developments. Chapter Six begins, for example, with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the authors remark that people who lived in the sixteenth century were "not yet ready" to adopt such a view.[47] This idea of "not yet" is also present in their introduction, which states their aim to narrate history as a process of growth.[48] Progress and teleology are clearly demonstrated in their textbook narrative.

In their introduction to the reprint of 1973, the authors explain that they have chosen themes to narrate history with the aim of sketching the "cultural patterns" of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.[49] In this edition, Philip II is portrayed as "the prototype of intolerance."[50] In contrast, they sketch the tolerance of the Netherlands: "As the Netherlands were known to be guardians of tolerance, many Spanish and Portuguese Jews in particular moved there and found shelter in Amsterdam and other towns, where they and their descendants were free to practice their religion up until 1940."[51] The strong dichotomy between the Netherlands as the "guardian of tolerance" and Philip II as the "prototype of intolerance" is reinforced by the questions that students have to answer. Examples are: "Why did the Netherlands become a refuge for persecuted people?" and "Why is Philip II a prototype of an intolerant king?"[52] Moreover, they ask the students why the Peace of Westphalia, the end of the Dutch Revolt in 1648, can be seen as a turning

**46** A. Adang and F. E. M. Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 1* (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1962), 161.

**47** A. Adang and F. E. M. Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 3* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff Educatief, 1971), 74.

**48** Adang and Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 3*, introduction.

**49** A. Adang and F. E. M. Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 2* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff Educatief, 1973), introduction, xii.

**50** Adang and Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 2*, 112, 118.

**51** Adang and Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 2*, 118. "Omdat bekend was dat men in de Nederlanden verdraagzaamheid verdedigde, trokken vooral veel Spaanse en Portugese joden daarheen. Zij vonden daar onderdak in Amsterdam en andere steden."

**52** Adang and Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 2*, 119.

point in history.[53] This turning point is also present in the textbook composition: several editions of the textbook end or start with the year 1648, which is highlighted as the end of the religious wars and the beginning of "tolerance."

## Questioning the Myth of Dutch Tolerance

The optimism and the idea of growth and progress in relation to tolerance started to diminish at the end of the 1970s in response to the rise of the Netherlands as a multiethnic society. Tolerance was no longer regarded as the absence of persecution of minorities and people with other ideas or opinions, but textbook authors started to include discussions about (in)tolerance related to discrimination, repression, and prejudices against particular groups of people. Inspired by these contemporary debates about tolerance, textbook authors questioned the myth of "Dutch tolerance" and invited pupils to examine this topic.

An example is the innovative textbook series *Sprekend Verleden* (The speaking past), originally published in 1978 and constituting a significant break with earlier published history textbook series by emphasizing the inquiry method and (critical) historical thinking. The series became well known for highlighting the constructive nature of historical narratives. On the one hand, the author highlights progress and argues, for example, that (religious) intolerance was worse in the past: "But in sixteenth-century Europe, people were even more intolerant," and unable to move beyond "black-and-white thinking."[54] Prince William of Orange is described as an "exception to his time." In the questions, students are invited to think about this remark for themselves: "Do you agree with the idea that Prince William of Orange was ahead of his time?"[55] Although the authors clearly frame the Dutch Revolt in terms of (in)tolerance at the beginning of the chapter, they also question the widespread idea of "Dutch tolerance": "We Dutch like to think of ourselves as a freedom-loving and tolerant people. […] But how much freedom did the Republic allow its own inhabitants?"[56]

---

**53** Adang and Vercauteren, *Mensen en Machten 2*, 128.

**54** Leo Dalhuisen et al., *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 2a* (Haarlem: Uitgeverij J. H. Gottmer, 1978), 62; Leo Dalhuisen et al., *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 2a* (Haarlem: Gottmer Educatief, 1982), 73.

**55** Leo Dalhuisen et al., *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 2. Wegwijzer voor de leerling* (Haarlem: Gottmer Educatief, 1981), 88.

**56** Dalhuisen, *Sprekend Verleden 2a* (1978), 80; Dalhuisen, *Sprekend Verleden 2a* (1982), 99. "Wij Nederlanders beroemen ons er nogal eens op een vrijheidslievend en verdraagzaam volkje te zijn. […] Maar hoeveel vrijheid stond de Republiek zijn eigen bewoners toe?"

With the help of two case studies – freedom of religion for Catholics and freedom of the press – students have to examine to what extent people had freedom. In a 1985 reprint, "Dutch tolerance" is downplayed in comparison with the Islamic world from the past: "In the Middle Ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, dissenters in the Islamic world had more freedom than those in most Western European states. […] With the Koran stipulating that those who changed religion should be killed, however, tolerance was not extended to apostate Muslims."[57]

Another well-known Dutch textbook series from the eighties is *Vragen aan de Geschiedenis* (Questions of history), firstly published in 1983 by dr. Joop Toebes. The limits of "Dutch tolerance" are also discussed in this series: "We almost saw ourselves as the most tolerant people in the world. However, the behavior of people in Amsterdam during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show that this tolerance was lacking in quite some cases."[58] Although Philip II is clearly portrayed as intolerant, he does not function here as a simple prototype of intolerance. The workbook supplements questions about Philip's intolerance with questions about sixteenth-century Calvinists: "What do you think? Were the Calvinists as intolerant towards the Catholics as the Spaniards were towards the Calvinists?"[59]

The teachers' book of 1991 mentions that the intolerance of Philip II could be related to contemporary examples of intolerance, such as Islamic fundamentalism and the Troubles in Northern Ireland. At the time, teachers are encouraged to think of examples that are related to pupils' own environment; they also mention the acceptance of "our" cultural minorities in the Netherlands.[60] Furthermore,

---

**57** Leo Dalhuisen et al., *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 3c* (Haarlem: Gottmer Educatief, 1985), 173. "In de middeleeuwen en de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw hadden andersdenkenden in de islamitische wereld echter een grotere vrijheid dan in de meest West-Europese staten. Toen Europa in de zestiende eeuw bijvoorbeeld werd geteisterd door godsdienstoorlogen, vonden veel Joden die uit Spanje waren verjaagd, een toevlucht binnen het Turkse rijk. De verdraagzaamheid betrof echter niet afvalligen van de islam."

**58** Joop Toebes, *Vragen aan de geschiedenis* 2 (Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1985), 63. "Vergeleken met andere landen waren we in de 17e eeuw een verdraagzaam volk. De joden werden hier niet om hun geloof of manier van leven vervolgd. Op die verdraagzaamheid zijn we in de loop van de tijd erg trots geworden. We gingen onszelf zien als bijna het meest verdraagzame dat er op de aardbol bestond. Toch kunnen we aan het gedrag van veel Amsterdammers uit de 17e eeuw en vooral uit de 18e eeuw zien dat er aan die verdraagzaamheid nogal wat mankeerde."

**59** Joop Toebes, *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 2: Werkboek* (Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1991), 17.

**60** Joop Toebes, *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 2: Docentenboek* (Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1991), 13. "Misschien dat men in het kader van 'verdraagzaamheid' – 'onverdraagzaamheid' Noord-Ierland en het islamitisch fundamentalisme kan noemen. Nuttiger is echter de leerlingen de vraag te stellen hoe het met de acceptatie van de praktijken en overtuigingen van onze culturele minderheden is gesteld. Zo kunnen leerlingen er begrip voor krijgen dat 'verdraagzaamheid' niet iets vanzelfsprekends is."

Toebes explains in the teachers' book that the old motives for teaching the Dutch Revolt, such as promoting religiousness and/or patriotism, are now obsolete. He emphasizes multiformity and multicausality instead, with the aim to teach pupils a more balanced view and understanding of (current) conflicts.[61] Toebes narrates history in a thematic and exemplary way and clearly connects history to the social sciences. In his view, history education is not an enumeration of dates, nor a collection of curiosities, but a course with social value that needs to contribute to an understanding of "our lives" in the present world.[62]

## Conclusions

This chapter has discussed how and why the myth of Dutch tolerance was constructed, adapted, and perpetuated in Dutch history textbooks during the period 1920 – 1990. Since the equal religious segmentation of education was organized within a Dutch national framework, this chapter questioned the interconnection between religion and nationalism in history textbooks. The various representations of the Dutch Revolt during pillarization displayed how Christianity was intertwined with narrating the nation. By highlighting the interpretation of the Dutch Revolt as a Calvinist founding narrative, it became clear how religion can underpin conceptions of the nation and how religious identity can be closely intertwined with a national identity. At the same time, religion can collide and compete with conceptions of the nation and accompanying identity, as became clear in the discussed Catholic counternarrative.

In contrast with widespread opinions that during pillarization the Martyrs of Gorcum were only mentioned in Catholic history textbook series – broader recognition would be harmful for the interpretation of the Dutch Revolt as founding narrative of the Netherlands – this chapter revealed otherwise. The Martyrs of Gorcum were also included in non-Catholic history textbook series for secondary schools. The essential difference was not their presence or absence but their narrative framing. Within the Catholic textbook series, the Martyrs were part of a longer list of Catholic victims, and the Prince was described as an opportunist. Non-Catholic series narrated a clear contrast between the intolerance of the Sea Beggars and the tolerance of Prince William of Orange, even being nicknamed the "Father of the Nation." Despite the differences, the Catholic victims function as a cul-

**61** Toebes, *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 2: Docentenboek* (1991), 8 – 9.

**62** Joop Toebes, *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 1: Docentenboek* (Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1984), 14.

tural tool in both frames: they had a function in the act of mediation between the past and the present. While the Martyrs first played a role in the Catholic emancipation process, including recognition, they transcended their role as religious martyrs and became national martyrs.

Whereas the various representations of the Dutch Revolt demonstrated that religion led to varying – sometimes contrasting – historical interpretations and narrations in textbooks, this chapter has also showed how religion led to unification in the interpretation of national history under the heading of Dutch tolerance. In 1954, nine textbook authors (Novem) with various backgrounds worked together and published a textbook series that could be used in various schools, regardless of their denomination. Instead of the prince's ideal of tolerance – a sensitive issue amongst the nine textbook authors – Novem highlighted Desiderius Erasmus's ideas of tolerance in relation to global citizenship, inspired by the idea that all human beings are connected in Christ. This attempt to go beyond nationalism and a narrowly defined national identity was inspired by depillarization and ecumenical, interreligious cooperation and stimulated by increasing European cooperation, decolonization processes, and universal ideas on human rights.

In this time of the "Europeanization of the national narrative," the Martyrs of Gorcum disappeared from almost all history textbooks written for secondary education. The narrative on the Dutch Revolt gained significance within a European frame, showing "democratization," the growth of tolerance, and the Low Countries as a "safe haven" in Europe. In this European frame, the representation of the Dutch Revolt can still be seen as a national narrative. The Netherlands was quickly conquered during the Second World War and lost its colonies,[63] but the nation was re-enchanted by attributing a heroic and leading role to the Netherlands as a cultural nation, highlighting the growth and progress of tolerance over time. This chapter showed how and why this re-enchantment of the nation in Dutch history textbooks was related to Christianity and to contemporary developments within religious communities of that period.

Around the 1980s and 1990s, textbook authors stretched the notion of "Dutch tolerance" as a reaction to the rise of the Netherlands as a multiethnic society. Instead of the absence of persecution of minorities and people with other ideas or opinions, textbook discussions about (in)tolerance included themes such as discrimination and prejudice. Influenced by contemporary discussions, textbook authors questioned the myth of "Dutch tolerance" and emphasized that pupils need-

**63** The Indonesian Revolution (or the Indonesian War of Independence) was hardly present in Dutch history textbooks published in the 1950s and 1960s.

ed to critically examine sources related to this topic. Moreover, pupils were invited to think about the acceptance of "our" cultural minorities in the present.

This chapter has clearly showed that history textbooks do not simply transmit fundamental societal values but, rather, function as adapters and co-designers of discourses. History textbooks are discursive mediators, containing narratives that have been used for making the nation, but also for remaking it.

## References

1572: Geboorte van Nederland. "450 jaar op zoek naar vrijheid, verdraagzaamheid, verbondenheid, verscheidenheid." Accessed May 12, 2023. https://geboortevannederland.nl/.

"80 Jaar Oorlog: De geboorte van Nederland." YouTube. Accessed May 12, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFbZwdNy8Wk.

Adang, A., and F. E. M. Vercauteren. *Mensen en Machten 1.* Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1962.

Adang, A., and F. E. M. Vercauteren. *Mensen en Machten I.* Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1967.

Adang, A., and F. E. M. Vercauteren. *Mensen en Machten 2.* Amsterdam: Meulenhoff Educatief, 1973.

Adang, A., and F. E. M. Vercauteren. *Mensen en Machten 3.* Amsterdam: Meulenhoff Educatief, 1971.

Auerbach, Yehudith. "National Narratives in a Conflict of Identity." In *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, edited by Yaacov Bar-siman-Tov, 158 – 87. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2010.

Balkenhol, Markus. "Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands." In *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion,* edited by Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, 195 – 216. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Blonk, Arij, and Jan Romein. *Leerboek der Algemene en Vaderlandse geschiedenis.* Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1941.

Boer, Michael Georg de. *Beknopt Leerboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland.* Leiden: Sijthoff, 1904.

Commissaris, August Cornelis Jacobus. *Leerboek der Nederlandse geschiedenis: Eerste deel.* 's Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1940.

Commissaris, August Cornelis Jacobus. *Van toen wij vrij werden: Eerste deel. Van schuilkerk tot kathedraal 1795 tot 1853.* Groningen: Wolters, 1927.

Daalder, Hans, and Galen Irwin. *Politics in the Netherlands: How Much Change?* London: Frank Cass and Company, 1989.

Dalhuisen, Leo, et al. *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 2a.* Haarlem: Uitgeverij J. H. Gottmer, 1978.

Dalhuisen, Leo, et al. *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 2a.* Haarlem: Gottmer Educatief, 1982.

Dalhuisen, Leo, et al. *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 2. Wegwijzer voor de leerling.* Haarlem: Gottmer Educatief, 1981.

Dalhuisen, Leo, et al. *Sprekend Verleden: Een geschiedenis van de wereld 3c.* Haarlem: Gottmer Educatief, 1985.

Fontaine, Piet. *Van oermens tot wereldburger: Derde deel. De nieuwe geschiedenis, 1517 – 1789.* 's Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1959.

Frijhoff, Willem. “The Relevance of Dutch History, or: Much in Little? Reflections on the Practice of History in the Netherlands.” *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 125 (2010): 7 – 44.

Ghonem-Woets, Karen. *Boeken voor de katholieke jeugd. Verzuiling en ontzuiling in de geschiedenis van Zwijsen en Malmberg.* Zuthpen: Walburg Pers, 2011.

Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience.* New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Grever, Maria, and Tina van der Vlies. “Why National Narratives are Perpetuated: A Literature Review on New Insights from History Textbook Research.” *London Review of Education* 15 (2017): 286 – 301.

Heijden, Chris van der. “De zwarte canon. Pleidooi voor een eerlijke geschiedschrijving.” *De Groene Amsterdammer* 10 (2012): 22 – 29.

Hielkema, Harco. “In Brielle ligt de geschiedenis op straat: van de Watergeuzen en de martelaren.” *Trouw*, March 26, 2005.

HoornRadio HoornGids. “Coen is gevallen: bevrijdingsfeestje gevierd.” Last modified August 17, 2011. Accessed March 16, 2023. https://www.hoornradio.nl/nw-7951-7-3347264/nieuws/coen_is_gevallen_bevrijdingsfeestje_gevierd.html.

Kloek, Els. “De martelaren van Gorcum (1572).” In *Verzameld verleden: Veertig gedenkwaardige momenten en figuren uit de vaderlandse geschiedenis*, edited by Els Kloek, 46 – 49. Hilversum: Verloren, 2004.

KNAW. *Wankele Sokkels: Omstreden monumenten in de openbare ruimte.* Amsterdam: KNAW, 2023.

Koning, Martijn de, “De beleefde tolerantie,” *NieuwWij*, April 22, 2013. Accessed April 14, 2023. https://www.nieuwwij.nl/opinie/de-beleefde-tolerantie/.

Langedijk, Dirk. *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche geschiedenis: Deel 1. Van de oudste tijden tot 1795.* Groningen: Wolters, 1932.

Langedijk, Dirk. *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis: Deel 1. Van de oudste tijden tot 1795.* Groningen: Wolters, 1938.

MAX Vandaag. “Het jaar 1572, het begin van de ‘geboorte van Nederland.’” Accessed May 12, 2023. https://www.maxvandaag.nl/sessies/themas/terug-naar-toen/het-jaar-1572-het-begin-van-de-geboorte-van-nederland/.

Novem. *Wereld in Wording: Deel 2. Nieuwe Geschiedenis.* The Hague: Van Goor Zonen, 1961.

Pik, J. W. *Overzicht der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis.* Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1928.

Rijpma, Enneus. *Ontwikkelingsgang der historie II.* Groningen: Wolters, 1938.

Rijpma, Jasper. *Jan Pieterszoon Coen op school: Historisch besef en geschiedenisonderwijs in Nederland, 1857 – 2011.* Master’s thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2012.

Schrijver, Wim. “Martelaren.” *Korte metten*, November 29, 2008. Accessed April 14, 2023. http://lc-kortemetten.blogspot.com/2008_11_01_archive.html.

Schwartz, Barry. “Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II.” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 908 – 27.

Stipriaan, Alex van. “Dutch Tolerance in Black and White: From Religious Pragmatism to Racialized Ideology.” In *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion*, edited by Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, 173 – 91. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Toebes, Joop. *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 1. Docentenboek.* Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1984.

Toebes, Joop. *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 2. Docentenboek.* Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1991.

Toebes, Joop. *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 2.* Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1985.

Toebes, Joop. *Vragen aan de geschiedenis 2. Werkboek.* Groningen: WoltersNoordhoff, 1991.

Vlies, Tina van der. *Echoing Events. The Perpetuation of National Narratives in English and Dutch history textbooks, 1920 – 2010.* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022.

Vlies, Tina van der. "Echoing National Narratives in English History Textbooks." In *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, edited by M. Carretero, S. Berger, and M. Grever, 243 – 58. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Vlies, Tina van der. "Historicizing and Pluralizing Wertsch's Narrative Templates: Freedom and Tolerance in Dutch History Textbooks." In *Reproducing, Rethinking, Resisting National Narratives: A Sociocultural Approach to Schematic Narrative Templates in Times of Nationalism*, edited by Ignacio Brescó and Floor van Alphen, 23 – 26. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2022.

Vlies, Tina van der. "Van nationale heldenonderwijs tot 'vredesvak'. Hoe twee wereldoorlogen het schoolvak geschiedenis veranderden." *Geschiedenis Magazine* 49 (2014): 52 – 55.

Voogd, Gerrit Jan de. *Erasmus en Grotius: twee grote Nederlanders en hun boodschap aan onze tijd.* Leiden: Nederlandse Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1946.

Zeijden, Albert van der. *Katholieke identiteit en historisch bewustzijn: W. J. F. Nuyens (1823 – 1894) en zijn "nationale" geschiedschrijving.* Hilversum: Verloren, 2002.

Paul Vermeer

# Religious Education as Latent Secularization in the Netherlands: An Analysis of Two Contemporary and Widely Used Textbooks

## Introduction

For most of the twentieth century, Dutch society was a so-called *pillarized* society deeply influenced by the Christian faith. Between 1917 and approximately 1967, when the first signs of the process of depillarization became visible, Dutch society was divided along ideological and religious lines into four closed social groupings known as *pillars:* a Calvinist (Protestant), a Catholic, a liberal and a socialist pillar.[1] These four pillars had their own social institutions, such as newspapers, broadcasting companies, trade unions, health insurances, farmers' associations, banks, hospitals, universities, youth movements, and sport clubs, as well as schools. People belonging to these pillars led segregated lives and were, in the case of religion, even geographically segregated with the traditional distinction between the Catholic south and the Protestant, or Calvinist, north. These pillars offered robust plausibility structures in which people mainly interacted with like-minded individuals. As a result, religious beliefs and values were socially endorsed as they permeated every aspect of life. Even if people did not regularly attend church, they still internalized fundamental religious beliefs and values. Through, for instance, the newspapers they read, the radio programmes they listened to, the sports club they were members of, not forgetting the denominational school they attended, people became familiar with the fundamental beliefs of their pillar.

Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, this division of Dutch society has almost disappeared, except in education. The Dutch dual school system of public and private denominational schools appears to be the last remnant of this pillarized past and still offers denominational schools the possibility to transmit fundamental Christian beliefs and values through religious education. But do present-day denominational schools really do this? Do they still transmit fundamental Christian beliefs? Or are denominational schools also affected by secularization and have they become, just like other societal institutions such as hospitals, broadcasting companies, or trade unions, *de facto* depillarized? In this chapter, I will

1 Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-013

delve more deeply into this matter by looking at the practice of religious education in mainstream denominational schools for secondary education. More specifically, I will critically reflect on the way Christianity is represented in two textbooks for religious education which are widely used in Dutch denominational schools in the 2020s. Consequently, the following research question is addressed: How is the representation of Christianity in two widely used textbooks for religious education in mainstream denominational schools marked by secularization? I limit myself to religious education in mainstream denominational schools, because these schools constitute by far the largest domain of denominational schools in the Netherlands. Analyzing religious education textbooks used in mainstream denominational schools may, therefore, be indicative of the possible secularization and de facto depillarization of the Dutch dual school system at large.

## The Dutch Religious Landscape of the Twenty-First Century

For a correct understanding of what follows below, it is first important to briefly sketch the religious context in which religious education takes place nowadays in the Netherlands. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, religion in Dutch society exhibits two important characteristics: it is very diverse and, at the same time, deeply affected by the process of secularization. As regards the first characteristic, although Christianity is still the dominant religion, other religious traditions are also clearly present in Dutch society. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), in 2020, 20 percent of the Dutch population aged fifteen years or older identified themselves as Catholic, 14 percent as Protestant, 5 percent as Muslim, and 5 percent had another religious background.[2] Among the Protestants, the largest denomination is the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, which resulted from a merger between the Dutch Reformed, the Re-Reformed, and the Lutheran Church in 2004, followed by various smaller orthodox, neo-Calvinist denominations, some tiny, more liberal denominations, like the Remonstrant Church, and several independent evangelical congregations.[3] Islam is by far the largest non-Christian religion, but there are also noticeable, though clearly smaller, numbers

**2** See. CBS, "Religieuze betrokkenheid: Persoonskenmerken," accessed October 19, 2022, https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/82904NED?q=religie.

**3** Hyme Stoffels, "Protestantisme," in *Handboek religie in Nederland: Perspectief – overzicht – debat*, ed. Meerten ter Borg, Erik Borgman, Marjo Buitelaar, Yme Kuiper and Rob Plum (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008), 122–45.

of Jews, Hindusm and Buddhists living in the Netherlands.[4] Hence, the Dutch religious landscape is characterized by intra-Christian as well as interreligious plurality.

However, figures from Statistics Netherlands also show that the Netherlands is a very secular country, with the majority of the Dutch population, 55 percent, having no religious background at all. When it comes to the Christian faith, longitudinal data show that the proportion of the Dutch population that believes in God and at the same time attends church services has dropped from 59 percent in 1966 to 14 percent in 2015.[5] This downward trend equally affects the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and the smaller liberal denominations, while the orthodox, neo-Calvinist denominations, as well as most of the evangelical congregations, are far less affected by secularization.[6] Islam, too, is hardly affected by secularization. Between 2006 and 2015, the religious commitment among Dutch Muslims of Turkish and Moroccan descent, as indicated, for instance, by their religious self-definition, mosque attendance, prayer practices, fasting, or religious salience, barely changed.[7] The Dutch population thus is becoming increasingly secular, but this mainly goes for the autochthonous Dutch with (previous) ties to the mainstream Christian churches.

With respect to the secular character of Dutch society, recent observations of The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) concerning alternative religiosity and spirituality are also very interesting.[8] In view of five core elements of contemporary spirituality – viz., self-spirituality, holism, mysticism, paraculture, and a quest orientation (bricolage) – the SCP concludes that support among the Dutch population for these core elements or basic spiritual attitudes has slightly

**4** Hans Schmeets, *Wie is religieus, en wie niet?* (The Hague: CBS, 2018), 6. For a more detailed overview of the Dutch religious landscape, see Ton Bernts, Gert de Jong and Hassan Yar, "Een religieuze atlas van Nederland," in *Geloven in het publieke domein: Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie*, ed. Wim van de Donk, Petra Jonkers, Gerrit Kronjee and Rob Plum (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 89–138.

**5** Joris Kregting, Peer Scheepers, Paul Vermeer, and Chris Hermans, "Why God Has Left the Netherlands: Explanations for the Decline of Institutional Christianity in the Netherlands Between 1966 and 2015," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57, no. 1 (2018): 58–79.

**6** Jos Becker and Joep de Hart, *Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland: Verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke traditie* (The Hague: SCP, 2006), 30–31; see. also Joep de Hart and Pepijn van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland: Kerkelijke deelname en christelijke gelovigheid* (The Hague: SCP, 2018).

**7** Willem Huijnk, *De religieuze beleving van moslims in Nederland* (The Hague: SCP, 2018). Similar longitudinal data concerning Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists in the Netherlands are, to my knowledge, not available.

**8** Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving: Diversiteit en verandering in beeld. Deel 3: buiten kerk en moskee* (The Hague: SCP, 2022).

decreased over time. Furthermore, these attitudes are endorsed by church members and spiritual non-members alike, but not by the 51 percent of the Dutch population who self-identify as secular. This shows that there is no spiritual revolution going on, as once predicted by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead,[9] nor is there a growing tension or distinction between the spiritual and religious domains, as Heelas and Woodhead also claimed.

This religious context has two profound implications for religious education in the Netherlands. The first implication relates to the institutional context in which religious education occurs. As I will explain in more detail below, religious education in the Netherlands almost exclusively takes place in denominational schools. However, schools affiliated with the largest Christian denominations in the Netherlands – that is, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands – are affected the most by the process of secularization, as the aforementioned figures show. That is to say, compared to schools affiliated with the smaller, more orthodox Christian denominations, these schools are attended mainly by pupils with no or only a nominal religious background. This situation seriously limits the capability of these schools to offer Christian religious education, as Bruno Vreeburg already noticed during the 1990s.[10] The second implication concerns the pupils themselves. Not only is the Dutch population as such becoming increasingly secular, but youngsters are the forerunners in this process. Each younger birth cohort is less religious, in terms of church membership, church attendance, and belief in God, than the previous birth cohort.[11] Moreover, youngsters are not only the least religious in a more traditional Christian sense, but they are also the least interested in and occupied with alternative spirituality. Almost 70 percent of the Dutch population in the 15–24 age bracket identifies as both non-religious and non-spiritual.[12] Therefore, religious education in the Netherlands is primarily taught in relatively secular educational environments to secular youths.

**9** Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

**10** Bruno Vreeburg, "Religieuze socialisatie en onderwijsverzuiling," in *Verzuiling in het onderwijs: Actuele verklaringen en analyse*, ed. Anne Bert Dijkstra, Jaap Dronkers and Roelande Hofman (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1997), 185–225.

**11** De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, 46–48, 77–78.

**12** De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, Appendix Table l.12.

## A Confessional Subject

The way Christianity is represented in textbooks is not only influenced by the religious context I briefly sketched above, but also by the status and actual practice of religious education in Dutch secondary education. As regards its status, religious education in Dutch schools is officially a confessional subject. This is the result of the aforementioned dual school system of public, state-controlled schools and private, denominational schools, which receive equal funding from the state.[13] As a separate subject, religious education only exists in private, denominational schools, while in public schools, religious education is not part of the curriculum. Although the law demands that public schools pay attention to the various religions and worldviews in Dutch society, this does not have to be a separate subject. As a result, most public primary and secondary schools touch on religion and worldview in passing in subjects like geography, history, or social studies. Furthermore, as not to jeopardize the neutrality of the state, it is also required that public schools pay attention to religion and worldview in an *objective* and strictly informative way.[14] As a result, separate religious education classes are only part of the curriculum in denominational schools. In these schools, religious education is considered a legitimate expression of the denomination the school is affiliated with and may be used to socialize pupils in this specific religious tradition.

Thus, officially, or *de jure*, religious education in Dutch schools is always confessional. Moreover, religious education is also not supervised by the state: such a measure would violate the separation between church and state and the state's neutrality. Therefore, the state imposes no general educational aims with regard to religious education, there is no such thing as a national syllabus or curriculum, nor are there general professional and educational requirements for religious ed-

**13** Paul Vermeer, "Wie is verantwoordelijk voor het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs op school? Een probleemverkenning," *Religie en Samenleving* 13, no. 3 (2018): 182–204. This equal funding resulted from the *pacification* of 1917 and led to the establishment of large numbers of private denominational schools alongside the existing public schools. Due to this historic development and despite recent processes of secularization, even today most secondary schools are denominational schools. During the 2021–2022 school year public schools made up only 29 percent of all secondary schools, followed by Catholic (22 percent), Protestant (20 percent), and other private schools (29 percent); StatLine, "Onderwijsinstellingen: Grootte, soort, levensbeschouwelijke grondslag, accessed October 21, 2022, https://opendata.cbs.nl/ - /CBS/nl/dataset/03753/table?searchKeywords=levensbeschouwelijke grondslag voortgezet onderwijs. See also the contribution of Brasters in this volume for more detailed information regarding the Dutch dual school system.

**14** Wim Westerman, *Ongewenste objectiviteit: Onderwijs in geestelijke stromingen in historisch en vergelijkend perspectief* (Kampen: Kok, 2001).

ucation teachers. These issues are solely the responsibility of the school board or of the religious authorities of the denomination the school is affiliated with. In short, the status of religious education strongly differs from the status of any other subject in public and private schools. Apart from paying the salaries of religious education teachers, the Dutch state does not concern itself with religious education in any way.[15]

Due to this confessional status, the actual practice of religious education in the Netherlands is nowadays very diverse. As mentioned already, religious education initially served as a kind of secondary religious socialization taking place at school as an extension of the primary religious socialization in the family. However, the profound secularization of Dutch society has made it virtually impossible, at least in schools affiliated with mainstream Christian denominations such as the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, to continue this practice.[16] In most of these schools, religious education has actually lost its confessional character, though officially, it is still treated as a confessional subject for which the state bears no responsibility. Moreover, the churches themselves seem to have somehow lost interest in religious education at school as they became aware that it is no longer an appropriate medium for the transmission of faith. In the Netherlands, therefore, religious education is virtually absent in public schools and increasingly marginalized in most denominational schools.

## From Religious Education to Worldview Education

In line with this weakened status of religious education in mainstream denominational schools, the content and actual practice of religious education has also changed over time. This change can best be described as a transformation from religious education to worldview education and is the result of two consecutive developments.

The first development can be briefly described with the help of the keyword *correlation.*[17] If pupils are no longer actively socialized in the Christian faith by their parents, even though they may still be baptized, how can the Christian tradi-

**15** Vermeer, "Wie is verantwoordelijk."

**16** Vreeburg, "Religieuze socialisatie"; see also Paul Vermeer, "Religious Education and Socialization," *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (2010): 103–16.

**17** E. T. Alii, *Godsdienstpedagogiek: Dimensies en spanningsvelden* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2009), 169–75; Jan Marten Praamsma, "Korte geschiedenis van het schoolvak godsdienst/levensbeschouwing," in *Handboek vakdidactiek levensbeschouwing en religie: Leven leren vanuit je wortels*, ed. Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer (Lervo, 2020), 90–93.

tion and the Christian faith be made relevant to them? This question occupied religious educators from the second half of the 1960s through to roughly the mid-1980s and was answered in two ways, both of which correlated the Christian faith to the experiences and daily life of pupils. One approach took the individual pupil as a point of departure and aimed to demonstrate the relevancy of the Christian tradition by showing how the Christian faith offers a new perspective on the pupil's daily experiences and worries. This approach marks an anthropological turn in religious education and is known as *experiential religious education, correlational didactics*, or *dialogical learning*. The second approach took contemporary socioeconomic situations of injustice and oppression as a point of departure and tried to demonstrate the Christian tradition's relevancy by highlighting the Christian faith's ideological-critical and liberating potential.[18] This approach is known as the *catechesis of liberation*. Over time, however, both approaches failed. The almost exclusive emphasis on the Christian tradition simply no longer matched the heterogeneous composition of most classrooms in mainstream denominational schools. From the 1980s onwards, these classrooms were occupied by a growing number of pupils who were completely unfamiliar with the Christian faith or identified with the Christian tradition in a very superficial way, as well as by a growing number of migrants with a non-Christian background.

The failure of the above-mentioned approaches led to the emergence of worldview education as a second major development concerning religious education in Dutch secondary schools.[19] Initially, worldview education was closely related to correlational didactics. The human need for dealing with situations of contingency and the quest for meaning in life were taken as the starting point, after which various religious traditions and secular worldviews were presented as possible answers. Because of that, the novelty of this approach lay in its non-exclusive Christian character, which marks the first step in the factual *de-confessionalization* of religious education from the mid-1980s onwards. Later on, however, the emphasis gradually shifted from the presentation of religious and secular worldviews as systems of meaning to the authentic search for meaning by the pupil himself. As a result, the emphasis shifted from an *organized* worldview to a *personal* worldview.[20]

Organized worldviews are more or less coherent and established systems of ideals, norms, beliefs, and rituals, that people may, for instance, use to answer existential questions or find meaning in life. However, organized worldviews are pre-

**18** See for example Johannes A. van der Ven, *Kritische godsdienstdidactiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1982).
**19** Alii, *Godsdienstpedagogiek*, 175–176; Praamsma, "Korte geschiedenis," 92–93.
**20** Jacomijn van der Kooij, Doret de Ruijter, and Siebren Miedema, "'Worldview': The Meaning of the Concept and the Impact on Religious Education," *Religious Education* 108, no. 2 (2013): 210–28.

scriptive. They contain specific answers to existential questions. For example, if one considers death from a Christian perspective, an organized worldview, one cannot say death is the definite end of life. This is not in accordance with the Christian tradition. In contrast, a personal worldview consists of the norms, values, ideas, and existential notions that influence the way people act, think, and find meaning in life. Such a personal worldview can, but need not, be based on an organized worldview, and people need not be very conscious about their personal worldview. Now, within present-day worldview education, the personal worldview of the pupil constitutes both the start and the endpoint of the learning process – for the aim of the learning process is to help pupils develop a personal worldview and to find meaning in life.[21] Religious and secular, organized worldviews can be important sources of inspiration in this respect, but the emphasis is on the pupil's own search for meaning, not (or no longer) on the systematic learning of organized worldviews. The following statement of the general aim of religious education/worldview education in a recent Dutch handbook on worldview education and religion perfectly illustrates this approach: "Pupils learn to think about themselves, others and the world around them from the perspective of ultimate meaning."[22]

Although the actual practice of religious education is very diverse, as I already mentioned in the previous section, this latter worldview education approach is the dominant approach in most religious education classes in mainstream denominational schools in the 2020s.[23] This approach is illustrative of the aforementioned, ongoing de-confessionalization of religious education as well as of the loss of learning content. Recently, this loss of learning content has led to a renewed appeal among various scholars of religion, including myself,[24] for a neutral and more cognitive-oriented religious studies approach to religious education in school. These scholars argue that instead of focusing on the development of a personal worldview, religious education should offer pupils the necessary conceptual tools to

**21** Praamsma, "Korte geschiedenis," 92.

**22** Kees Hamers and Jojanne Kemman, "Doelstellingen voor het vak godsdienst/levensbeschouwing," in *Handboek vakdidactiek levensbeschouwing en religie" Leven leren vanuit je wortels*, ed. Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer (Lervo, 2020), 106. My translation. In Dutch this aim is stated as follows: "Leerlingen leren over zichzelf, anderen en de wereld om hen heen na te denken vanuit het perspectief van uiteindelijke betekenis en zin."

**23** Of course, this is not the dominant approach in schools affiliated with the smaller orthodox, neo-Calvinist denominations or the evangelical movement. In these schools, religious education still functions as a kind of secondary religious socialization on the basis of a recognizable confessional content. However, these schools constitute only a small proportion of all Protestant schools in the Netherlands.

**24** Paul Vermeer, "Meta-concepts, Thinking Skills and Religious Education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 34, no. 3 (2012): 333–47.

help them understand and critically engage with the religious diversity they encounter in daily life.[25] While this critique once more started a discussion about the aim and content of religious education in mainstream denominational schools, worldview education with an emphasis on the personal development of pupils still dominates the scene.

## The Representation of Christianity in Two Widely Used Textbooks

Having sketched the sociocultural and educational context in which religious education is practiced in the Netherlands at the beginning of the twenty-first century, I will now focus on the representation of Christianity in two contemporary and widely used textbooks for religious education. As mentioned several times now, the practice of religious education in the Netherlands is very diverse. Therefore, the textbooks I discuss cannot be considered in every respect representative of the ways religious education is practiced at different denominational schools. At best, these textbooks illustrate how religious education is generally practiced at mainstream Catholic and Protestant schools, which together form the majority of denominational schools in the Netherlands. In this section, I will first describe the background of each textbook and then offer a more systematic overview of how Christianity is represented with the help of an analytical scheme consisting of seven dimensions. I end this section by briefly mentioning the most important similarities and differences between the textbooks.

### *Standpunt* (Point of view)

A very popular method in the 2020s, which is mainly, but not exclusively, used in Catholic secondary education, is entitled *Standpunt.* The best English translation of *Standpunt* is "Point of view," which captures the overall aim of this method very well: helping pupils to develop their own philosophy of life by making them familiar with the major religious traditions and worldviews present in Dutch society. This means that, first, pupils should become aware of fundamental existential

25 This appeal is not new. As early as 1986, a group of pedagogues and scholars of religion had analyzed several textbooks for religious education and criticized most of them for their lack of scholarly content. See Jan Dirk Imelman, Wilna Meijer, Piet van der Ploeg and Rieuwert Wissink, *Tussen leuren en leren: analyse van elf methoden voor godsdienstonderwijs* (Kampen: Kok, 1986).

and ethical questions and, second, they must become familiar with how these existential and ethical questions are addressed within major religious traditions and worldviews. Thus, pupils learn to take the perspective of different religious traditions and worldviews while thinking about fundamental, existential questions and ethical issues. In this way, pupils are stimulated and encouraged to develop their own philosophy of life or personal worldview.[26]

*Standpunt* offers a complete religious and worldview education curriculum for twelve- to fifteen-year-old pupils. It consists of three parts and is available in two versions: one for lower-level vocational schools and one for higher pre-college education. In this chapter, I only discuss the first part of the version for higher education.[27] I limit myself to this first part because this is the only part in which Christianity is presented systematically. Alongside Christianity, Judaism is also presented in this part, while Islam and Humanism are discussed in parts two and three, respectively. Besides these four traditions, various topics are also covered throughout the three parts, namely, the beginning of life, nature and the environment, beauty, sexuality, death, sports, relationships, and God.

In the first part of the version for higher pre-college education, Christianity is presented in the fourth chapter in a very descriptive or phenomenological way. The chapter begins by explaining why learning about Christianity is important. This is done by referring to popular first names that originate from the names of important Christian figures – such as *Paul* or *Chris* – by mentioning that the death of Jesus marks the beginning of our era, that Christmas and Easter are still widely celebrated, and that the value we attach to human life is held as an important Christian value. In the next section the core of the Christian faith is briefly explained, as well as the importance of Christianity as a world religion. The third section deals with the history, spread, and current position of Christianity in Dutch society. The fourth section is the core of this chapter and deals with five basic values derived from the Ten Commandments, such as forgiveness, refusal to use violence, or respect for nature. Furthermore, this section also discusses the Christian perspective on certain existential questions like the meaning of suffering and death. Following this section on the "inside" of the Christian faith, the fifth section deals with the material side of Christianity by discussing important Christian figures (Jesus, Saint Francis), the Bible, and Christian rituals, symbols, feasts, and organizations. Finally, the sixth section offers a Christian perspective on happiness, salvation, and social justice.

**26** Jan de Leeuw, *Docentenhandleiding Standpunt HAVO/VWO*, vol. 1 (Oss: Damon Educatie, 2016), 11–12.

**27** Jan de Leeuw, *Standpunt HAVO/VWO*, vol. 1 (Oss: Damon Educatie, 2016).

## *Van horen zeggen* (The story goes)

A popular method used mostly, but again not exclusively, in Protestant secondary education is entitled *Van horen zeggen. Van horen zeggen* can best be translated as "The Story Goes," and this title is also well chosen. Like *Standpunt*, *Van horen zeggen* offers a complete curriculum for religious education for twelve- to fifteen-year-old pupils in lower-level secondary education and twelve- to seventeen-year-old pupils in higher pre-college education. However, unlike in *Standpunt*, the focus is much more on the five world religions, and for both levels, the curriculum starts by paying attention to the Bible. For the lower levels of secondary education, *Van horen zeggen* offers a curriculum consisting of four parts: the first two parts deal with stories from the Bible, the third part deals with the five world religions, including Christianity, and the fourth part deals with ethics. For the higher levels of secondary education, the curriculum *Van horen zeggen* offers consists of eight parts. Again, the first part deals with Biblical stories, after which the second part offers a comparative introduction to the five world religions. The second part is followed by four separate parts on Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Two additional parts for the highest grade of secondary education deal respectively with ethics and more fundamental philosophical issues like the relationship between religion and science. Apart from these latter two parts, *Van horen zeggen* thus explicitly presents religion, especially Christianity, as a narrative tradition and emphasizes the role and importance of biblical stories in continuing this tradition; hence the appropriateness of its title.

For this chapter, I focus on the textbook on Christianity for lower-level secondary education,[28] which belongs to the third part on world religions. This textbook offers a mainly factual description of Christianity. This is also explicitly emphasized in the general teacher guide, which says that *Van horen zeggen* aims to offer objective, phenomenological knowledge about religious traditions to enable pupils to form their own opinions about these traditions.[29] As a result, the learning objectives for this specific textbook on Christianity are all of a cognitive nature; for instance, "the pupil learns about the most important events in the life of Jesus"; or, "the pupil learns about the way Christians practice their faith."[30] Affective or attitudinal learning objectives are not stated. As regards the learning content, this text-

**28** Lennart Becking, Cor Jongeneelen, and Lizet Penson, *Van horen zeggen: Christendom 3/4 VMBO leerwerkboek* (Amersfoort: ThiemeMeulenhoff, 2021).

**29** ThiemeMeulenhoff, *Van horen zeggen Docentenhandleiding algemeen* (Amersfoort: ThiemeMeulenhof, 2022), 6.

**30** ThiemeMeulenhoff, *Van horen zeggen 3/4 VMBO Christendom: Handleiding* (Amersfoort: ThiemeMeulenhof, 2021).

book on Christianity consists of four chapters. The first chapter deals with the life of Jesus; the second chapter explains how Christianity developed into a world religion; the third chapter discusses important Christian feasts and rituals; and the fourth chapter is dedicated to the Christian faith, its symbols, and the way Christians practice their faith in daily life.

## A Systematic Overview of the Way Christianity is Represented

To get a more detailed picture of how Christianity is presented in these textbooks, I use an analytical scheme designed initially by Jan van Wiele to examine representations of Islam in religious education textbooks.[31] However, as noted by Van Wiele himself, the scheme can also be used to examine how other religious traditions besides Islam are portrayed. Applied to Christianity, the analytical scheme consists of seven dimensions: concise definition of Christianity; geographical and political context in which Jesus lived; aspects of the Bible; Christianity in history; Christian beliefs; Christian practices; and the relationship between Christianity and other religions. The more detailed, comparative descriptions of *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Christianity in *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen*.

| | ***Standpunt* (Point of view)** | ***Van horen zeggen* (The story goes)** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Concise definition of Christianity | Christianity is a world religion in which Jesus Christ is worshipped as the only incarnation of God. There are different Christian confessions of which (Roman) Catholics constitute the largest group. | Christianity is presented as the largest and most widespread world religion, which started 2,000 years ago with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who was seen as the Messiah or Christ. |
| 2. Geographical and political context in which Jesus appeared | Jesus is presented as a Jew perceived by his contemporaries as the Messiah, because of his good deeds. The Jewish leadership considered his actions and sermons blasphemous, and the | Jesus's public appearance, as a moral teacher telling parables, is discussed against the background of Palestine and the Roman Empire. Much attention is paid to Jesus's suffering and death, while his resurrection is only |

**31** Jan van Wiele, *In het atelier van de theoloog: Een instrumentarium voor interreligieuze schoolboekanalyse* (Leuven: Acco, 1999), 180–82; Jan van Wiele, "Mapping the Road for Balance: Towards the Construction of Criteria for a Contemporary Interreligious Textbook Analysis Regarding Islam," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 17, no. 1 (2004): 1–35.

**Table 1** *(Continued)*

| | ***Standpunt* (Point of view)** | ***Van horen zeggen* (The story goes)** |
|---|---|---|
| | Romans feared he would start a rebellion, which is why he was crucified. | briefly mentioned and relativized by stating that some people believe Jesus rose from the dead. |
| 3. Aspects of the Bible | The textbook mentions that the Bible is the most important book of Christianity, which consists of the Old and New Testament. The textbook lists the books of the New Testament and mentions when these books were written, by whom and in what language. The books of the Old Testament are not mentioned. | The four Gospels are presented as the most important source of our knowledge of Jesus's life. The Gospels are presented as human narrations, which therefore sometimes differ from one another. The Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles and the Book of Revelation are only briefly mentioned. The books of the Old Testament are not mentioned. |
| 4. Christianity in history | The history of Christianity is sketched by referring to the period of Constantine when Christianity became the state religion, the Schism of 1054, and the Reformation. Next, the textbook discusses how Christianity developed in the modern era and mentions the processes of pillarization and depillarization in Dutch society. It is also mentioned that disaffiliation is rather common among the Dutch. | The history of Christianity is presented chronologically. Starting with the conversion of Paul, the textbook explains how Christianity gradually became the state religion in the Roman Empire and, eventually, the dominant power in Europe. Next, the schism of 1054 and the Reformation are mentioned, as well as the confessions that resulted from these schisms. The current global spread of Christianity is also described, and it is stated that Christianity has had a significant influence on the development of, for instance, education and healthcare in various countries. |
| 5. Christian beliefs | Core Christian beliefs are barely mentioned in the textbook. Only at the beginning of the chapter are some parts, but not all, of the Christian confession discussed. Far more attention is paid to the answers the Christian faith offers to existential questions, as well as to the moral values Christianity teaches. In this respect, five ethical guidelines are presented: forgiveness, respect, nonviolence, care for the poor and vul- | The core of the Christian belief is described as the belief in one God whose relationship with humanity is restored by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, the textbook also states that people will go to heaven if they follow Christ. |

**Table 1** *(Continued)*

| | ***Standpunt* (Point of view)** | ***Van horen zeggen* (The story goes)** |
|---|---|---|
| | nerable, and respect for nature and the environment. | |
| 6. Christian practices | Christian practices are presented as part of the visual expressions of Christianity. The textbook mentions important rituals like the Eucharist, all seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, feasts like Easter and Christmas, and water as a core symbol; it also refers to several Christian organizations in the Netherlands, such as churches, Christian political parties, and Christian broadcasting organizations. | First, the textbook discusses feasts Christians celebrate to remember important events in the life of Jesus: Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost. Next, rituals like baptism and the Eucharist, and the difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant rituals, are also mentioned. As part of the section on beliefs, several practices, like churchgoing, prayer, acts of mercy and charity, are presented as ways to follow in Jesus's footsteps. In view of churchgoing, attention is also paid to the presence of Catholic and Protestant churches in contemporary Dutch society. |
| 7. Relationship between Christianity and other religions | Christianity is presented as rooted in and emerging out of Judaism. The fact that Jesus was a Jew is emphasized throughout the textbook. Resemblances to or differences from other religions are not mentioned in this section on Christianity. | Other religions are not mentioned in this textbook on Christianity. The fact that Jesus was a Jew is ignored, nor are there references to the Jewish roots of Christianity. The Old Testament is referred to as the covenant between God and the Jewish people, and the New Testament as the covenant between God and humanity as a whole. |

## Similarities and Differences between the Textbooks

As becomes clear from Table 1, the two textbooks do not much differ in how Christianity is represented. Both textbooks offer a very factual description of Christianity, which is presented as a major world religion. As a result, both textbooks emphasize *facts*, like the context in which Jesus lived, the history of Christianity and how it spread across the globe, Christian symbols and rituals, some core Christian beliefs, Christian sacraments, Christian churches in contemporary Dutch society, and so on. Besides these similarities, there are also some differences. *Van horen zeggen* is more focused on the Bible and the Gospels, as important human narra-

tions of the life of Jesus, are discussed in more detail compared to *Standpunt.*[32] This difference is probably due to the fact that *Van horen zeggen* was initially written for Protestant religious education. In the Netherlands, the Bible is traditionally more central to Protestant religious education than to Catholic religious education. *Standpunt*, in contrast, is more focused on the experiential dimension of religion by showing how Christianity, as an organized worldview, informs the personal worldview of a Christian teenager and, subsequently, helps this teenager address existential questions.[33] This difference probably reflects the fact that *Standpunt* is published by a publishing house that as early as the mid-1980s was at the forefront in promoting the aforementioned, worldview education approach.

## Secularization

The aim of this chapter is to explore to what extent the representation of Christianity in *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* is marked by secularization. Before I am able to do this, however, in this section I will first explain my understanding of secularization. In line with the work of leading secularization theorists like Karel Dobbelaere and Steve Bruce, I understand secularization as the *loss of religious authority* at the societal (macro), organizational (meso) and individual (micro) levels.[34] This means that the influence of religious beliefs and values on society and on various social institutions, as well as on individuals, is declining.

Modern societies are characterized by what is known as functional or structural differentiation. All kinds of societal functions, like healthcare, education, politics, economics, or art, are nowadays fulfilled by independent, specialized subsystems, which operate based on their own inner logic and rationality and no longer on the basis of religious values and regulations. A prime example of functional differentiation is the separation between church and state, which in the Netherlands goes together with the neutrality of the state and the right to freedom of religion.[35] The Dutch state does not interfere with internal church affairs, does not prefer or favour one specific religious tradition over another, and grants every citizen the right to practice the religion of his or her choice. In such a differentiated society,

**32** Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 9–17.

**33** De Leeuw, *Standpunt*, 94–99.

**34** Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002); Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002); Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

**35** Sophie van Bijsterveld, *Overheid en godsdienst: Herijking van een onderlinge relatie* (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2017), 3.

religion itself has become an independent subsystem with a specific function, that is, relating individuals to the transcendent. At the same time, however, religion no longer has any authority or control over the other subsystems. Such a decline in the societal authority of religion in the Netherlands becomes visible, for instance, in the fact that nowadays, most shops are no longer closed on Sundays. In this respect, functional or structural differentiation is seen as a core characteristic of secularization.[36]

Apart from the macro level of society, secularization may also occur at the meso level of societal institutions. Societal institutions are the organizations needed to fulfil the functions of the specific subsystems. Healthcare is fulfilled by hospitals, education by schools and universities, law by juridical organizations, and the economy functions by enterprises. But these organizations also become more secular. For example, due to developments in the economy or healthcare, there is a need for people trained in science and technical skills, which in turn affects the educational curriculum in school. The school curriculum becomes increasingly oriented towards teaching technical knowledge and transmitting a rational scientific worldview instead of a religious worldview.[37] This also affects denominational schools. To maintain their social standing and to ensure the enrolment of a sufficient number of pupils, denominational schools downplay their religious identity and instead emphasize their secular educational quality and expertise. In the process of secularization, religion thus not only loses control over other subsystems, but also over the societal institutions fulfilling the specific functions of these subsystems.

At the micro level, secularization concerns the loss of religious authority over the individual. This means that religious authorities no longer control what people believe or how they act. People have become autonomous in this respect and decide for themselves what to believe or by which moral principles to live their lives. Hence, micro-level secularization concerns "the lost power of the religious authorities of institutionalized religions to control individual religiousness."[38] From this perspective, the alleged transformation from an authoritarian "life-as" religion into an authentic "subjective life" spirituality, as described by Heelas and Woodhead,[39] is not a refutation of secularization, but is actually a sign of individual,

**36** Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1991): 395–415.

**37** Karel Dobbelaere, "The Meaning and Scope of Secularization," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 601.

**38** Dobbelaere, *Meaning and Scope of Secularization*, 606.

**39** Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 3–4.

micro-level secularization. It is a perfect illustration of the declining role of religious authorities over individual religiosity.[40] In addition, even if people still attend church, they may display a certain level of individual secularization. Dobbelaere describes this as secularization of the mind or as compartmentalization.[41] By this, he means that church members and churchgoers no longer allow their faith to interfere with other extra-ecclesial aspects of their lives. For example, a person may still self-identify as a Catholic, but no longer feel obliged to vote for a Christian political party, reject abortion or euthanasia, or send his or her children to a Catholic denominational school. A phenomenon which also becomes visible in the Netherlands as a growing proportion of Catholics, and to a lesser extent mainstreamProtestants, thinks that one should no longer automatically abide by all the rules and regulations set by the church.[42]

To conclude, I understand secularization as the loss of religious authority, which may become manifest at the societal, organizational, and individual levels. Or, as Bruce succinctly puts it: "I see secularization as a social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs."[43]

## The Secular Character of Religious Education Textbooks

Following the above understanding of secularization as a loss of religious authority, *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* reflect the influence of secularization in a threefold way. The first secular feature regards the overall aim of religious education as endorsed by both textbooks and not so much their representation of Christianity itself. As mentioned already, *Standpunt* fits the worldview education approach of which the first, overall aim of this method offers a perfect illustration: Helping pupils discover and develop their own personal worldview or philosophy

**40** Steve Bruce, *Secular Beats Spiritual: The Westernization of the Easternization of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 124–27.

**41** Dobbelaere, *Meaning and Scope of Secularization*, 606.

**42** Joep de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband: Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (The Hague: SCP, 2014), 38–42.

**43** Bruce, *God is Dead*, 3.

of life.[44] *Van horen zeggen*, as I mentioned above, also fits the worldview education approach, but combines this somewhat more explicitly with a religious studies approach. Hence, *Van horen zeggen* not only aims to encourage pupils to reflect on existential questions and themes, but also to offer objective knowledge about the major world religions.[45]

However, seen from the perspective of denominational schools and their position in the Dutch dual school system, these educational aims of *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* are remarkable. Despite the ongoing process of secularization, denominational schools still have every right to openly display their religious identity and promote and favour the religious tradition they are affiliated with over other religions and worldviews. But this is not done in either *Standpunt* or *Van horen zeggen.* When it comes to Christianity, both textbooks focus on the acquisition of knowledge about Christianity and only state learning objectives of a cognitive nature. Affective and attitudinal learning objectives, like developing a basic, positive attitude towards the Christian faith, are not stated. Moreover, when it comes to the space dedicated to the world religions, specifically the three monotheistic traditions, Christianity is not given more attention in the overall curricula of which these textbooks are part. In short, Christianity is approached from an outsider or etic perspective and treated as equal to the other (monotheistic) religions.

I believe this treatment of Christianity is an instance of meso-level secularization. It reflects religion's declining authority and status in mainstream denominational schools and shows how these schools downplay their religious identity even in religious education classes. As such the development from religious education to worldview education or a religious studies approach may already be considered an instance of meso-level secularization. It shows that mainstream denominational schools are very much aware that religious education may no longer serve the once dominant aim of socializing children in the Christian faith. Yet not only do denominational schools no longer try to socialize pupils in the Christian faith, they do not even aim to encourage an open, positive attitude toward the Christian faith among their pupils. Pupils have to acquire basic knowledge about religious traditions and in this respect Christianity is not given more or special attention in religious education classes. My reading and analysis of *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* thus suggest that Christianity has lost its once privileged position even in mainstream denominational schools.[46]

---

**44** De Leeuw, *Docentenhandleiding*, 11.

**45** ThiemeMeulenhoff, *Van horen zeggen Docentenhandleiding algemeen* (Amersfoort: ThiemeMeulenhof, 2022), 6.

**46** Of course, this statement is based only on my critical reading and analysis of the textbooks under study. The extent to which denominational schools really downplay their religious identity

This apparent lack of authority the Christian tradition has at the beginning of the twenty-first century is also reflected in the textbooks in another way, which is the second secular feature I want to mention. Both textbooks briefly explain how Christians practice their faith and mention a few moral values and ethical guidelines, like forgiveness, caring for the poor, or mercy. But the textbooks barely explain why these values and guidelines are typical of Christianity. *Standpunt* presents five ethical guidelines with the help of a story of a teenager who explains how he, as a Christian, practices his faith in daily life (Table 1, dimension 5). However, with respect to only one ethical guideline, namely nonviolence, does the textbook explicitly refer to a Christian source, viz. the New Testament (Lk 6:29–30).[47] *Van horen zeggen* barely mentions moral values and ethical guidelines. Only in the very last section on Christian practices (Table 1, dimension 6) are the seven acts of mercy mentioned as a way to follow Jesus, with reference to Matthew 25. What is more, *Van horen zeggen* even adds that nowadays these acts of mercy are part of the social policy of the Dutch government and that the Dutch constitution guarantees the basic rights, mentioned in Matthew 25, to food, water, and shelter. In this way, *Van horen zeggen* implicitly confirms the aforementioned notion of functional differentiation, that tasks that were once the responsibility of the churches, like taking care of the poor, are now transferred to the state.[48] Hence, in both textbooks the Christian tradition is barely presented as an authoritative source still relevant to contemporary society. Moreover, moral guidelines on various themes that are nowadays more contested – for instance, concerning marriage, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, or (homo)sexuality – which can also be linked to the Christian tradition, are entirely ignored in both textbooks. For example, *Van horen zeggen* mentions that people will go to heaven if they follow Jesus (Table 1, dimension 5), but there is no talk of what happens when people transgress a moral rule or commit a sin.

In my view, this second secular feature reflects what I, with the help of Dobbelaere, referred to above as *compartmentalization* or the secularization of the mind. As shown by Table 1, the textbooks primarily present Christianity as a belief system, but not (or to a far lesser extent), as a value system conducive to certain (conservative) moral behavior. This lack of moral prescription is clearly in line with the descriptive and phenomenological nature of the worldview education

is an empirical question, which calls for further empirical research. Nevertheless, the popularity of these textbooks at least suggests that several mainstream denominational schools no longer value their Christian identity that much.

**47** De Leeuw, *Standpunt*, 96–98.

**48** Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 69–72.

and religious studies approaches,[49] but it again demonstrates that even in mainstream denominational schools, Christianity faces a loss of authority. Thus the message is conveyed, at least implicitly, that people have become autonomous in religious matters, too.

A third and final secular feature of both textbooks is disregarding truth claims. Religious traditions make certain truth claims and consider certain values and beliefs as absolutely and uniquely valid and, by implication, other values and beliefs as false. However, due to the descriptive, phenomenological nature of both textbooks, truth claims are entirely ignored. In both *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen*, Jesus is presented as a human figure who is perceived by some as the Messiah or Christ (Table 1, dimensions 1 and 2).[50] In addition, both textbooks describe Jesus's crucifixion as a historical fact, but his resurrection is presented as a religious interpretation and a matter of personal faith.[51] In this way, one of the core revelatory claims of Christianity, that Jesus is the Son of God who rose from the dead, is severely relativized. This also goes for the authority of the Bible (Table 1, dimension 3). *Standpunt* only mentions the four Gospels and emphasizes that they were written by different authors,[52] while *Van horen zeggen* demonstrates, with the help of a classroom assignment, that the four Gospels are actually human narrations.[53] This again relatives a central claim of Christianity: viz., that the Bible is the Word of God.

But a relativistic stance toward religious truth claims is not only reflected by the representation of Christianity. Although different world religions are discussed in the overall curricula of which the textbooks are part, interreligious comparisons are not being made. In this way, the textbooks actually convey the message that religion is a matter of personal faith and that all religions are valid in their own way, which has the apparent consequence that all beliefs are being relativized. Discussing religious truth claims calls for complex theological and philosophical reasoning, which may not be feasible in religious education classes. Nevertheless, differences between religious beliefs could be mentioned and, in part, explained by pointing to the different social and cultural contexts from which these religious traditions originate.[54] But this is not done in the textbooks. Instead,

**49** Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 59.
**50** De Leeuw, *Standpunt*, 89, 91; Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 7.
**51** De Leeuw, *Standpunt*, 91, Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 10, 22.
**52** De Leeuw, *Standpunt*, 103.
**53** Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 10–12.
**54** Peter R. Hobson and John S. Edwards, *Religious Education in a Pluralist Society: The Key Philosophical Issues* (London: Woburn Press, 1999), 26–43.

Christianity is presented alongside other religions in such a relativistic way that all its claims to authority are undermined.[55]

## Conclusion: Religious Education as Latent Secularization

In this chapter, I addressed the following research question: How is the representation of Christianity in two widely used textbooks for religious education in mainstream denominational schools marked by secularization? Now, as I have tried to show above, *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* reflect the influence of secularization in a threefold way. Neither textbook aims to make pupils more open or receptive to the Christian tradition, nor is the Christian tradition given special attention. Moreover, the Christian tradition is not presented as an authoritative source, and both textbooks deal with the Christian tradition in a very relativistic way by ignoring core religious truth claims. Instead, both textbooks, first and foremost, aim to transmit basic, factual knowledge about Christianity and to this end present Christianity as just one of the many religious traditions present in Dutch society. In my view, this treatment and presentation of Christianity clearly reflect what secularization is all about – viz., the loss of religious authority!

Of course, given the sociocultural context in which religious education in the Netherlands takes place nowadays, the worldview education and descriptive, phenomenological approaches of *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen* certainly make sense. Socializing pupils in a religious tradition is no longer possible in mainstream denominational schools. This being the case, perhaps offering factual knowledge about religious traditions is the most that can be achieved. Furthermore, by offering factual knowledge about Christianity and its longstanding influence on Dutch society, as both textbooks do,[56] religious education classes may still be important avenues in mediating fundamental social values. Nevertheless, I seriously doubt whether the textbooks under discussion do indeed have this additional educational effect. Due to these aforementioned secular features, Christianity is presented in such a relative, or even relativistic, way that pupils are barely challenged to critically reflect on how Christianity helped shape contemporary Dutch society. What is more, the way Christianity is presented in the textbooks may have a secularizing effect in itself.

**55** For the secularizing effects of relativism, see Bruce, *Secularization*, 47–48.

**56** See Table 1, dimension 6, "Christian practices."

According to Dobbelaere, secularization may be the intended as well as the unintended result of social actions. For example, the separation between church and state is a conscious attempt to limit the societal influence of religious authorities. This is referred to as manifest secularization. But secularization may also be an unintended result of social actions, in which case one speaks of latent secularization.[57] Now, the latter, I believe, also applies to the textbooks under discussion here. Certainly, it is not the intention of the authors of the textbooks to reinforce the process of secularization. Still, the ways in which the textbooks are adapted to their secular readership, that is, a cohort of primarily secular pupils, may have the unintended (latent) effect of confirming these pupils' secular outlook on life. Christianity is basically presented as a cultural artefact that once had a dominant impact on Dutch society, but no longer does.[58] The Bible is referred to as an important source of the Christian faith, but it is barely discussed as an authoritative source relevant to contemporary society. Furthermore, religious truth claims are disregarded and religion is not presented as a matter of deep conviction, but as a matter of personal choice. Together, these aspects essentially convey the message that religion is marginal and relative in modern society, and secularity is thus the core value that is implicitly transmitted. That is what I mean by religious education as latent secularization, and which I see reflected in the way Christianity is represented in *Standpunt* and *Van horen zeggen.*

In this regard, this analysis of and reflection on two widely used textbooks for religious education in mainstream denominational schools reveals an additional aspect of what Leni Franken and I have previously called the *mental depillarization* of the Dutch dual school system.[59] By this we initially meant that the school's religious identity is no longer an important factor for parents choosing a school. That is to say, parents base their school choice on, for instance, the perceived educational quality of the school, but not on the school's religious ethos. But as the above analysis shows, even religious education itself, which in the Netherlands only exists in denominational schools as a confessional subject, is nowadays depil-

**57** Dobbelaere, *Meaning and scope of secularization*, 602–4.

**58** In this respect, it is also noteworthy that the textbooks explicitly, though briefly, describe Christianity's current marginal position in Dutch society as a result of the process of secularization. For example, it is stated that the majority of Dutch people no longer adhere to Christian norms and that in the near future less than 25 percent of the Dutch population will be affiliated with one of the Christian churches. Thus, pupils are actually being told that Christianity is, indeed, a thing of the past. See Becking, Jongeneelen, and Penson, *Van horen zeggen*, 67; De Leeuw, *Standpunt*, 93.

**59** Leni Franken and Paul Vermeer, "Deconfessionalising RE in Pillarised Education Systems: A Case Study of Belgium and the Netherlands," *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 3 (2019): 272–85.

larized and barely reflects the school's identity. In this way, these textbooks can also be seen as instances of the mental or ideological depillarization of the Dutch dual school system, which, in a structural way, is still pillarized. Denominational schools have long been considered the last remnants of a pillarized past. But this view is no longer tenable as far as mainstream denominational schools are concerned, which constitute the overwhelming majority of all denominational schools in the Netherlands. With regard to education, too, the Netherlands indeed has become a secular society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## References


Alii, E. T. *Godsdienstpedagogiek: Dimensies en spanningsvelden.* Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2009.

Becker, Jos, and Joep De Hart. *Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland: Verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke traditie.* The Hague: SCP, 2006.

Becking, Lennart, Cor Jongeneelen, and Lizet Penson. *Van horen zeggen: Christendom 3/4 VMBO leerwerkboek.* Amersfoort: ThiemeMeulenhoff, 2021.

Bernts, Ton, Gert de Jong, and Hassan Yar. "Een religieuze atlas van Nederland." In *Geloven in het publieke domein: Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie*, edited by Wim van de Donk, Petra Jonkers, Gerrit Kronjee, and Rob Plum, 89 – 138. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.

Bruce, Steve. *God is Dead: Secularization in the West.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

Bruce, Steve. *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Bruce, Steve. *Secular Beats Spiritual: The Westernization of the Easternization of the West.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

De Hart, Joep. *Geloven binnen en buiten verband: Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland.* The Hague: SCP, 2014.

De Hart, Joep, and Pepijn van Houwelingen. *Christenen in Nederland: Kerkelijke deelname en christelijke gelovigheid.* The Hague: SCP, 2018.

De Hart, Joep, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk. *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving: Diversiteit en verandering in beeld. Deel 3: Buiten kerk en moskee.* The Hague: SCP, 2022.

De Leeuw, Jan. *Docentenhandleiding Standpunt HAVO/VWO.* Vol. 1. Oss: Damon Educatie, 2016.

De Leeuw, Jan. *Standpunt HAVO/VWO.* Vol. 1. Oss: Damon Education, 2016.

Dobbelaere, Karel. "The Meaning and Scope of Secularization." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Peter B. Clarke, 599 – 615. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Dobbelaere, Karel. *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels.* Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002.

Franken, Leni, and Paul Vermeer, "Deconfessionalising RE in Pillarised Education Systems: A Case Study of Belgium and the Netherlands." *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 3 (2019): 272 – 85.

Hamers, Kees, and Jojanne Kemman. "Doelstellingen voor het vak godsdienst/levensbeschouwing." In *Handboek vakdidactiek levensbeschouwing en religie: Leven leren vanuit je wortels*, edited by Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer, 103 – 16. Lervo, 2020.

Heelas, Paul, and Linda Woodhead. *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Huijnk, Willem. *De religieuze beleving van moslims in Nederland.* The Hague: SCP, 2018.
Hobson, Peter R., and John S. Edwards. *Religious Education in a Pluralist Society: The Key Philosophical Issues.* London: Woburn Press, 1999.
Imelman, Jan Dirk, Wilna Meijer, Piet van der Ploeg, and Rieuwert Wissink. *Tussen leuren en leren: analyse van elf methoden voor godsdienstonderwijs.* Kampen: Kok, 1986.
Kregting, Joris, Peer Scheepers, Paul Vermeer, and Chris Hermans. "Why God Has Left the Netherlands: Explanations for the Decline of Institutional Christianity in the Netherlands Between 1966 and 2015." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57, no. 1 (2018): 58 – 79.
Lijphart, Arend. *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
Praamsma, Jan Marten. "Korte geschiedenis van het schoolvak godsdienst/levensbeschouwing." In *Handboek vakdidactiek levensbeschouwing en religie: Leven leren vanuit je wortels*, edited by Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer, 81 – 102. Lervo, 2020.
Schmeets, Hans. *Wie is religieus, en wie niet?* The Hague: CBS, 2018.
Stoffels, Hyme. "Protestantisme." In *Handboek religie in Nederland: Perspectief – overzicht – debat*, edited by Meerten ter Borg, Erik Borgman, Marjo Buitelaar, Yme Kuiper, and Rob Plum, 122 – 45. Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008.
ThiemeMeulenhoff. *Van horen zeggen 3/4 VMBO Christendom: Handleiding.* Amersfoort: TiemeMeulenhof, 2021
ThiemeMeulenhoff. *Van horen zeggen Docentenhandleiding algemeen.* Amersfoort: ThiemeMeulenhof, 2022.
Tschannen, Olivier. "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1991): 395 – 415.
Van Bijsterveld, Sophie. *Overheid en godsdienst: Herijking van een onderlinge relatie.* Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2017.
Van Wiele, Jan. *In het atelier van de theoloog: Een instrumentarium voor interreligieuze schoolboekanalyse.* Leuven: Acco, 1999.
Van Wiele, Jan. "Mapping the Road for Balance. Towards the Construction of Criteria for a Contemporary Interreligious Textbook Analysis Regarding Islam." *Journal of Empirical Theology* 17, no. 1 (2004): 1 – 35.
Van der Kooij, Jacomijn, Doret de Ruyter, and Siebren Miedema. "'Worldview': The Meaning of the Concept and the Impact on Religious Education." *Religious Education* 108, no. 2 (2013): 210 – 28.
Van der Ven, Johannes A. *Kritische godsdienstdidactiek.* Kampen: Kok, 1982.
Vermeer, Paul. "Meta-concepts, Thinking Skills and Religious Education." *British Journal of Religious Education* 34, no. 3 (2012): 333 – 47.
Vermeer, Paul. "Religious Education and Socialization." *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (2010): 103 – 16.
Vermeer, Paul. "Wie is verantwoordelijk voor het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs op school? Een probleemverkenning." *Religie en Samenleving* 13, no. 3 (2018): 182 – 204.
Vreeburg, Bruno. "Religieuze socialisatie en onderwijsverzuiling." In *Verzuiling in het onderwijs: Actuele verklaringen en analyse*, edited by Anne Bert Dijkstra, Jaap Dronkers, and Roelande Hofman, 185 – 225. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1997.
Westerman, Wim. *Ongewenste objectiviteit: Onderwijs in geestelijke stromingen in historisch en vergelijkend perspectief.* Kampen: Kok, 2001.

Mette Buchardt

# Epilogue: Textbooks as a Prism for the Politics of Secularization and "Cultural Heritage"

Textbooks are sources for much more than the history of the curriculum. Not only do they bring us closer to what was actually taught in classrooms in shifting historical periods, but they are also to be understood as sources for the imaginaries of the states whose curriculum they operationalize. While historical textbook research is a longstanding research tradition, not least with regard to the history of education and church history, this phenomenon has recently been powerfully demonstrated by Nicole Gotling in her research on what I will call the recontextualization of the late nineteenth-century Prussian wars, as shown in textbooks in the states Prussia was at war with (that is, the Austrian Empire, the French Republican Empire, and the Kingdom of Denmark).[1] While this volume emphasizes the relation between education, national identity, and religion in three Northern European so-called "welfare nations" – Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands – this also brings up the question of secularization. In turn, since the study of textbooks is emphasized as a methodology across the contributions in the volume, this leads to the question of how the political discussions and strategies that developed for renegotiating religion–state relations, especially from the late nineteenth century onwards, were operationalized in, mirrored through, and washed back from the production of textbooks, precisely as a part of curriculum. This epilogue chapter highlights this dimension of the volume using examples from other states that modernized throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which point to how secularization can be understood as a political question that was significant for education reform.

**1** Nicole Gotling, "National Textbook Narratives and Historiography: Presenting a Same That is Never the Same," *Croatian Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (2020): 65–82; Nicole Gotling, "Framing the National Mind of Students: A Textbook Case of the Prussian Wars: Educational Historiographies and Narratives in Prussian, Danish, Austrian, and French History and Geography Textbooks, From the Prussian Wars Until the Interwar Period" (PhD diss., Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, Universität Wien, 2022).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. (cc) BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-014

## Textbooks as Curriculum and Educational Secularization Reformers

When approaching the question of secularization, one should first differentiate between secularization understood as a social process, on the one hand, and a cultural process on the other, arguing for secularization having actually happened[2] or not[3] – whether as an ideology (be that from a problematizing perspective[4] or a descriptive[5] one or, as I have featured in my own research, as a politics of modernization.[6] I will pursue the latter approach in the following discussion. In such a perspective, textbooks as a source for the history of secularization are also a source for politics itself: textbooks themselves mirror and produce the relations between religion and the state, how these relations were subject to political discussion and reform, and how this was pursued through education. This concerns the relations between (sometimes overlapping) institutions – religious institutions, educational institutions, and other state institutions; but it is not confined to *institutions*, since it also, to draw on Charles Taylor's notion, concerns *social imaginaries.*[7] The curriculum, in an analytical sense, involves both.

---

**2** See, for example, Karel Dobbelaere, "Some Trends in European Sociology of Religion. The Secularization Debate," *Sociological Analysis* 48 (1987): 107–37.

**3** See, for example, Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249–73.

**4** See, for example, Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood, eds., *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley, CA: Townsend Center for the Humanities/University of California, 2009); Joan Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

**5** See, for example, Todd H. Weir, "Germany and the New Global History of Secularism: Questioning the Postcolonial Genealogy," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 1 (2015): 6–20; Susannah Wright, *Morality and Citizenship in English Schools: Secular Approaches, 1897–1944* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

**6** Mette Buchardt, "The Political Project of Secularization and Modern Education Reform in 'Provincialized Europe': Historical Research in Religion and Education beyond Secularization, R.I.P.," *IJHE. Bildungsgeschichte. International Journal for the Historiography of Education* 11, no. 2 (2021): 164–70; Mette Buchardt, "Educating Migrant Children and Women in the Political Projects of the Welfare Nation-State and Secularization: The Danish 'Extreme Case' in Light of the French," *World Yearbook of Education* 15 (2022): 251–66; Mette Buchardt, ed., *Educational Secularization: Within Europe and Beyond. The Political Projects of Modernizing religion through Education Reform* (Berlin and Leiden: De Gruyter Brill, forthcoming).

**7** Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

Drawing on the work of curriculum historian and theorist Ulf P. Lundgren, the curriculum in a social theoretical sense can be said to entail a society's knowledge selection for educational purposes, and thus for societal reproduction; which knowledge is selected for social and educational reproduction? What form does this take in public and political debate, political decision-making, drafted and crafted policy, teacher education, and the production of textbooks?[8] Textbooks can then be said to be part of the curriculum. Moreover, they are what Bernsteinian define as recontextualized knowledge – that is, knowledge that has gone through what Staffan Selander conceptualizes as a *text-traduction* process, a weaving and reshaping of knowledge, be it from academic disciplines, other societal institutions, or public and political dispute.[9] In this sense, both textbooks and the debates and discussions about them are sources for creating knowledge about political struggle and change concerning the relation between religion and state as well as the ongoing change and transformation of the position of and imaginaries on religion in state and society. This has recently been demonstrated by Emma Hellström with regard to the council for schoolbooks in Sweden during the post-WWII democratization process.[10]

**8** Ulf P. Lundgren, *Att organisera omvärlden. En introduktion till läroplansteori* [To organize the world: An introduction to curriculum theory] (Stockholm: Liber förlag, 1979); Mette Buchardt, "Undervisningsmidlet i institutionel praksis" [The textbook in institutional practice], in *Klassisk og moderne pædagogisk teori* [Classic and modern pedagogic theory], ed. Peter Østergaard Andersen and Thomas Ellegaard (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2017), 286–304.

**9** Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 165–218; Staffan Selander, *Textum institutionis: Den pedagogiska väven, en studie av texttraduktion utifrån exemplet Freire och dialogpedagogiken i Sverige* [Textum institutionis: A study of text-traduction based on the example of Freire and the pedagogy of dialogue in Sweden], *Studies in Education and Psychology* 15, Stockholm Institute of Education, Department for Educational Research (Malmø: Gleerup, Liber, 1984); Staffan Selander, *Lärobokskunskap, pedagogisk textanalys med exempel från läroböker i historia 1841–1985* [Textbook studies, pedagogical text analysis based on examples from history textbooks 1841–1985] (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1988); Buchardt, "Undervisningsmidlet i institutionel praksis," 286–304; Mette Buchardt, *Pedagogized Muslimness: Religion and Culture as Identity Politics in the Classroom.* Religious Diversity and Education in Europe 27. Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2014, 21–42.

**10** Emma Hellström, "På objektiv, vetenskaplig eller pedagogisk grund: Statens läroboksnämnd som källmaterial vad studiet av religionens roll i den demokratiska skolans framväxt" [On an objective, scientific or pedagogical basis: The state textbook council as source material when studying the role of religion during the development of the democratic school], in *Ny utbildningshistorisk forskning II: Nio bidrag från Forskarskolan i tillämpad utbildningshistoria* [New education history research II: Nine contributions from the School for Applied History of Education], ed. Johannes Westberg and Germund Larsson (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies of History and Education, 2023), 115–36.

The question of how academic knowledge has been recontexualized and traducted into textbook knowledge is thus central to the question of how the relation between religion and the state has been transformed. Often reformers have engaged in the production of textbooks that are hence sources of how reform intentions were operationalized, often before reforms were stipulated in the legal texts for the school. Simultaneously, turning scholarly attention to the textbook corpus can provide a more accurate and nuanced picture, not only of what modernization ideas became when they were pedagogized and sequenced for instruction purposes, but also who the agents actually were who brought modernization of religion through education.

## Transforming Religion into "History" and "Culture"

An example of this is the struggles concerning textbooks and Biblical Criticism, the scientific historical study of biblical texts that became an academic trend in theology faculties across the Nordic states in the late nineteenth century, to the dismay of some, including conservative and Pietist church circles. In Denmark, a leading figure was Orientalist and Old Testament scholar Frants Buhl (1850–1932), professor in Leipzig and Copenhagen and an initiator of debates about implementing the result of Biblical Criticism in the upper secondary school. Here the new liberal theologians were not only dealing with pressure from in and around the church but also among teachers.[11] The school became an arena for what the head of the N. Zahle's Teachers' College for Women, Bertha Hahn (1848–1916), called the "Bible storm":[12] the debate over the historical status of biblical scriptures and the consequences this would and should have for society. At N. Zahle's Teachers' College for Women in Copenhagen, scientific results from Biblical Criticism were as a matter of fact implemented, and Hahn was a central agent in that. Hahn had studied under Buhl but did not graduate. Hahn's academic work was published under a male pseudonym and translated into German. However, Hahn authored several textbooks in her own name. Her *Lille Bibelhistorie* (Little Bible History, 1905) was significant in the liberal theological "storm" on the too-mythical parts

**11** Erik Nørr, *Det højere skolevæsen og kirken: Faget Religion i sidste halvdel af det 19. århundrede* [The higher school and the church: The school subject Religion in the late 19th century], licentiate diss., Institut for Kristendomskundskab, Aarhus University (Aarhus: Akademisk Forlag, 1979).
**12** Adda Hilden, *Lærerindeuddannelse, Dansk læreruddannelse 1791–1991* [Education of female teachers: Danish teacher education 1791–1991], vol. 3 (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag 1993), 85.

of the Bible: anything that seemed too irrational was removed. When retelling the miraculous story of the Book of Jonah, the prophet Jonah simply "washed up on the shore" rather than being swallowed and saved by a whale, as he is in the Old Testament text. The textbook was, as it were, historically cleansed, so that a rational history, suitable for the modern human being, could be put forward. Hahn was, importantly, not on a quest to weed out religion. As a pious Christian, her aim was rather to defend Christianity against growing Socialist and Liberalist atheism, by rationalizing and modernizing it. Historical "objectivity" was a pedagogical means of doing so.[13] While Buhl, Hahn, and their counterparts were not successful on a central political level, they helped to pave the way for so-called historical critical bible education. When implementing this finally became a task for a reform commission during a Social Democrat government in the 1930s, it was one of Buhl's younger male followers, Old Testament professor Aage Bentzen (1894–1953), who took a seat on the commission. Being a proponent of the implementation of Biblical Criticism in education, Bentzen argued that Old Testament should be treated as history so that it would "become real to people," and as such be written as a history of Denmark in order to make it culturally relevant for modern human beings.[14] The alleged secular reform of schoolbooks thus also carried re-sacralizing dimensions connected to the welfare nation-state under construction.

While religious modernists pursued "objectivity" as an instrument for transforming the role of religion – and in the process became contributors to the political project of transforming religion, state, and society by creating a new imaginary purged of mythology – religious modernist reformers could also work the other way around. An example of this is a textbook co-authored by the anti-colonial socialist, philosopher, and poet Léopold Sédar Seghor (1906–2001), who became the Republic of Senegal's first president in 1960. Senghor and his socialist collaborators did not seek to adopt the French Laïcité model, with its radical separation of religion and state and, by extension, religion and school. On the contrary, the plurality of religions in plural as a part of African civilization and culture were supposed to

**13** Holger Jahn [Bertha Hahn, pseud.], *Billeder fra det gamle Israel* [Pictures from ancient Israel], preface by Professor Dr. Fr. Buhl (Copenhagen: Karls Schönbergs Forlag, 1895); Holger Jahn [Bertha Hahn, pseud.], *Bilder aus dem alten Israel*, foreword by Fr. Buhl, trans. Ottilie von Harling (Dresden: C. Ludwig Ungelenk, 1908); Bertha Hahn, *Bibelhistorie for Mellemskolen* [Bible History for the middle school] (Copenhagen: Karl Schønbergs Forlag, 1904); Mette Buchardt, "Educational Biblical Nationalism and the Project of the Modern Secular State," *Croatian Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (2020): 133–50.

**14** Aage Bentzen, *Det Gamle Testamente: Tre Foredrag* [The Old Testament: Three lectures] (Copenhagen: P. Haase & Søns Forlag, 1929), 53, 56, 59; Mette Buchardt, "Pedagogical Transformations of 'Religion' into 'Culture' in Danish State Mass Schooling 1900s–1930s," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 49, no. 1 (2013): 126–38.

educate the citizens of a newly decolonized West Africa in their ideological framework for a new state. Another means of achieving this aim was the authorship of textbooks. In 1953, while representing Senegal in the National Assembly in Paris, Seghor authored the textbook *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-Lièvre* together with fellow Pan-African socialist activist Abdoulaye Sadji, a primary education inspector and radio journalist. The textbook was a collection of myths about the wise and smart hare Leuk-le-Lièvre retold in French but meant for secondary school students in "Afrique Noir." The education-political agenda was a more culturally appropriate way to teach the French language to high school students in, for instance, Senegal; here, African culture and civilization became the mediator for teaching French, while at the same time the book aimed at civilizing the students into a new modern socialist society, the African and Senegalese way, where religion and mythology served socialism, instead of being cleansed from it, opposite of what was the case in the French Laïcité and Soviet atheist models.[15]

## Perspective: "Christian Cultural Heritage" as Politics of Secularization/Re-sacralization

Religious modernists across Africa and Europe were, of course, not the only actors that contributed to a political project of secularization, but a glance at the textbook level tells us about how such reformers pursued their ideas, and in the case of Senegal and Denmark, how they were able to push through their intentions for reform. In addition, such source materials reveal nuances with regard to the landscape of modernization actors: that they were also women (as in the case of Hahn), for instance. Similarly, it offers a sharper look at the instruments and concretized ideas of programs of the well-known state crafters (as in the case of Seghor) – and thus, their consequences. Finally, both of the examples point, in their own way, to another feature that is often overlooked when discussing secularization, state modernization, and schools – or perhaps, rather, how religion and state were transformed through education: namely, that "history" and "culture" were central features when religion was transformed into being part of the mod-

**15** Léopold Sédar Senghor and Abdoulaye Sadji, *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-Le-Lièvre: Cours Élémentaire des Écoles D'Afrique Noire* (Cedex: Edicef, 1953; repr. 2022); Mette Buchardt, "A Spiritual Socialist Education: 'The Problem of Culture' in Senegalese Educational Republican State Crafting beyond French Laïcité and Soviet-Style Atheism, 1950s–1960s," in *Educational Secularization: Within Europe and Beyond. The Political Projects of Modernizing religion through Education Reform*, ed. Mette Buchardt (Berlin and Leiden: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

ern social imaginaries emerging from the late-nineteenth and twentieth-century processes that transformed empires and kingdoms, including transcontinental colonial powers, into welfare states and nation-states. Further, we might identify socially practiced conceptualizations of, for example, Christianity as "cultural heritage" – as a secularized, yet not-so-secularized strategy of modernized state religion. Here, religion evolves into culture and history, serving the modern state as a tool for educating and consequently governing the population. Textbooks, drawing on Jona Garz, Fanny Isensee, and Daniel Töpper's framework, can be seen as "small forms" of such politics.[16] Directing more attention to the history of small forms of *cultural heritage politics* from a perspective of secularized and re-sacralized religion, globally and locally, should be a task for future research to take on.

## Bibliography

Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood, eds. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech.* Berkeley, CA: Townsend Center for the Humanities/University of California, 2009.

Bentzen, *Det Gamle Testamente: Tre Foredrag* [The Old Testament: Three lectures]. Copenhagen: P. Haase & Søns Forlag, 1929.

Bernstein, Basil, *Class, Codes and Control. The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 165 – 218.

Buchardt, Mette. "Educating Migrant Children and Women in the Political Projects of the Welfare Nation-State and Secularization: The Danish 'Extreme Case' in Light of the French." *World Yearbook of Education* 15 (2022): 51–266.

Buchardt, Mette, ed. *Educational Secularization: Within Europe and Beyond. The Political Projects of Modernizing religion through Education Reform.* Berlin and Leiden: De Gruyter Brill, forthcoming.

Buchardt, Mette. "Educational Biblical Nationalism and the Project of the Modern Secular State." *Croatian Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (2020): 133–50.

Buchardt, Mette, "Pedagogical Transformations of 'Religion' into 'Culture' in Danish State Mass Schooling 1900s–1930s." *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 49, no. 1 (2013): 126 – 38.

Buchardt, Mette. *Pedagogized Muslimness: Religion and Culture as Identity Politics in the Classroom.* Religious Diversity and Education in Europe 27. Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2014.

Buchardt, Mette. "The Political Project of Secularization and Modern Education Reform in 'Provincialized Europe': Historical Research in Religion and Education beyond Secularization,

**16** Jona Garz, Fanny Isensee, and Daniel Töpper, "Knowledge in the Making: Methodological Considerations on the Production, Dissemination, and Usage of 'Small Forms in Education'," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9 (2022): 39 – 62.

R.I.P." *IJHE. Bildungsgeschichte. International Journal for the Historiography of Education* 11, no. 2 (2021): 164–170.

Buchardt, Mette. "A Spiritual Socialist Education: 'The Problem of Culture' in Senegalese Educational Republican State Crafting beyond French Laïcité and Soviet-Style Atheism, 1950s-1960s." In *Educational Secularization: Within Europe and Beyond. The Political Projects of Modernizing religion through Education Reform*, edited by Mette Buchardt. Berlin and Leiden: De Gruyter Brill, forthcoming.

Buchardt, Mette. "Undervisningsmidlet i institutionel praksis" [The textbook in institutional practice]. In *Klassisk og moderne pædagogisk teori* [Classic and modern pedagogic theory], edited by Peter Østergaard Andersen and Thomas Ellegaard, 286–304. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2017.

Dobbelaere, Karel. "Some Trends in European Sociology of Religion: The Secularization Debate." *Sociological Analysis* 48 (1987): 107–37.

Garz, Jona, Fanny Isensee, and Daniel Töpper. "Knowledge in the Making: Methodological Considerations on the Production, Dissemination, and Usage of 'Small Forms in Education'." *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9 (2022): 39–62.

Gotling, Nicole. "Framing the National Mind of Students: A Textbook Case of the Prussian Wars: Educational Historiographies and Narratives in Prussian, Danish, Austrian, and French History and Geography Textbooks, From the Prussian Wars Until the Interwar Period." PhD diss., Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, Universität Wien, 2022.

Gotling, Nicole. "National Textbook Narratives and Historiography: Presenting a Same That is Never the Same." *Croatian Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (2020): 65–82.

Hahn, Bertha. *Bibelhistorie for Mellemskolen* [Bible History for the middle school]. Copenhagen: Karl Schønbergs Forlag, 1904.

Hahn, Bertha. *Lille Bibelhistorie* [Little Bible History]. Copenhagen: Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1905.

Hellström, Emma. "På objektiv, vetenskaplig eller pedagogisk grund: Statens läroboksnämnd som källmaterial vad studiet av religionens roll i den demokratiska skolans framväxt" [On an objective, scientific or pedagogical basis: The state textbook council as source material when studying the role of religion during the development of the democratic school]. In *Ny utbildningshistorisk forskning II: Nio bidrag från Forskarskolan i tillämpad utbildningshistoria* [New education history research II: Nine contributions from the School for Applied History of Education], edited by Johannes Westberg and Germund Larsson, 115 – 36. Uppsala: Uppsala Studies of History and Education, 2023.

Hilden, Adda, *Lærerindeuddannelse, Dansk læreruddannelse 1791 – 1991* [Education of female teachers: Danish teacher education 1791 – 1991], vol. 3. Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag 1993.

Jahn, Holger [Bertha Hahn, pseud.]. *Billeder fra det gamle Israel* [Pictures from ancient Israel]. Preface by Professor Dr. Fr. Buhl. Copenhagen: Karls Schönbergs Forlag, 1895.

Jahn, Holger [Bertha Hahn, pseud.]. *Bilder aus dem alten Israel.* Foreword by Fr. Buhl, translated by Ottilie von Harling. Dresden: C. Ludwig Ungelenk, 1908.

Lundgren, Ulf P. *Att organisera omvärlden. En introduktion till läroplansteori* [To organize the world. An introduction to curriculum theory]. Stockholm: Liber förlag, 1979.

Nørr, Erik. *Det højere skolevæsen og kirken. Faget Religion i sidste halvdel af det 19. århundrede* [The higher school and the church: The school subject Religion in the late 19th century]. Licentiate diss., Institut for Kristendomskundskab, Aarhus University. Aarhus: Akademisk Forlag, 1979.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Sex and Secularism.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Seghor, Léopold Sédar, and Abdoulaye Sadji. *La Belle Histoire de Leuk-Le-Lièvre: Cours Élémentaire des Écoles D'Afrique Noire.* Cedex: Edicef, 1953, repr. 2022.

Selander, Staffan. *Lärobokskunskap, pedagogisk textanalys med exempel från lärobökeri historia 1841–1985* [Textbook studies, pedagogical text analysis based on examples from History textbooks 1841–1985]. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1988.

Selander, Staffan. *Textum institutionis: Den pedagogiska väven, en studie av texttraduktion utifrån exemplet Freire och dialogpedagogiken i Sverige* [Textum institutionis: A study of text-traduction based on the example of Freire and the pedagogy of dialogue in Sweden]. Studies in Education and Psychology 15, Stockholm Institute of Education, Department for Educational Research. Malmø: Gleerup, Liber, 1984.

Stark, Rodney. "Secularization, R.I.P." *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249–73.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age.* Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

Weir, Todd H. "Germany and the New Global History of Secularism: Questioning the Postcolonial Genealogy." *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 1 (2015): 6–20.

Wright, Susannah. *Morality and Citizenship in English Schools: Secular Approaches, 1897–1944.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

# Author presentations

**Karl Christian Alvestad** is an Associate Professor in history at the University of South-Eastern Norway. His current research focuses on medievalism, nationalism, public history, medieval history, and history education.

**Jørn Varhaug** is an Associate Professor and head of the Department of Culture, Religion and Social Sciences, University of Southeastern-Norway. He has a PhD on Biblical science and Old Testament exegesis. His current research interest is more related to recent history of education, especially religious education, and understanding dialogue in education.

**Hege Roll-Hansen** is an Associate Professor in Social Studies at the University of South-Eastern Norway and holds a PhD in history from University of Oslo. Her research interests concern 20th century Norwegian history, feminist history, and educational history.

**Merethe Roos** is full professor in history at University of South-Eastern Norway. Her main research interests concern Nordic educational history, theological history, and political history from 1750 and up to today. She has been the editor in chief for the most important Norwegian pedagogical journal (Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift) since 2013, and she is the organizer of the Norwegian network of educational history. In 2024, Merethe Roos was awarded a honorary doctorate at Uppsala university for her efforts in educational history.

**Emma Hellström** is a PhD-candidate in Sociology of Education at the Department of Education, Uppsala University. Her dissertation focuses how the evolvement of the Swedish democratic welfare stare during the twentieth century affected the relations between Christian education, secularization and democratization in the Swedish primary school.

**Henrik Edgren** (PhD in history) is associate professor in the history of education at the Department of Education, Uppsala University. Among Edgren's research interests are early nineteenth century political newspaper debate and how the Swedish state, in the late nineteenth century, used textbooks to promote national identity.

**Janne Holmén** (PhD in history) is associate professor in the history of education at the Department of Education, Uppsala University. Among his research interests are comparative history, textbook research and cognitive history.

**Johan Wickström** (ThD in history of religions) is senior lecturer in curriculum studies and distinguished university teacher at the Department of Education, Uppsala University. Among his research interests are ethnic, social and religious representations in textbooks and student essays from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Johannes Westberg** is full professor in theory and history of education at University of Groningen. His main research interests concern the rise of mass schooling in the nineteenth century, and the expansion of secondary education and early childhood education and care during the twentieth century. He is co-founder of the Dutch Expertise Center for Theory & History of Education and Psycholo-

gy (DEEP), the organizer of the Nordic network of history of education, and member of the editorial team of *Nordic Journal of Educational History.*

**John Exalto** is assistant professor in theory and history of education at the Department of Education, University of Groningen, and coordinator of the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlandse Gedragswetenschappen (Heritage Centre for the Dutch Behavioural Sciences). He is also the president of the board of the Stichting Comenius Museum, Naarden. His current research focuses on the relations between religion and education in (early) modern history.

**Paul Vermeer** is associate professor for the empirical study of religion at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen. He has written various articles about the aim and content of religious education in modern society. His current research focuses on evangelicalism in contemporary Dutch society.

**Sjaak Braster** is associate professor in sociology at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam. He has been a distinguished professor in history of education on behalf of the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His current research focuses on the use and analysis of visual sources in the history of education, and on public history of education.

**Tina van der Vlies** is an associate professor in the History Department at Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. In 2022, she published a peer-reviewed monograph entitled *Echoing Events: The Perpetuation of National Narratives in English and Dutch History Textbooks, 1920 – 2010*, which was awarded the Georg Eckert Research Award by the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media. Currently, she is also affiliated with the University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education, for her research project "Why school history matters: public discourses on the purposes of history education, 1920 – 2020," funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO).