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Book review

History, remembrance and religious education (Religion, Education and Values: 7), by Stephen G. Parker, Rob Freathy and Leslie J. Francis (eds), Bern, Peter Lang, 2015, x + 413 pp., ISBN 978-3-0343-1720-7.

“History, remembrance and religious education” is a collection of selected conference papers from the 2012 meeting of the *International Seminar on Religious Education and Values* (ISREV) in Turku, Finland, with participants from more than thirty countries. It consists of 18 chapters by Religious Education (RE) researchers from Europe (Finland, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, UK), Canada, Israel and South Africa. After a foreword by the general secretary of ISREV, *Julian Stern* (UK), the book is opened by *Rob Freathy* and *Stephen G. Parker* (UK), whose introduction offers an initial reflection on the basic concepts of history and remembrance and provides an overview on contributors and treated subjects. The following 17 papers are divided into three parts, the first of which focuses on Holocaust remembrance in RE, the second collects different aspects of the history of RE as a school subject in various national contexts, and the third reflects on the significance of history, memory and tradition in religious learning and identity formation.

Part I is opened by *Reinhold Boschki* (Germany) with a plea for a “Culture of remembrance” (23) as a key issue of RE today where in his view the perspective of “the victims of the past” (23) is central. *Elisabeth Naurath* (Germany) investigates the knowledge of nine-to-ten-year-old German children about Judaism and the Holocaust and asks at which age children should and can be confronted with the Holocaust in educational settings. *Thomas Schlag* (Switzerland) draws a connection between Holocaust remembrance and Human Rights Education, which he both interprets as tasks for RE. *Zehavit Gross* (Israel) deals with the question how the Holocaust can become an integral part of RE starting with the challenge that Holocaust should be seen as “one of the main issues that cause people to think about God.” (79)

Part II includes eight papers with specific historical perspectives on RE: *Rob Freathy*, *Stephen G. Parker* and *Jonathan Doney* (UK) provide a critique of the existing historiography of RE in England (1960s-1970s) based on primary and secondary documentary as well as on primary oral sources and recommend methodological standards for further historical in-depth research. *Jonathan Doney* (UK) shows how the

standard narrative of the recent history of RE in England (1960s-1970s) suffers from a lack of contextual analysis causing simple binary oppositions and linear causalities so that a reappraisal of the ruling historiography becomes necessary. *Lynn Revell* (UK) provides a further contribution to an in-depth historiography of RE by exploring the representation of Islam in more than 70 RE textbooks from Great Britain (1968-2012). *Oddrun M. H. Bråten* (Norway) presents a historical comparison of the school subject RE in England (1870-1988) and Norway (1739-1997), considering national institutional conditions and supranational developments. *Elisabet Haakedal* (Norway) reflects on the history of RE in Norway by taking the perspective of students. A corpus of approximately 40 primary school students' texts from workbooks (1955-2006) is interpreted. *Bernd Schröder* (Germany) follows the historical link between RE and Christian Mission through the example of German Protestant missionary societies and their engagement in Palestine (from the 19th century until today). *Lorna M. A. Bowman* (Canada) reveals by historical inquiry how religion and RE has been exploited by the Canadian government for political and economic reasons with terrifying consequences for indigenous people. *Myrtle Power* (Canada) highlights the impact of the two twentieth-century woman pedagogues Françoise Darcy-Berubé and Christiane Brusselmans on the development of Catholic RE and catechesis in Canada from the 1960s until today.

Part III presents five international perspectives on the interrelation of history and RE. *Ulrich Schwab* (Germany) unfolds the importance of tradition in general and religious traditions in particular for an integrated person-oriented educational theory with maturity and responsibility at its centre. *Geir Skeie* (Norway) explores the communalities of History and RE, which he sees "both justified by educational aims that draw on memory of the past [...] in order to manage the challenges of present and future." (312) *Glynis Parker* (South Africa) reflects on the importance of traditions for today's black South Africans by presenting results of an empirical study among 95 people from 15 to 93 years of age. *Bill Gent* (UK) provides insights into the results of an ethnographic fieldwork in England concerning traditional Islamic practices of memorizing the Arabic Qur'ān (*hifz*) and the life of persons having achieved this goal (*huffaz*). *Hannele Niemi* (Finland) develops a theory of RE on the basis of Viktor E. Frankl's existential analysis and Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, following the goal to help young people growing up "as open-minded and critical thinkers who can also find personal support in religion." (383)

The contributions draw a broad and colourful picture of different approaches to history and remembrance in interrelation to RE. Different research focuses and interpretations of the underlying concepts are derived from different contexts, cultures and religions as well as various methodological frameworks. The question, which must therefore be asked, is whether the picture as a whole shows rather a kind of „informed diversity“ (Freathy & Parker, 14) or a pure plurality of approaches being in the end more or less incompatible. Is there a common ground how history in the field of RE is dealt with, how it is interpreted and evaluated and which significance it gains for religious learning processes? Though not directly addressed by most contributions in the book, the answer to this question might be found in three key terms that appear to be typical: religion, tradition and remembrance.

The religious educational perspective on history in this book first asks for the connection to *religion* knowing that “religion can be both positive and problematic“ (Schlag, 64). Learning about and from history in RE therefore means to become aware of what has been done “in the name of religion” (Bowman, 257) and in contrast to foster its contribution “to humanization, to the development of children and young people“ (Skeie, 313) as “a civilizing force” (Schlag, 61). Any integral theory and praxis of education has to be aware of “the role and impact of religions on the world [and their] capacity to create personal identity“ (Niemi, 380). Even the history (and historiography) of RE is strongly interrelated with the development of religion on the subjective, institutional and social level (Freathy et al., 125; Bråten, 189). As RE is interested in the relevance of religion for today’s and future life orientation, it often looks on history through the lens of *tradition*. In this volume Religious Educators think of tradition not in terms of “sustained discipline or indoctrination [or] the passing on of religious rituals” (Gent, 359), but as “a living thing” (Parker, 325) or “collage” (Parker, 339), which helps people “to define who they are and where they come from” (ibid.). And it is not at least from the liberating part of religious traditions where RE takes its critical position towards history (see Schwab). As opposed to the sad fact that “[h]istory is often written by the victors” (Freathy & Parker, 4), the concept of *remembrance* is of central importance within religions and RE. “Remembrance is not just thinking of something that happened in the past. Remembrance means solidarity backward, a solidarity that leads to solidarity for today’s marginalized persons, for the oppressed and persecuted of our time” (Boschki, 27). – It’s through the combination of religion, tradition and remembrance that the specific contribution of RE to the understanding and interpretation of history becomes

obvious: “not just to focus on the past but also to provide a vision for the present and the future.” (Gross, 98). It is the particular achievement of this book to clearly illustrate this unique contribution in its conceptual conciseness and contextual diversity.

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