

SCHWERTE CONSENSUS – The 3C3P principles of Christian RE in schools

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The “Schwerte Consensus” summarizes the discussions and results of the symposium “*New bottle, old wine? – A New Perspective on Political Issues in RE*”, which took place in March 2022 at the Catholic Academy in Schwerte. It was organized by the Institute of Catholic Theology of the Technical University of Dortmund and the Kommende Dortmund, an Institute for the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. The consensus was inspired especially by the resolution of the Würzburg Synod about RE in schools (1974) (cf. Könemann & Sajak 2019). This resolution was also intensively received in other countries, for example in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Croatia, Lithuania and Slovakia (Pajer 2012, 40).

The “Schwerte Consensus” is composed of six principles (3c3p) that consider the political dimension of religion and RE. In this context it is also inspired by the famous “Beutelsbach Consensus” (1976) on political and civic education in Germany. The Consensus has already been taken up by some RE teachers in their teaching practice in Germany. A further contextualization as well as a discussion of the text can be found in the following book: Jan-Hendrik Herbst/Claudia Gärtner/Robert Kläser (eds.), “Der Beutelsbacher Konsens in der religiösen Bildung. Exemplarische Konkretionen und notwendige Transformationen“ [The Beutelsbach Consensus in RE. Exemplary concretions and necessary transformations], Frankfurt am Main: Wochenschau 2023.

Controversial

Issues on which there are differing positions in theology, the church and society should be discussed controversially in RE. The prerequisite for this is that the positions do not contradict human rights or scientific knowledge that has been gained on the basis of common standards of rationality, methodology and argumentation. Controversies ad intra (i.e., the intra- and interreligious variety of religious traditions) as well as controversies ad extra (between religious and secular worldviews) should be considered.

Critical

When initiating and implementing processes of RE, one should (self-)critically reflect on power relations and social ideologies to recognize and counteract social dependencies and inequalities. This also results in the need to articulate critique, opposition and protest against existing religious, social, mental and nature-related power relations and their entanglements.

Constructive

RE should awaken the enthusiasm of students by introducing a perspective of hope into the educational process: It should make accessible the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as a counterfactual interpretation of reality and question its plausibility. Anticipatory and reminiscent at the same time, the orientation towards biblical concepts of justice opens visionary prospects for a future “against all hope”.

Positional

Within RE, it is necessary to take certain (reflected) positions, as RE should be conceived, in line with the biblical tradition, as an advocate for the marginalized. Teachers should make their own position transparent and, at the same time, offer students spaces for free and critical reflection so that they can consciously relate to this position. This basic constellation makes it possible to counteract personal, structural, institutional and existential indoctrination.

Participatory

The personal backgrounds, resources and perspectives of the students must be fully acknowledged in RE. It is essential to encourage students to participate in the learning process. They must learn to intervene in practice according to their own religious convictions or secular worldview. At the same time, they are confronted with the fact that, from a Christian perspective, one's own practice should be oriented towards the ideas of "peace", "justice" and "responsibility for creation".

Practical

RE must be practice-oriented because religions themselves are practical. In addition to addressing religious perceptions and interpretations of the world, as well as their critical evaluation, it is about enabling forms of *lived religion*. Only by engaging with spiritual practice and (religiously motivated) socio-political actions, RE can open avenues for changing society through individual and collective action and for shaping it in a just way.

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