

Study day 2016 "Youth - Religion - Relevance "

There are many reasons why religious education in schools and youth ministry in the parishes face radical changes. They are more noticeable in the north of Germany than in the south, however, conditions seem to align more and more: In Bavaria as well, the number of baptisms is decreasing significantly, many parishes are having difficulties with actively practicing youth ministry work and the confessional character of religious education is increasingly questioned. Which possible consequences do these changes entail for pastoral care within the parishes and religious education in schools? How can church and parish react productively to these substantial changes and avoid pessimistic prophecies of doom? What does education even mean when you take a look at the current school subject religion?



These questions were approached in the context of a study afternoon in Eichstätt which was hosted by Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kropač, Prof. Dr. Uto Meier and Klaus König from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in cooperation with the DV Eichstätt and the DKV. Two presentations given by the pastoral theologian Prof. Dr. Matthias Sellmann from Bochum and the Regensburg-based religious educationalist Prof. Dr. Burkard Porzelt opened the event. They were followed by a panel discussion between the two speakers, Dr. Sandra Krump, director of the Ordinariate in Munich and Johanna Schrödel from BdkJ (Federation of German Catholic Youth) Eichstätt. Ms. Schrödel kindly substituted for Lisi Maier, Berlin-based federal chairperson of the BdkJ, who was unable to attend due to sudden illness.

In front of an audience of approx. 120 attendees, in his pastoral theological presentation, Prof. Sellmann characterized the present youth as creative tacticians who had to master their lives independently in the midst of individuation and integration and in doing so were looking for accompanying security. Religiosity has to fit in the construction plan of one's own life. Only if it succeeds in finding its place in this context, it can claim validity. Young people chose and determine for themselves how they would like to characterize religiosity content-wise and in the context of actions. Dominant sources provide cultural-medial offers, with religious aspects being acquired rather incidentally in the context of a general approach to cultural witness. From a pastoral-theological perspective, this calls for attractive offers tailored to the individual needs in youth ministry, the acquisition of which result in self-directed gains in identity and biography. This analytical part of the presentation was followed by an introduction to different projects that describe church as a place of spiritual life competence given by Prof. Sellmann. He calls one of these projects "McMental" – a term which was deliberately chosen to remind of the famous chains McDonalds and McFit and their communicational concepts. The project creates a spiritual center in the city which is led by the church and offers different spiritual impulses in differently designed rooms. All these impulses shall support subjective life coping techniques.

Prof. Porzelt also made suggestions for future development, e.g. to replace confessional religious education by a subject teaching general religious science for all pupils. He justified his suggestion by taking reference to the fundamental educational tasks of schools: They act out of a democratic aspiration because it is their responsibility to enable access to culture for all pupils regardless of

specific conditions in families and other socialization contexts. As religion is an integral part of our culture in various forms, we need a school subject which invites all pupils to approach and examine religion. This is of particular importance because children and teenagers are hardly confronted with reflective examination of religious questions and manifestations outside of school anymore. Therefore, Porzelt thinks that it is wrong to bind religious education to specific requirements, as is currently done in the present confessional concept. Such religious studies, however, comprise more than a mere collection of information on religion. By exploring and pondering religion, pupils experience it as a basic form of living, thinking and experiencing and develop a personal relationship with religion.

This brief summary of the presentations makes clear that they formed a very good and in parts also provocative basis for the ensuing panel discussion in which the auditorium participated lively. At the beginning of the discussion, Johanna Schrödel and Dr. Sandra Krump presented short statements on the presentations outlining their personal views: Ms. Schrödel called for low-threshold offers which church associations should provide to young adults. Dr. Krump spoke in favor of a religious educational model which was independent and which also included controversial content.

We express our special thanks to Heidi Klehr and Martina Dremel who have dedicated their time and effort for an outstanding and confident preparation of the study day in cooperation with the hosts and supported by the student assistant Stephanie Schmidt as well as the “technicians” Franz Hegenberger and Dominik Wittmann.

Impressions of the study day

