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From religious homogeneity to secularization, diversity and pluralism

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Abstract: In the article three Icelandic research projects are examined, two doctoral theses and one master's thesis, with a view to mapping the knowledge that those projects have created while also considering what knowledge is lacking in the field of research in religious education in Iceland. The selected projects are chosen on the basis of their focus on religious education at schools, and they are examined from the perspective of what knowledge they have provided and what conclusions can be drawn from their results about the status and role of religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland. Research in the field of religious education in Iceland has been rather limited, and the question arises, what knowledge is available in that area in the country? All three projects reflect the development of Icelandic society from being relatively homogeneous in religious matters to growing secularization and increasing religious diversity and pluralism. Although their objectives are different, they clearly show how the development of the society affects emphases in the school's religious education. Therefore their results and discussion provide a foundation of knowledge on religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland or other multicultural societies. In the first projects the historical development in Iceland is described and compared with the development in the other Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) and it effectively creates the background for the other projects. The development of Christian and religious education in Iceland is shaped by the development of the society. In the two other research projects the conclusion is that religious education must take into account the increasing diversity and put the students and their diverse experiences in focus. The emphasis is placed on the idea that the approach to religious education needs to be multicultural, precisely because there are students in the schools with different cultural and religious backgrounds and experiences. It is necessary to take this into account, since factors such as family, home and school affect each other.

KEYWORDS: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, SECULARIZATION, RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, PLURALISM, MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION, RESEARCH IN ICELAND

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Introduction¹

In Iceland, there are only two academic positions in the field of religious education, one at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Iceland in the School of Humanities, where ecclesiastical pedagogy is the main emphasis together with sociology of religion, the other at the Faculty of Teacher Education in the School of Education at the University of Iceland, where the emphasis is on the school's religious education and religious education in the teacher education. Research in the field of religious education in Iceland has therefore been rather limited, and the question thus arises, what knowledge is available in that area in the country? In seeking answers to that question, three research projects will be examined, two doctoral theses and one master's thesis, with a view to mapping the knowledge that those projects have created while also considering what knowledge is lacking in this field. The selected projects are chosen on the basis of their focus on religious education at schools, although their objectives are different, and they will be examined from the perspective of what knowledge they have provided in that field and what conclusions can be drawn from their results about the status and role of religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland. All three projects are within educational sciences and are in one way or another connected to the Faculty of Teacher Education at the School of Education.

The first project is the doctoral thesis of Sigurður Pálsson, "Kirkja og skóli á 20. öld" ("Church and school in the 20th century"). His research revolved around examining the status and development of the teaching of Christian and religious studies in the Icelandic compulsory school in the 20th century by comparison with Denmark, Norway and Sweden (Pálsson, 2008). The second project is my own doctoral thesis from the University of Stockholm, "I don't believe the meaning of life is all that profound", where the research revolved around the life interpretation and values of Icelandic teenagers, based on interviews with a group of compulsory school students (Gunnarsson, 2008). Both of these theses were defended in the year 2008. The last project is the Master's thesis of Móeiður Júnísdóttir, "Hlutverk trúarbragðafræðslu í íslensku fjölmeningarsamfélagi: viðhorf foreldra grunnskólabarna" ("The role of religious education in the Icelandic multicultural society: attitudes of parents of compulsory school children"), where she interviewed

¹ At the Nordic Conference of Religious Education, Tartu, Estonia, June 2015, papers were presented during the symposium "Epistemologies of Religious Education – Examples from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden". The aim of the symposium was to examine different conditions for knowledge re/production concerning Religious Education in the Nordic countries and discuss how disciplines work as frames for ongoing developments of knowledge, primarily research contributions. The presenters were asked to use their own dissertation in relation to other dissertations from the country in which the presenter was institutionalized. As no one from Iceland took part in the symposium I was after the conference invited to take part in a special issue of Nordidactica and write an article according to this format.

several parents of compulsory school children with different backgrounds in 2013 about the role of religious education in compulsory schools (Júníusdóttir, 2014).

Research questions in the article are: What foundation of knowledge do these projects provide on religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland, particularly with regard to the development of the subject, life attitudes of teens and perspectives of parents? What conclusions can be drawn from them about the role of religious education in schools in the future?

When the projects are examined, attention is paid to their objectives, theoretical framework, main results and their interpretation. In the conclusion, an attempt is made to link them together and assess what knowledge they have created in the field of religious pedagogy in Iceland, with a special focus on religious education in the compulsory school, and where more knowledge is needed. The article can thus form a basis for further development of the school's religious education in Iceland.

Development of Christian and religious education in the 20th century

The aim of Sigurður Pálsson's research was to investigate how the role of the compulsory school in relation to the Church had changed in the 20th century and how the objectives, status and content of teaching in Christian studies, ethics and education about other religions developed at the same time. In connection with these objectives, seven research questions were presented. They revolved around the attitude and expectations of the state Church and its ministers to the school's Christian education; the understanding of the authorities and political parties regarding this education; the development in the other Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) compared with the development in Iceland; whether the debate about the education reflects trends in general in each period and ideas about general education; how the development agrees with theories of social scientists about the development of Western democracies toward secularization, pluralism and multiculturalism; and what conflicts, theological, pedagogical, and political, have characterized the debate (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 16-17).

The theoretical framework

As a basis for the theoretical framework of his investigation, Pálsson uses the debate in the neighboring countries on the status and role of religious pedagogy as an independent academic discipline. In the second half of the last century, considerable debate occurred among scholars about the self-understanding and definition of this academic discipline. It derives its foundation from more than one source, and as a result, there have been different perspectives on how to define it. Pálsson refers in particular to Geir Skeie (1998) and Karl E. Nipkow (1992) in his discussion of the definition of religious pedagogy as an academic discipline. He uses the broad definition of Skeie with reference to a model that he has put forward where religious pedagogy is related to different academic disciplines, such as cultural studies,

pedagogy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, theology and religious studies (Skeie, 1998, p. 239). At the same time, he builds on the analysis of Nipkow who seeks to combine the two main trends within religious pedagogy with reference to the Two Kingdoms doctrine of Luther, i.e., one that demands that the religious education of the schools be entirely justified on the basis of the pedagogical objectives of the school, and the other which is ecclesiastical or religious and places the primary emphasis on the students' need for knowledge and understanding of their own religious tradition. Nipkow (1992, pp. 484nn) wants to take conditions in contemporary multicultural societies seriously, while taking into account both pedagogical and theological views in the making of pedagogical theories (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 6-12).

Pálsson therefore approaches his subject from the perspective of religious pedagogy, but at the same time applies the traditional methods of history as it involves examining and tracing events in their historical context, and uses equally a descriptive, analytical and interpretive approach, and refers in this context to alethic hermeneutics, which, among other things, is based on the existential hermeneutics of Heidegger and others (Alveson & Sköldberg, 1994, pp. 115-150). He divides the subject matter of the study into three periods, and the division is determined by the fact that at the start of each of them, laws were enacted and/or curriculums published that involved changes in the status and content of Christian and religious education in compulsory schools. The first period begins around 1900 with preparation for the enactment of legislation on the education of children in 1907 and ends around 1946. During that period, two laws were enacted. On the one hand in 1926, and that law entailed fundamental changes in the collaboration of Church and school, where the Church's Christian education was no longer part of the Church's catechetical instruction (Law on education of children, No. 40/1926). On the other hand in 1936, but then there were no changes in the status of Christian education (Law on education of children no. 94/1936). The next period begins with the enactment of new legislation on the school system and compulsory education and the education of children in 1946 and ends with the enactment of the law on compulsory schools in 1974. During this period, the share of Christian studies in the compulsory curriculum became the most meager, at least formally. The last period extends from the enactment of the law on compulsory schools in 1974, and that law and subsequent curriculums entailed significant changes to the organization of Christian and religious education (Compulsory School Act, No. 63/1974), to the turn of the century in 2000 (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 19-23).

Pálsson's thesis provides a good insight into the development of Christian and religious education in compulsory education in Iceland in the 20th century with reference to the development in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Pálsson presents and discusses the main results of his research in four sections.

Changes in the administration of the school

First of all, there were changes in the administration of the school, as both in Iceland and in Denmark, Norway and Sweden it was secularized towards the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th, so that it was transferred out of the

hands of the Church to secular authorities. This happened in the wake of demands for increased and more diversified education, and that the political system underwent changes in the direction of democracy. The changes occurred in Norway with the school legislation which was enacted in 1889 when the administration of the school was secularized. In spite of that, the influence of the Church was significant and the article concerning objectives of the Norwegian compulsory school referred to the Christian pedagogical role of the school until after the turn of the century in 2000. The Swedes transferred the administration of the school from the hands of the Church to democratically elected local authorities in the year 1909 in urban areas and 1930 in rural areas. Some conflicts occurred about this, and some people wanted the administration of the school to rather be in the hands of a representative council under the auspices of the Church. The Danes were the last to make this change, and it was not until 1933 that the obligation of the Church to supervise schools in the country ended. There was considerable opposition to this change, especially from conservative ecclesiastical groups. The change of the administration of the school and the supervision of the school activities did not, for the time being, influence the Christian objectives of the school activities. When Pálsson compares the developments in Iceland with the developments in these countries, it emerges that Iceland is unique in two ways. On the one hand, the Icelandic compulsory school was not given any defined pedagogical objectives in the first comprehensive legislation on schools in the country in the year 1907, and on the other hand, there seemed to have been perfect unity about the idea that the administration of the school should be in the hands of secular authorities. Pálsson believes the explanation to be that the Icelandic society was very homogeneous at that time and the political party conflicts at that time mainly revolved around the relationship with the Danish state and little about school matters (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 259-261).

The ideological foundation of the school

Second, there is the ideological foundation of the school. Pálsson points out that the article concerning objectives of compulsory schools in the three Nordic countries at the beginning of the 20th century entailed that the school should, among other things, have a Christian pedagogical role to play. That applied in Norway during the entire 20th century, in Denmark until 1937 and in Sweden until 1958. In Denmark, disputes had rather been about the status of Christian education than about the school's Christian pedagogical role, but in the legislation of 1937, there are no references in an article concerning objectives to the school's Christian pedagogical role. On the other hand, the legislation provides that the Christian education should be in accordance with the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In Norway, on the other hand, there were both general and intense debates about the Christian foundation of the school activities and the status of Christian education well into the second half of the century. In Sweden, the changes to the article concerning objectives of the schools laws of 1958, which no longer referred to the Christian role of the school, occurred without much conflict, since there had been a rather long time of

preparation. Pálsson's conclusion is that Iceland is distinct from the other three nations in that there was no article concerning objectives in the school legislation of 1907, 1926 and 1936. His evaluation is that it is difficult to understand why the Icelandic compulsory school was not given any pedagogical objectives, similar to those that applied in the Nordic countries. An article concerning objectives is first found in the Icelandic school legislation of 1946, but without any Christian references. On the other hand, in the final stage of work on the legislation on compulsory school of 1974, a provision that the school should, among other things, be shaped by Christian ethics was inserted into the school's article concerning objectives. Pálsson points out that this happened after both Denmark and Sweden had removed all references to Christianity from the article concerning objectives of their school legislation (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 261-262).

From church education to school education

Third, there is the status and development of Christian education from Church education to school education. In the early 20th century, Christian studies played an important role in compulsory schools in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. At that time, the subject had the status of being the post-baptismal education of the Church. Pálsson notes that there was prolonged conflict during that century over this arrangement. Disputes occurred about the number of hours devoted to the subject and the traditional catechism education which was based on the confessions of the Church, and in addition, new teaching methods better suited to children were demanded. For example, the status of the subject became a matter of dispute in the political sphere, among other things because of the increased influence of Social Democrats, who wanted to restrict Christian education. The development differed somewhat in each of the Nordic countries. In Denmark, proposals to the effect that the subject would cease to have an ecclesiastical role, which were put forth by the Social Democrats in the thirties, met with much resistance. There were various ecclesiastical movements which united in opposition to the changes. The Christian education in the Danish compulsory school was thus defined as the post-baptismal education of the Church until 1949 and remained connected to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church until 1975. In Norway, the conflicts between Social Democrats and ecclesiastical movements were even more intense. They revolved both around the basis of the school activities and the status and role of the school's Christian education. Opposition from ecclesiastical movements led to the school's Christian education being defined as post-baptismal education of the Church until 1969. In Sweden, the development was somewhat different. During the first part of the century, the conflict particularly revolved around the status of the catechisms and Luther's Small Catechism as textbooks. A division occurred between the Christian education of the schools and the Church with the school legislation of 1958. Around the middle of the century, the demand for objectivity regarding the education was given top priority, along with the emphasis on tolerance towards different beliefs. That emphasis aroused considerable debate, i.e., whether it would be possible or desirable. A few years later,

there was a change in emphasis and students' existential questions were intended to be determinative. This is the only instance in the Nordic countries where an emphasis on student-centered education had a strategic influence on the content of religious education. In the opinion of Pálsson, these changes in emphasis can be traced to the fact that Swedish society had become secularized, in the widest sense of that word, earlier than the other Nordic countries.

In a comparison of developments in Iceland and the Nordic countries, Pálsson comes to the conclusion that the relationship between the Christian education of the schools and the Church in Iceland is in many ways unique. In the first proposals for the school legislation of 1907, there were no provisions for any formal connection between school education and Church education, but the result was, however, that the school's Christian education should be the Church's catechetical instruction and the statutory catechisms should be the school's curriculum. Followers of liberal theology, which spread into this country as in neighboring countries, turned against the catechism teaching, but there was little discussion of the relationship between the education and the doctrinal foundation of the state Church. Pálsson notes that in Iceland a division had occurred between the Christian education of school and Church with the education act of 1926. He also points out that the uniqueness of Iceland appears, among other things, in the fact that in Icelandic school legislation, there has never been an explicit provision connecting the education to the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is noteworthy that in the legislation of 1926, the division of labor between school and Church in Christian education is discussed, and Pálsson believes that it is not clear how that should be understood, both in view of the debate that occurred during the preparations for the legislation and because the relationship between school and Church was not specified more fully in the legislation. This led to prolonged uncertainty about the relationship between school education and Church education and the role of priests and teachers. Pálsson notes that conflict and uncertainty about whether priests or teachers should teach Christian studies do not appear to have manifested themselves in the Nordic countries, but in Iceland they began immediately after the enactment of the education act of 1907. In Pálsson's conclusions, he mentions that little debate occurred in the public sphere about the school's Christian education, with the exception of the first quarter of the 20th century. Although both the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party had, to begin with, included the removal of Christian education from the schools as part of their platform, like their sister parties in the other Nordic countries, that demand was not followed up in political debate. Pálsson's conclusion is that even though the Church and Church meetings had made repeated resolutions about strengthened and improved Christian education, it continued as usual without much conflict until the enactment of the Compulsory School Act of 1974. At that time, the Church was called to cooperate with school authorities in drawing up the curriculum for the subject, but that cooperation was broken off, although the policy, which had been formulated by the cooperation committee, was followed. Iceland's uniqueness came to the surface again at the end of the century when the Church was officially appointed to write the curriculum in Christian studies, religious studies and ethics, and

Pálsson notes that this would have been unthinkable at that time in the other Nordic countries. No opposition emerged to this measure, neither among educational professionals nor politicians. Pálsson considers it difficult to explain the almost total absence of debate in Iceland on the teaching of Christian studies and the school's foundational values in general, but notes that there seems to be little tradition of debate on fundamentals of pedagogical and educational matters, but all the stronger tradition of debate on practical issues. Pálsson does not consider the possibility that the decision to appoint the Church to write the curriculum can be explained by the fact that the minister of education at that time belonged to a political party on the right wing and was positive towards a cooperation with the Church. It is more complicated to explain the lack of debate about this decision, but maybe it can be explained by the fact that at the end of the last century around 90% of the population belonged to the National Lutheran Church of Iceland.

Formal education on non-Christian religions was not introduced in compulsory schools in the Nordic countries until the latter half of the 20th century and was then associated with the teaching of Christian studies. In Sweden such education was adopted in 1962, in Norway and Iceland in 1974, and in Denmark in 1975. There was unity about this in all four countries.

Pálsson summarizes this factor and notes that both Skeie and Nipkow have emphasized the importance of dialogue between pedagogy and theology about pedagogical issues in general and religious education in particular. The developments in the Nordic countries indicate that this dialogue is no longer deemed as natural as before. It is Pálsson's assessment that with increased multiculturalism, it is important that such discussions takes place on an equal footing if the objective of creating tolerant multicultural societies is to be achieved (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 262-266).

Exemptions of students and teachers from Christian education

The fourth factor that Pálsson discusses in his conclusions is the exemptions of students and teachers from Christian education. Because of the diversity in religious matters, the demand for exemption from the confessionally bound Christian education of the schools arose early in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. It also caused conflicts that teachers who were not members of the state Churches or did not belong to Evangelical Lutheran congregations, were prevented from providing this education. Pálsson notes that Iceland also differs in this respect from the other Nordic countries. In Iceland, there were never any provisions for exemption from Christian and religious education, neither for students nor for teachers. Perhaps this reflects the strong position of the National Lutheran Church in Icelandic society most of the 20th century. Exemptions for students were discussed in the preparations for the legislation of 1907, and it was then considered natural that children who were outside the state Church and would not be confirmed would be exempt from the school's Christian education. It seemed unnecessary to enact special provisions for that. During the first decades of the 20th century, religious communities outside the state Church were few and rather weak. As the century progressed, they increased and some of them became powerful,

but they never objected to the Christian education in the schools, since it was usually easy to obtain an exemption. Pálsson believes that the explanation is probably that the education was not bound to the teachings of the Lutheran Church but was based primarily on Bible stories without significant theological explanations. In the current Icelandic Compulsory School Act of 2008, however, there are provisions similar to the ones in Sweden that allow applying for an exemption from individual aspects of the school program if there are valid reasons (Pálsson, 2008, pp. 266-269).

Conclusions

From Pálsson's results, it is clear that the school and the status of Christian education in the four countries, namely Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, have developed under the influence of growing secularization and pluralism in the last century. Education developed from being under the supervision of the Church over to secular authorities. However, it depends on the country how fast this development took place. Debates on the ideological foundation of the school have to some extent been shaped by the same factors. However, there are exceptions to the effect that while provisions regarding the Christian pedagogical role of the compulsory school disappeared from the article concerning objectives of school laws in Denmark and Sweden before and soon after the middle of the century, they remained in the article concerning objectives of the Norwegian school the entire century. Such provisions were completely missing, however, from Icelandic school legislation. It is first with the Compulsory School Act of 1974 that the article concerning objectives of Icelandic school legislation includes anything Christian in it, and then it revolved around the idea that the school's practices should be shaped by Christian ethics. Thus, the effects of secularization and pluralism are different and less clear here than when considering the administration of the school.

Interestingly, Pálsson's results show that there were much fewer conflicts and debates about the status and role of Christian education in Iceland than in the three Nordic countries. The school's Christian education was defined as the catechetical instruction of the Church until 1926, but after that, the status of the subject in relation to the Church is unclear. Conflicts about the status and role of the Church receded for the most part with the adoption of the Bible story teaching in the wake of the legislation of 1926, although the Church considered for a long time that this education would be for her sake. Pietistic movements within the Church and people outside the state Church did not participate much in the debate on the school and Christian education, since they were a small group well into the 20th century. Political parties on the left wing did not discuss their policy much in public debates. Pálsson deliberates how to interpret this lack of debates and conflicts in Iceland about Christian education and the foundational values of the school compared to the neighboring countries and wonders whether it is a result of the homogeneity of the society or the fact that Icelanders are primarily pragmatists who spend more time debating the practicality of things than fundamental objectives. One can wonder if Pálsson should have taken to a greater extent into his discussion the strong possession

of the National Lutheran Church in Iceland most of the 20th century. 90% of the population still belonged to the Church in the end of the century and over 5% to other Christian denominations. But at the same time the society became more and more secularized as the century passes, and it is clear that in the last quarter of the century the development of Christian and religious education in Iceland is shaped primarily by increased secularization and pluralism.

Icelandic teenagers' life interpretation and values

In my own doctoral thesis (Gunnarsson, 2008), the focus is on young people's life interpretation and values. The overall aim was to investigate Icelandic teenagers' interpretation of life and values and how they express their views, for the purpose of discussing this in connection with social developments and religious education in schools. The aim was defined as follows: a) to map and analyze some central elements of Icelandic teenagers' (age 14-15 years) life interpretation and values, b) to investigate what characterizes the contents of the teenagers' conceptions and what is common and what is special for each, and c) to discuss what characterizes teenagers' life interpretation and values in connection with social development and with religious education in schools. On the basis of the aim, the following research questions were formulated: How do teenagers express themselves regarding their interpretation of life and values and what characterizes individual teenagers' perceptions and statements? What common perceptions and values exist among teenagers and what differences are there between the sexes and between teenagers from different areas? What relationship is there between teenagers' life interpretation and values and social change? What challenges to religious education in schools do the teenagers' perceptions and statements present? (Gunnarsson, 2008, p. 22).

Theoretical framework and research method

The theoretical framework was first of all based on the Nordic discussion on concepts like philosophy of life and existential questions (Bråkenhielm, 2001; Hartman, 1986; Jeffner, 1973; Kurtén, 1995; Lindfeldt, 2003; Aadnanes, 1999) and life interpretation (Gravem, 1996; Hartman, 2000a; Haakedal, 2004; Selander, 1994; 2000; Skeie, 1998; 2002). My conclusion was to use and define the concept of life interpretation in the sense of the process in which the individual is involved when finding his way about his existence, attempting to tackle the various life situations he is faced with, seeking answers to his existential questions and his life's meaning. This is a process with a certain inner consistency but also conflicts, and it can therefore take form in different expressions and manifestations. Life interpretation also occurs in a dialectical interplay between the individual and his/her social and cultural context. On the other hand, I looked at the concept of life philosophy more like an interpretive framework, within which it is natural to work on existential questions and experiences (Gunnarsson, 2008, pp. 57-84).

Second, my theoretical framework was also based on the discussion on religious education in general (Asheim, 1971; Grimmitt, 1987; 2000; Nipkow, 1992; Skeie, 1998) and different approaches in religious education in schools (Jackson, 1997; 2004; Wright 1996; 2004). The discussion indicates that different theoreticians have presented proposals for various scientific approaches to religious teaching in schools. The main threads of this discussion stressed on one hand either theological or pedagogical grounding of religious education as a scientific discipline, and on the other hand either essential or contextual understanding of religious education in schools. As a conclusion, I pointed out that it may be possible to find an intermediate position between Karl E. Nipkow's attempt to represent what he calls 'connecting' paradigms since this involves taking contemporary circumstances seriously, and Michael Grimmit's stress on educational theory as a basis. It can also lead to finding a middle way between the contextual understanding that Robert Jackson and others present and Andrew Wright's more essential understanding. My point of view was to focus on what Jackson and Wright have in common, i.e., that the teaching shall be accessible to all, irrespective of faith or world view, and stressing openness and flexibility, and recognizing children's and young people's collaboration as important elements of religious education. Then one finds a way to create interaction between pupils' experiences and contexts and the essential or structured contents of the religions (Gunnarsson 2008, pp. 25-45).

Finally, as a theoretical perspective for analysis and interpretation of the empirical material, I used Hans G. Gadamer's (1960/1997) existential hermeneutic theory and his discussion of concepts such as *Bildung*, experience and tradition with a link to other concepts, such as the principle of effective-history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and his theory of the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*). I also viewed Clifford Geertz's (1973; 1983) concept of culture as significant and his semiotic and hermeneutic perspectives on anthropology, where he stresses culture as a pattern of meanings embodied in symbols that must be interpreted (Gunnarsson 2008, pp. 88-97).

I collected the material, together with a colleague at the Iceland University of Education, in two steps. Teenagers were interviewed with a one-year interval. The first interview was conducted when they were in the ninth class, i.e., aged 14/15. In Iceland, this is the year after confirmation. The second interview was conducted when they were in the tenth class, the last year of the compulsory school.

The teenagers came from three schools in Iceland. Two were in Reykjavik – one in an old quarter and the other in a new. One also had a number of immigrant children. The third school was in a fishing village in the countryside. Parents of 7-9 teenagers, randomly chosen in the ninth class from each school gave a positive answer; in all 24 teenagers, 14 girls and 10 boys. Since the informant group was not all that large, it is obvious that it does not admit generalizations, compared with a quantitative method with a large population. But I nevertheless viewed the informant group as large enough to be able to provide a survey of some main lines and trends in the material (Tylor and Bogdan 1998, pp. 87-92).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the spring term of 2003. They lasted around one hour and were tape-recorded and transcribed. The teenagers were asked questions around some central themes that we had chosen in advance. One year later, that is 2004, the young people were contacted again, requesting them to participate in a similar interview. Sixteen of the 24 took part again, 10 girls and six boys. Of these 16, nine were then selected for further analysis and interpretation in my thesis. The selection was guided by the differing backgrounds of the individuals, so as to obtain variation in the material (Gunnarsson, 2008, pp. 85-88).

Between homogeneity and plurality

My main conclusion was that the analysis and interpretation of the interviews with the teenagers showed a picture of tension, both between homogeneity and plurality and between security and insecurity. The first tension concerned the teenagers' external world. Here we had on one hand Icelandic society and its cultural traditions and development during the past few years. On the other hand, we had the teenagers' statement or narratives about their surroundings, which to some extent may reflect the situation in society or their experience of it. The results of my study were therefore based on a process of interpretation that switches between the external context, i.e., the information we had about Icelandic society, and the internal, that is, the teenagers' statements. General statistics on Icelandic development and research in the field suggested that society was relatively homogeneous for the major part of the twentieth century; but during the last few years of the last century and the beginning of the twenty-first, development has been towards increased diversity and plurality. This was shown, among other things, in the figures for increasing numbers of immigrants to Iceland, and by changes in affiliation to religious communities. But other changes also occurred during the twentieth century that affect teenagers' lives and conditions in Iceland, i.e., development from a farming and fishing community to a modern information community with a good economy and high technical development. The teenagers were exactly in the middle of this social situation and it created the framework within which they interpreted their lives. The tension between homogeneity and plurality therefore emerged in different ways in their statements when interpreted in relation to social change. The main lines and trends in the interview material indicated a common frame of reference regarding e.g. the effect of religion on the teenagers' life interpretation and what common and traditional values were to be found in their statements. The Church Sunday schools and confirmation classes, together with Christian education in school, have had their influence. Christianity as the dominant religion in society has therefore had its effect, but at the same time there is certain diversity in Icelanders' religious ideas and attitudes. The tradition and effect history (Gadamer 1960/1997) of the Church and the Christian faith in Icelandic culture appeared in the teenagers' statements, even among those who underwent civil confirmation and therefore had a non-religious family background. The teenagers' stress on the importance of friendship also appeared fairly traditional,

reflecting the weight placed on friendship in the cultural heritage, (cf. what Geertz (1983) calls traditional and 'common sense' in culture).

But my study also showed plurality and diversity in the teenagers' verbal expressions. Interpretation of individual teenager's statements in relation to their differing backgrounds in the family, with different traditions and experiences, showed a variation that may have appeared paradoxical but reflected primarily the tension between homogeneity and plurality in which the teenagers found themselves. Different views of the influence of religion on their lives, their differing views of death, some variation in values and how they experienced adversity, and their differing responses in such situations, were examples of plurality in their utterances. My conclusion was that the teenagers' life-interpretation process comprised both the homogeneity of their society's cultural heritage and tradition and the plurality created by social change and different individual backgrounds and experiences (Gunnarsson, 2008, pp. 162-173).

Between security and insecurity

The other tension, between security and insecurity, concerned first the internal, i.e. the teenagers' own experience of their external world. But to understand their experience, their statements also had to be interpreted in alternation with the external context. The results of other youth research in Iceland gave important information in this respect. The family and work situation in Iceland played a significant role here, alongside what was known about Icelandic youth culture and the teenagers' everyday situation. In general, the family situation in Iceland resembled that in other Nordic and western European countries, with an increase in divorce during the past few decades. The labor situation in Iceland, on the other hand, was different, since there was plenty of work when the interviews were conducted and many worked overtime. This, among other things, led to long working days for many parents.

There were also, according to Icelandic research, young people who had few or no friends, and therefore loneliness was possibly part of the young people's experience of their reality (Jónsdóttir, Björnsdóttir, Ásgeirsdóttir, Sigfúsdóttir, 2002). In addition, Icelandic youth culture was marked by a materialistic view of life with consumption, TV, films, pop music and computers, but also by what is called traditional values (Broddason, 2005; Guðbjörnsdóttir, 2005; Guðlaugsson, 2005). My analysis and interpretation of the teenagers' statements showed how their experience of this outer reality affected their life interpretation. Here the tension emerged between the security they experience in the family and among mates and the insecurity created by the feeling of meaninglessness and, not least, fear of losing their nearest and dearest and being alone. Expressions that show fear of loneliness and exclusion often arose, even though most of the teenagers described themselves as happy and having many good friends. This experience may have its explanation in the parents' long working hours, while the importance of good contact with their parents emerged from the teenagers' statements. The teenagers' personal experience and their knowledge of others' experience of loneliness and exclusion also had an effect in this connection.

This had the consequence that the teenagers' mates and interrelationships played an important part and counteracted the danger of loneliness, since most of them had many good friends. But I assumed that there were young people with few or no friends, even though this did not emerge generally in the statements of the teenagers interviewed.

How the young people experienced school also showed tension between security and insecurity in the young people's everyday situation. In this connection, I found it noticeable that even though research into schools in Iceland showed that the majority of upper-level pupils feel well in school, 13% said that they seldom or never feel well at school, often owing to bullying or similar (Jónsdóttir, Björnsdóttir, Ásgeirsdóttir, Sigfúsdóttir, 2002). This picture of reality was reflected in the statements of the teenagers interviewed in my study. The positive attitude to school was common and the meeting with schoolmates was experienced as valuable. But fear of bullying and exclusion lay beneath the surface in many, even though most claimed that there was no or very little bullying in their school. The tension between security and insecurity shown in the teenagers' life interpretation therefore became clearer when it was related to the outer circumstances that appeared in other research results (Gunnarsson, 2008, pp. 162-173).

Challenges to school religious education

On the basis of my results and conclusions, I discussed what challenges to school religious education the teenagers' perceptions and statements presented. The spread and individual differences emerging from the material played an important part in connection with the study's purpose of discussing what characterizes teenagers' life interpretation and values in connection with school religious education. Diversity and pluralism must be taken seriously when the approach in the teaching is being discussed, and then it is important to take account of the pupils' premises and different backgrounds. Although key figures in the discussion of religious education in England (Jackson 1997, 2004; Wright 1996, 2004) have presented approaches which stress either the essential or the contextual, in both cases, they have also stressed the importance of taking into consideration and using pupils' own experience of religion and of religious experience, and that religion as a school subject should be available for all pupils, irrespective of their religious or secular view of life. On the basis of research results in a Nordic context, similar views have been put forward, and religious education has been criticized both in Church and in school for being one-sidedly cognitive. There has been stress on starting from the individual pupil, his experience, existential questions and feelings (Brunstad, 1998; Eriksson, 1999; Birkedal, 2001; Porath Sjöo, 2008). The Swedish existential-question-education approach also stressed the pupil perspective and pupils' existential questions as a starting point in religious education. (Selander, 1993; 1994; Hartman, 2000b). In my view, there are numerous reasons for focusing on the pupil perspective, regardless of whether one's understanding of religious education is essential or contextual. One task of religious education is to help pupils deepen their own knowledge, their own frames

of reference and their own existential experience, thus encouraging them to practice formulating important questions of life and ethics (Selander, 2000). But this does not take place without interplay with pupils' outer contexts, culture and traditions; and the contents of religions and life philosophy traditions. The result of my study showed teenagers in a field of tension between homogeneity and plurality and between security and insecurity. Despite a partly common frame of reference represented by the culture and traditions of society, their different frames of reference also emerged, depending on the different backgrounds and experience to which they referred in their life interpretation. I saw this as an argument for a religious education that attempts to a greater extent to take its starting point in and to use pupils' own experience of religion and religious and existential experience and existential questions. Even though Icelandic society has been fairly homogeneous, it becomes increasingly marked by plurality and diversity, both in the Christian tradition and also through increasing influence from other religions and non-religious life philosophies. This development has continued since the interviews were conducted 12-13 years ago. Thus, young people bring to their lessons differing understanding and experience, depending on their differing external contexts and their capacity to formulate and process personal experience and existential reflections. In school religious education, this is the reality teachers must work with and can exploit in an interaction with the religion syllabus and its contents (Gunnarsson, 2008, pp. 173-176).

Parents' attitude toward religious education in a multicultural society

In her research, Móeiður Júnísdóttir (2014) drew attention to the attitudes of parents of compulsory school children, with different cultural and religious backgrounds, toward the school's religious education. The purpose of the research was to give parents, as participants in the education of their children, a voice in the debate on the role, emphases, status and importance of religious education as a subject in Icelandic compulsory schools, and to increase understanding of the religious needs of a diverse group of students in the schools. Her research question was: Why is the religious education of the compulsory school important in Icelandic multicultural society? She then poses three subsidiary questions: What is the role of religion and religious education in a multicultural society? What is the attitude of parents, as participants in the education of their children, toward religious upbringing and religious education in times of diversity? How do the attitudes of parents agree with the approach to religious education that is based on a vision of multicultural education? (Júnísdóttir, 2014, pp. 7-9).

Theoretical framework and research method

The theoretical framework for Júnísdóttir's research is based on theories of multiculturalism and diversity. She refers to Bhikha Parekh (2000) and Frederick Ericsson (2010), both of whom are examples of scholars who presuppose the

definition of culture as a social construct. That includes the presupposition of a fluid and interactive relationship between different cultures and the presupposition that that is the key prerequisite for cultural diversity being able to thrive in a community. In addition, Jónúsdóttir refers to critical multiculturalism, where it is presupposed that certain social groups have more power and privilege than other groups and pointed out what changes need to occur. Such ideology has increasingly become the theoretical foundation for school and educational research, which seeks to expose the reality of injustice that appears, among other things, in the gap between the official and hidden curriculum of educational institutions and in the lack of communication between school staff and the students/families that belong to minorities in the society (Baumann, 1999; Brooker, 2002, Grillo, 2007). The emphasis is on recognizing different cultures in schools and targeting curriculum for a diverse culture. On that foundation, Jónúsdóttir therefore also builds on theories of multicultural education and refers, among others, to James Banks (2010), and Bhikha Parekh (2000) and to Icelandic debate on the subject (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007; Hansen & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010) in this connection and connects those emphases to religious education in public schools in a multicultural society and international rights of parents and children. She refers, among other things, to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with particular emphasis on equality, freedom of thought, freedom of opinion and freedom of religion and the right to education (Jónúsdóttir, 2014, pp. 11-18).

On this foundation, Jónúsdóttir then examines the status and development of religious education, both in Europe and in the Icelandic compulsory school, from the time that the laws on compulsory schools were enacted in the year 1974 and education about non-Christian religions was introduced, until the time when the new curriculum of the compulsory school was published in 2011, i.e., the general section, and in 2013, i.e., the subject areas (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2013). At that time, the change was made to incorporate religious education under the curriculum in social studies, but until that time, an independent curriculum in Christian studies, ethics and religion had been published. Jónúsdóttir also discusses different approaches in religious education, and refers, among other things, to the debate in the UK and elsewhere about the essential approach on the one hand, and the contextual approach on the other hand (Ipgrave, 2001; Jackson, 1997; 2004a; 2004b; Leganger-Krogstad, 2001; 2003; Weisse, 1996; Wright, 2004). Jónúsdóttir's conclusion in this section is that religious education in schools needs to be on the terms of multicultural education. There she refers to the theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) on the effects of environment on the development of children in the social and cultural context. This is the so-called ecological system approach, where emphasis is placed on necessary bridge building between the home (micro setting) and the school (macro setting) in connection with the educational development of children. It is considered necessary that parents and teachers connect in a strong way so that the child is given an opportunity to experience values, traditions and activities in a continuous manner, that cultural continuity exists between home and school. Bronfenbrenner's theory focuses on the importance of

considering the individual and cultural attitudes of parents toward religious education and different approaches to teaching in that context (Júníusdóttir, 2014, pp. 18-54).

Júníusdóttir's research is based on qualitative methodology that utilized so-called objective sampling. Semi-structured interviews were taken with seven individuals that had in common that they were parents of compulsory school children, while emphasis was placed on having as much diversity as possible in the group with respect to cultural and religious background. The interviewees were all women aged 27-45 years. The interviews were about an hour in length, and were all but one taken at the person's home. Five of them had a mother tongue other than Icelandic, but they all spoke such good Icelandic that it was not considered necessary to use an interpreter. Their religious background was varied; one Lutheran, two Catholics, one in the Orthodox Church, one Buddhist, one Muslim and one Baha'i (Júníusdóttir, 2014, pp. 59-63).

The main results

Júníusdóttir summarizes the main results and believes they indicate that the religions play multifarious roles in the life of the interviewees. They also indicate that they believe the school's religious education is an important part of the overall education of their children and are in favor of religious education being compulsory in Icelandic compulsory schools. They also consider it a positive development to incorporate religious studies under social studies in view of the growing multiculturalism in Iceland. They made a clear distinction between religious upbringing and religious education, and considered the role of the school to be education about religions while religious upbringing was the role of parents and home. Furthermore, they emphasized the freedom of their children to make an independent and informed decision about their own faith and life view, and considered the school's religious education to have an important role to play in this regard. Regarding approaches to the teaching, the parents thought it important that it be neutral, student-oriented and take pluralism into account. They also expressed some concern that teacher education was generally not in accordance with the pedagogical requirements that such an approach makes, and emphasized increased communication with the school. Júníusdóttir notes that the results only mirror the views of the parents who were interviewed and therefore it is not possible to generalize on that basis about the attitude of other parents. She believes, however, that it is possible to draw certain conclusions from the results about a desirable arrangement of religious education in compulsory schools in a multicultural society (Júníusdóttir, 2014, p. 93).

The multi-faceted role of religion

Júníusdóttir then discusses the results in the light of the theoretical framework of the research in three parts. First, she places the results in the context of the multi-faceted role of religion in society (Kucukan, 2005) and the changes that have occurred in Icelandic society lately. She also refers to the discussion of Parekh (2000) about the fear that may arise in society when diversity increases. The interviewees stated that

they had experienced profound changes towards a multicultural society and religious pluralism. The religions played a multifaceted role in the lives of the interviewees in different spheres, such as attitudes, beliefs, emotions, experiences, rituals and identification. The interviewees talked about Icelandic society in a positive way, but also mentioned that it was possible to discern prejudices and fear of the religions. They also emphasized both the external and internal dimensions of religious freedom. Most of them had received a religious upbringing in childhood, although it varied whether they considered a religious upbringing important or not, but in general they were of the opinion that it was included in their pedagogical role to introduce their children to their own religious traditions, and a strong emphasis on prayer could be discerned in this regard. The interviewees also made a clear distinction between the religious pedagogical role of the home and the educational role of the school (Júníusdóttir, 2014, pp. 94-97).

The role of religious education

That leads to the second part of Júníusdóttir's discussion, i.e., the role of the religious education of the compulsory school. She refers to the discussion of Parekh (2000) and Grillo (2007) and draws the conclusion from the interviews with the parents that their views were characterized by a strong multiculturalism. They emphasized that the Icelandic school system would be in harmony with the growing multiculturalism of the country and that the school would be a neutral and democratic forum. The view that teaching about religions was one of the important aspects of the democratic role of the school was also strongly expressed by them. They were therefore all of the opinion that religious studies should be a compulsory subject and an important factor in the children's education. When the changes were discussed that religious studies were now part of social studies, the parents seemed generally positive towards them. It also emerged that many of them considered it natural that a greater emphasis would be placed on Christianity in the education since it was in a unique position in the country. Their main emphasis was, however, that it was the role of religious education to provide the children with basic knowledge of all major religions so they could form their own views. They also emphasized the importance of the teaching to reduce prejudices and stereotypes and that it contributed to mutual understanding, tolerance and open-mindedness. Júníusdóttir notes that these results are in many ways in harmony with similar research in neighboring countries (see for example Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010) (Júníusdóttir, 2014, pp. 97-99).

A multicultural approach in religious education

Thirdly, Júníusdóttir discusses the results in the context of a multicultural approach in religious education and refers to scholars who have researched and put forward theories of approaches that take the diversity and perspectives of students seriously (e.g., Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010; Igrave, 2001; Jackson, 1997; 2004a; 2004b; 2009; Weisse, 1996; Wright, 2004). All the interviewees emphasized the importance of religious education at schools not involving indoctrination, and that was independent

of whether they were in favor of placing greater emphasis on Christianity than other religions. They emphasized that the teaching should take into account pluralism and diversity, that most religions should be taught, not only the most numerous, so that students would get a clear view of the diversity and could form their own views on that basis. Teaching about nonreligious views was also considered important in this context. Some interviewees also emphasized discussing different emphases and traditions within the same religions. In Jónúsdóttir's opinion, it can be concluded from the comments of the interviewees that the teaching approach that they consider desirable is in the spirit of a multicultural approach (Banks, 2010; Parekh, 2000 Sleeter & McLaren, 2009). Also that students be trained to discuss religious subjects and make it natural for them. All of the interviewees emphasized that teachers should be well educated in this field and some of them had some concerns that there might be something lacking there. One of the things that interviewees mentioned was the importance of parents being more involved in the school and that the school should better utilize the resource that is comprised of the knowledge and experience of parents with different origins and religious backgrounds, but most interviewees felt that interactions with the school were too limited. Jónúsdóttir refers in this context to Brooker (2002), who emphasizes that it is not enough to express a formal interest in parental cooperation, knowledge and concrete actions need to follow. Grillo (2007) points out what he calls "imaginary strong multiculturalism" as a common phenomenon, which refers to multiculturalism that has no basis in reality. Even though emphasis is placed on multiculturalism in the curriculum, that is not to say that it reflects the reality in the school activities. From the comments of some interviewees, it can be concluded that the multicultural skills of many teachers need to be strengthened, and in this context Jónúsdóttir refers to the teachings of Bronfenbrenner (1979), where the individual and his environment are viewed as an indissoluble whole and emphasis placed on the fact that all aspects of children's lives, such as family, home and school, affect each other (Jónúsdóttir, 2014, pp. 99-104).

Discussion and conclusions

The three research projects examined in this article were chosen because they all focus on religious education at schools. The aim was to find out what foundation of knowledge is to be found on religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland and therefore these projects seemed to be fruitful in this regard as they all are from the last eight or ten years and not many other projects with this focus to be found. All three reflect the development of Icelandic society from being relatively homogeneous in religious matters to growing secularization and religious diversity. Although their objectives are different, they clearly show how the development of the society affects emphases in the school's religious education. Therefore their results and discussion provide a foundation of knowledge on religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland. In their theoretical framework, the research projects of Pálsson and myself have in common that they refer to the debate about whether religious pedagogy should

emphasize the theological or pedagogical foundation. Pálsson builds equally on the ideas of Nipkow, who builds on both a theological and pedagogical foundation, and Skeie, who gathers from more sources, such as cultural studies, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, theology and religious studies, when he lays a foundation for his theory of religious pedagogy. In my project, I put forward the option of going a middle way between Grimmitt, who builds entirely on a pedagogical foundation, and the theories of Nipkow, who wants to take conditions in contemporary multicultural societies seriously, while also taking into account both pedagogical and theological views. Perhaps there is not a big difference between these two projects in terms of the theoretical foundation of religious pedagogy. Furthermore, Jóníusdóttir's project and mine have in common that they refer to the discussion in the neighboring countries of different approaches in religious education, i.e., whether it should be essential or contextual. While my conclusion is to gather in both directions while simultaneously placing the student in the foreground, among other things with reference to life interpretation and existential questions, Jóníusdóttir emphasizes that the approach should be multicultural. The multicultural emphasis has in common with mine that it focuses on the student, his situation and experience in the family, home and school. This is important having in mind that religious education as a school subject should be available for all pupils, irrespective of their religious or secular view of life, and should provide more the multicultural skills among the pupils.

It is interesting to examine these three research projects in context. The historical development that Pálsson describes in his project effectively creates the background for the other projects. The development of Christian and religious education in Iceland is shaped by the development of the society from much homogeneity in religious matters to a society of secularization and increasing diversity and pluralism. Despite a certain nuanced difference between Iceland and the other Nordic countries, the main characteristics are similar. The role and status of religious education are shaped by the development of society. The liberal protestant theology also influenced the development of the Christian Education, especially in the first half of the 20th century, as it pushed aside the confessions of the Church and focused instead on the accounts of the Gospels and the historical criticism of the Gospels. Because of this the religious education in Iceland developed from being part of the catechetical education of the Church, during the first quarter century, to the independent Bible story education of the school, which lasts for about half a century. With growing secularization in the last quarter century education about non-Christian religions is added to the program side by side with the Christian education, and then begins growing together with increasing religious plurality at the end of the century. The difference between the Nordic countries lies particularly in the timing of the legislation, both in terms of the pedagogical objectives of the school and the status and role of Christian education. In that context, Iceland's uniqueness attracts special attention when it comes to the school's Christian pedagogical objectives.

The teenagers who were interviewed in my research went to compulsory school when education about non-Christian religions gradually increased in Icelandic compulsory school, though it was particularly at the lower secondary level to begin

with and they have probably not encountered such education until at the lower secondary level, or a year before the first interviews were taken. It is clear from the interviews that the growing influence of the diversity in religious matters had considerable impact on the teenagers, even if the effects of the homogeneity were also easily discernible and they lived in a kind of tension between homogeneity and diversity. It is not clear whether or to what extent the religious education has influenced that and more likely that the development of society has played the largest role. On the other hand, it was a logical conclusion, in my opinion, that religious education must take into account the increasing diversity and put the students and their diverse experiences in focus. In that context, I refer, among others, to John Dewey (1902/1956), who precisely emphasized the interaction between the school's curriculum and students' experiences. Jóníusdóttir's research emphasizes it even better when she, based on interviews with parents of compulsory school children, places emphasis on the idea that the approach to religious education needs to be multicultural, precisely because there are students in the schools with different cultural and religious backgrounds and experiences. It is necessary to take this into account, since factors such as family, home and school affect each other. The concern of her interviewees was whether teachers are sufficiently well prepared to deal with this education.

When the question is asked at the beginning of this article: What foundation of knowledge do these projects provide on religious education in compulsory schools in Iceland, particularly with regard to the development of the subject, life attitudes of teens and perspectives of parents? then the conclusion is that a subject such as religious education tends to be shaped by the development of society at the time. Of course this is the case about the school in general and other school subjects. But when the focus is on religious education it is clear that secularization and growing religious diversity are important causal factors. The development of religious education, however, is always behind the social development, and therefore acts as a reaction to it. It is also clear that both students and their families live and move in the same society as the school. Their circumstances and attitudes are shaped by the same changing society and thus they call for new approaches to religious education. The students in schools have different cultural and religious backgrounds and they are under the influence of secular and religious pluralism. The other research question revolves precisely around this, namely: What conclusions can be drawn from these studies on the role of religious education in the future? The diversity will continue to increase and we even see increased nationalism that sometimes is tied to religious or antireligious ideas. Therefore it is natural that religious education takes that into consideration. Religion is a social, cultural and political phenomenon in modern secular societies and cannot be confined solely to the private sphere. Religious education should therefore nurture an understanding of the phenomena of both belief and non-belief and the ability to reflect on the different religious and secular worldviews to be found in plural societies. As of the new curriculum of the compulsory school in Iceland of 2011/2013, religious education is part of social studies. That entails in some ways a demand for contextual religious education, which

is based on a functional understanding of religions. Whether teachers are prepared to deal with religious education in this new context, and put the students with their diverse backgrounds in focus, only time will tell. At the same time, it calls for further research in this field in Iceland, i.e., on matters that the studies, which have been discussed here, did not deal with. There is therefore a need for research on what happens in the class room, how religious education is arranged there and what results are achieved in view of the growing diversity in religious matters which the development of society in Iceland entails, and the new status of religious education as part of social studies. Having the school in focus it is natural that the Faculty of Teacher education deals with such research, but the religions-sociological emphasis within the Faculty of Theology and Religious studies could also contribute, having in mind the interplay between the development of the Icelandic society and religious education as a school subject. The studies that have been discussed here form a good foundation for such research.

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