Facing Religious Diversity and Secularisation – About the Future of Denominational Religious Education in Compulsory School in Austria
Abstract

This thesis deals with the current situation of denominational religious education in Austria and the question of its future. The situation will be described including the historical development of the relationship between religion and politics and the legal framework of religious education in Austria. Afterwards models and systems of religious education in other European countries will be discussed. A major part of the thesis deals with challenges and recent developments of denominational religious education in Austria. This current situation will be discussed then against the historical background of the relationship between politics and religion in Austria. Afterwards the Austrian situation will be compared to other models in Europe to find out about similarities and differences. The final conclusion outlines what denominational religious education in Austria can learn from other systems in Europe and what are some ways it can be adapted to a more religiously diverse and secular Austria in the future.

Keywords

denominational religious education, Austria, compulsory school, challenges, secularisation, religious diversity, relationship between religion and politics, future
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1 Introduction

1.1 The Religious Landscape of Austria

Today Austria is a modern secular state in which religion, especially to the Roman Catholic church, played a major role in history. Today religion is often part of public discussions, for example when it comes to the issue of religious symbols in public like Christian crosses in schools and in public buildings or like wearing headscarves. Religion is also an issue in discussions about public holidays because most of them are Christian holidays. Politicians are using religious symbols or religious metaphorical language in their election battles. And religion is a large issue when it comes to matters of immigration, integration and foreigners. The emphasis is here – because of the large number of Muslim refugees in the last years– on Islam.

In 2017 Goujon, Jurasszovich and Potancoková presented the results of the research project ‘Religious Denominations in Austria: Baseline study for 2016 – Scenarios until 2046’. The study gives much information about today’s religious situation in Austria and presents scenarios how this situation could change in the next 30 years. This study gives estimated numbers about the religious affiliations of the Austrian population in 2016 because there are no official statistics about that. Last time numbers about the religious affiliation of the Austrians were officially gathered was with the census from 2001.

The authors of the mentioned study state that the former – nearly complete homogenous – Roman Catholic population of Austria is slowly changing into a more diverse religious landscape. This is because of secularisation and migration.¹

Interesting here is the comparison between the Austrian’s religious affiliations in 2001 (data from the census) and in 2016 (estimated data from the study’s authors): 75% of the Austrian population were Catholics in 2001, while in 2016 64% of the population are members of the Roman Catholic Church. The number of Protestants did not change in these 15 years (5%), while the number of Orthodox increased from 2% in 2001 to 5% in 2016. In 2016 were twice as many Muslims (8%) than in 2001 (4%). The number of unaffiliated also grew from 12% in 2001 to 17% in 2016.²

According to this study all the possible scenarios presented for the future of Austria state that religious diversity will increase further:

“... in all scenarios presented in this project the Roman Catholic community would still be the largest religious group in Austria, accounting for 42 to 47% depending on the scenario. The share of the Protestants would remain relatively stable over the period with around 4-5%. The projections also show an increase in the share of the Orthodox community to around 6-9%. The group of the religiously unaffiliated would increase its weight in the Austrian population, within a range from 21 to 28% by 2046, depending on the scenario. The Muslim population has already experienced a sharp increase, from around 1% in 1981 to 8% in 2016, and by 2046 would represent 12% to 21% of the population. Another interesting aspect is that the share of other religions is estimated to remain at the same level as in 2016 (about 2%) across all four scenarios.”

To sum up, it can be stated that religious diversity and secularisation are two important things Austria has to deal with in the next years.

Important questions will arise referring to this situation: How do we all live together peacefully? How can we tolerate and accept each other? How can we strengthen our similarities and how do we live with our differences? How do we deal with prejudices and avoid stereotyped thinking?

So, how do we raise our children particularly with regard to these questions? Not only parents, but also the Austrian school system has to contribute to these questions. For a very long time now denominational religious education as a compulsory subject has been established in Austria. According to the law⁴, school has to contribute to children’s religious education. The subject of denominational religious education deals not only with the personal denomination, but teaches pupils also about other denominations and religions. Many curricula of religious education state that it is important to know about one’s own religion to better accept and tolerate other religions. Furthermore, religious education also deals with ethical questions. So, religious education – amongst others - can help with the above mentioned questions. But increasing secularisation and religious diversity are also challenges for denominational religious education. The subject has to deal with other challenges as well and various experts are discussing the future of denominational religious education in Austria. Some critics even state that religious education does not belong to public schools because Austria is a modern secular state and religion and politics should be separated which has to be valid also for the public school system.

1.2 Research Question, Aim, Method and Material

This paper examines the question: What can the Austrian system of denominational religious education in compulsory school learn from other European systems of

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⁴ Details about it will be discussed in chapter three.
religious education and what are some ways it can be adapted to a more religiously diverse and secular Austria in the future? The focus of this paper is on compulsory school because the situation is slightly different at secondary level II and there are already a few publications existing about that part. The aim of this paper is on one hand to give an overview of recent challenges and debates of denominational religious education in Austria. This has been done before as part of various research projects. Therefore, on the other hand this paper aims to compare the Austrian situation to the situation in other European countries and by that discuss what the Austrian system can learn from them. It shall be ascertained if and how denominational religious education in Austria could change to face the future and its challenges. Today pupils learn in religious education not only about their own religion, but also about other religions and discuss ethical questions as well. Therefore, religious education deals – amongst others – with the question how people live together in a religious diverse and at the same time secular state. The method to examine the research question is a literature study. In the last years there have been a few research projects concerned with describing religious education throughout Europe. This material is described below in more detail. Professional journals and other publications discuss challenges and recent debates about denominational religious education as well. So, enough literature about these parts exists already. And with the help of this literature the comparison between the Austrian system and other systems in Europe can be done. This comparison then can lead to a conclusion, what the Austrian system can learn from other European systems and what are some ways the Austrian system can be adapted to a more religiously diverse and secular Austria in the future.

1.3 Previous Research

Religious education has been an issue of various research projects in previous years and today. Information from such related research projects can be taken into account for this paper. They help understanding the different systems of religious education in different countries. On that information can be built a comparison beneath the different systems. To underline the relevance of religious education in international discussions just a few of these projects should be mentioned here. The project ‘Religious Education at Schools in Europe’ researches the various situations of religious education in Europe. It is a joint project by the Protestant and the
Catholic religious pedagogical departments at the University of Vienna. With the help of thirteen questions the situations of religious education are examined. This makes it possible to compare the findings which will be published in six volumes, three of which have already been published.

The project ‘Religious Education and Diversity (READY)’ is dealing with the experiences of teacher trainees of religious education. Teacher training institutions in Austria, England, Germany, Scotland and Sweden are sharing their experiences and approaches to teacher education. Proposals for lessons for teaching religion and diversity shall be published. The project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The project ‘REDCo’-project (‘Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries’) was funded by the European Commission. REDCo is “… a European comparative research project on young people’s views of religion, religious diversity and possibilities for dialogue, as well as of classroom interaction and teacher-strategies.”

TRES stands for ‘Teaching Religion in a multicultural European Society’ and is not a research project but a network “… of academic institutions and other professional organisations engaged in ‘Teaching Religion’ (mainly) in an academic context.” The network has focussed on sub-themes and published a volume about ‘How Teachers in Europe Teach Religion’.

The findings and publications by all these research projects and the TRES network can support the path to an answer to the research question mentioned previously.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The path through the thesis starts with a chapter on the history of the relationship between religion and politics in Austria. Then the current situation of religious education in Austria will be described. The legal framework will be discussed as well as the educational aims of different curricula of religious education. This happens in chapter three. After that, chapter four deals with various systems of religious education in Europe. A classification of ‘learning’ in religious education – learning from religion, learning about religion and learning in religion - will be approached and different

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7 https://etopetus.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/redco_policy_recommendations_eng.pdf
8 https://www.tres-network.eu/about-tres/
9 Ziebertz/Riegel (2009)
models of religious education in Europe will be discussed. The models will be described on the basis of examples from different European countries. First differences and similarities between the models will become obvious. Then chapter five discusses recent challenges and debates of religious education in Austria. The issues discussed make it clearly recognizable that denominational religious education in Austria stands before the question of its future viability. But similar discussions – and also different ones – take place in other countries too. Before a comparison of the Austrian system with other systems will be done in chapter seven, chapter six deals with understanding the Austrian situation in its historical context. In the final chapter eight it shall be concluded what the Austrian system can learn from others and what can be applied in Austria for the future of denominational religious education.
2 History of Religion in Austria

2.1 Introduction

Before this paper discusses the situation of denominational religious education in Austria, it is necessary to discuss how the present situation has developed. Austria’s history of the relationship between religion and politics is a vivid one because religion played a major role in people’s lives in bygone times. And today’s situation can be understood much better before the background of this history. Furthermore, education at schools was the responsibility of the church for a long time. That is why this chapter also deals with the development of the school system in Austria.

2.2 From Constantinian Shift to Protestant Reformation

With the so called Constantinian Shift in the year 380 Christianity became state religion in the Roman Empire. Large parts of today’s Austria were part of the Roman Empire at this time. When in 395 the Roman Empire fell apart into the Eastern Empire and the Western Empire the Pope became the highest authority. State and church were equal powers but the Pope had also liability for the King towards God. The 8th and 9th century were heyday for a proprietary church system. This means that wealthy people could found churches and therefore got the right of patronage. The interregnum was a process where the late medieval church was influenced by the sovereign. Parties related to the king got into high functions. Pope, King and sovereign wanted to make sure their candidate would become bishop.

In the Middle Ages monasteries were responsible for poor people. But the clergy also took care of old and sick people in their hospitals and monasteries. Schools and education was the duty of monasteries for a long time. From the 12th century on education also took place in schools of the parish church. Clergymen were teaching the children there. Since the 13th century church schools and public schools coexisted. In the late medieval time people developed a kind of piety that reflected their religious hunger for adventures. Foundations increased, chapels were built, letters of indulgence were sold, veneration of saints was not regulated, but people were excited about the veneration of saints and the cult of relics.

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11 cf. Ehrlich (2009), 27.
At the same time the clergy had lost its reputation. People spent their money willingly for religious things which underlines this very vivid piety. They had a strong desire for a guarantee of grace and salvation. An elitist group of humanists criticised this piety and wanted Christ to come to power. Leeb states that there must have been some kind of “subconsciously existing discomfiture”\textsuperscript{12} because people later were ready to give up their convictions.

But more piety of the people also meant the risk of heresy. One of those heretic groups in Austria were the Waldensians. They were forced to convert or executed by inquisition. Supporter of Jan Hus could also be found in Austria.

Aside from that, in medieval times there were already Jews and Muslims on the territory of today’s Austria.

The first Jews probably came to Austria with the Romans when they came to the north. First written proofs of Jews in Austria are from the years 903-906. During the High Middle Ages Jewish communities spread in important cities of Austria. In 1244 Jews in Vienna received privileges from duke Friedrich II. Their profession was money lending so they became sort of a state bank for the duke. In return Jews got protection and were treated well. Jealousy and hate against Jews grew, there were legends about host desecration and well poisoning. Again and again there were riots against Jews.\textsuperscript{13} Middle Ages were also the time of crusades. They started when Muslims destroyed the Church of Resurrection in Jerusalem. People in Austria had heard rumours about Muslims so they thought Muslims were praying to tin gods and Mohammed was a magician. They hated Muslims because they felt inferior. In the Battle of Belgrade in 1456 a Christian army defeated the Ottomans. After this battle the Ottomans came to Austria again and threatened the people again\textsuperscript{14}

2.3 Protestant Reformation\textsuperscript{15}

On Habsburg territory there were two poles of power: the Landtag of the countries with the representatives of the estates (Ständevertreter) and the government of the Habsburg overlord (Landesherr).

After Martin Luther published his 95 theses in Wittenberg in 1517 his pamphlets spread very fast also in Austria. The territorial lord Ferdinand banned them and prohibited the

\textsuperscript{12} Leeb (2010), 156.
\textsuperscript{13} cf. Ehrlich (2009), 87ff.
\textsuperscript{14} cf. Ehrlich (2009), 72ff.
\textsuperscript{15} cf. Leeb (2019; 164ff.)
printing of Luther’s pamphlets and books from 1524 on for 50 years. Nevertheless, they were imported and spread by clergy and laity. Typical for Austria was the suspense between the development of Protestant Reformation and the Habsburg overlords who insisted on “the old faith”. Many efforts to hold off the spreading of Protestant Reformation – even executions – were ineffective.

Early Protestant Reformation was very vivid in coal mining centres, like Tirol. The miners paid the salary of the preachers and vouched for them. In many Austrian cities Protestant preachers appeared.

Some members of Austrian nobility had direct contact with Martin Luther, like the Jörger family in Vienna. They were able to contribute in a leading position for the establishment of Protestant Reformation in Austria by using their right over parishes to fill the jobs and to inspect them.

The Anabaptists were persecuted in Austria because no members of nobility joined them. So they had no protection.\(^{16}\)

Since the Constantinian Shift people were convicted that it was necessary that faith and rule are united. Protestant Reformation challenged this very old conviction. People believed when they followed the right faith they could gain God’s pleasure and this would lead to the security and welfare of the state. It was possible to hold off heretics like Waldensians and Cathars but not to hold off Protestant Reformation. Even the Edict of Worms by Karl V. could not stop it. Complex conflicts eventually lead to a war between the party of the emperor against the Schmalkaldic League, which was a confederation of Protestant cities and countries against Karl V. In 1547 the emperor won the war, in 1548 the so called Augsburg Interim, a special law for Protestants was decided.

Protestant Reformation was approved in 1555 with the Religious Peace of Augsburg. Both confessions now should coexist. It was the right of the Habsburg overlords to decide about the confession on their territory (ius reformandi; ubi unus dominus, ibi una sit religio; later: cuius regio, eius religio). All of the people on the territory had to be Protestant or Roman-Catholic according to the confession of the overlord. People who did not agree with the confession of their Habsburg overlord had the right to emigrate without losing their reputation and property (ius emigrandi). The Habsburg overlords were all Catholics. Protestant nobility in the Landtag tried to convince

\(^{16}\) cf. Ehrlich (2009), 127f.
archduke and overlord Ferdinand I. of Protestant Reformation. Nobility was the political leader of Protestant Reformation. Protestant preachers were protected by landlords, so there were hardly any chances for any influence by the bishop.

Archduke Ferdinand I. and his heir apparent Maximilian II. shared a vision of reuniting the church. In 1564 Habsburg territory was divided beneath the heirs of Ferdinand I. The Landtage saw their chance to negotiate again with their new Habsburg overlords about their confession. Maximilian II. legalised Lutheranism in 1568 in Danube Countries and Inner Austria after the territories paid 2,5 million guilders. That was the moment when the schism became official and Austria became biconfessional. In these territories the parishes of the Protestant landlords became the basis for the Protestant church affairs.

In the Austrian provinces Tirol, Salzburg and Vorarlberg the first officially approved Protestant parish was established in 1861. Up to that point people there shaped the so called secret Protestantism (‘Geheimprotestantismus’). It was a Lutheran shaped Lay-Christianity which was not institutionalised.

A special thing in Austria was that during Protestant prosperity period a Catholic countermovement started.

### 2.4 Catholic Counter-Reformation\(^{17}\)

The Munich Conference in 1579 decided on a strategic paper which began to work against Protestant Reformation by territorial cities and markets. In the Danube Countries Rudolf II – the heir of Maximilian II – decided the closure of the Protestant centre in Vienna in 1576. At the same time, he deployed a Catholic mayor in Vienna. On 22\(^{nd}\) of December 1585 an imperial decree stated the prohibition of Protestant services in cities. In Inner Austria (under Archduke Karl) Protestant cult and schools were prohibited since 1580. Protestants moved outside the cities on the property of nobility. But also on the countryside re-catholisation started.

Ferdinand – the heir of Archduke Karl – claimed obedience to his orders. He came back to the Catholic confession and pointed out the Religious Peace of Augsburg – his people could also become Catholic or had to emigrate. All the Protestant church organisations were removed, until 1628 only nobility was allowed to be Protestant, but since then not even them. Protestants emigrated to Germany and Franconia, peasants tried to survive with the help of secret Protestantism.

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\(^{17}\) cf. Leeb (2019), 251ff.
The Austrian province Burgenland had a special role during this period because they were part of Hungary at this time and not part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Nobility there was much more powerful. That was why many Protestants emigrated to Burgenland, there have never been any expulsions of Protestants from Burgenland.

At the time of Protestant Reformation court Jews in Vienna still had privileges. Ferdinand II. protected them because they were responsible for the collection of taxes for the emperor. In Burgenland Jews were protected by the Esterházy family, who were a powerful family at this time. Seven Jewish communities established in Burgenland and Jews expelled from other regions were accommodated there.\(^\text{18}\)

During Catholic confessionalisation seminaries were established in all dioceses, the education for clergy was modernized, the interior of the church was redesigned, pilgrimage and processions became very popular.

### 2.5 The Way to Secularisation

The victory against the Ottomans in 1683 before Vienna lead to an increase of piety of the Catholic Austrian state. But the Catholic church made less efforts to match with the era of reason. So the church lost its influence.\(^\text{19}\)

But the victory over the Ottomans gave the Catholic Habsburgs safety because they were no longer depended on the financial help of the Protestant nobility against the Ottomans. So they no longer needed to consider Protestants which meant a victory for the Catholic church over Protestant Reformation. Ruler and clergy began to build splendid castles and churches.\(^\text{20}\)

In 1774 Empress Maria Theresa established compulsory school attendance for all children. She also effected a church reform. She did not tolerate people of another religion – except when it was useful for the state. The church-state law designated the monarch as the real master of the church. So he (or she) was able to engage in for example in education, register-business or funeral-business. Protestants emigrated, were proselytised or deported to Hungary, Silesia or Transylvania. The secret Protestants in the Alpine countries smuggled books and even had written advice on how they should behave as secret Protestants.\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^{18}\) cf. Ehrlich (2009), 137ff.

\(^{19}\) cf. Tropper (2010), 281ff.

\(^{20}\) cf. Ehrlich (2009), 169f.

This situation changed when on 13th of October 1781 emperor Joseph II – the successor of Maria Theresa – issued the Patent of Tolerance. With that patent the private practice of religion was free. Soon the first parishes (‘Toleranzgemeinden’) established. Joseph II. also decided the abolition of monasteries and sold the inventory at an auction. The money came into a religious fund and new parishes were founded. There was also a reform of the order of worship – marriage should only be an agreement by civil law. This decision lead to an alienation between the Apostolic See and the emperor of Austria. The Catholic church backed the state reform of Joseph II. with its capital and structure of parishes.\textsuperscript{22} 

Joseph II. understood religion as a tool to form the conscience and for the education of the people to do their duties, as well as a guide for living together peacefully. All this was in his understanding the requirement for the personal happiness of everybody and the welfare of the state. That was why he thought religion is not a private matter but a matter of the state and the emperor. So Joseph II. wanted to create a national church with him on top of it. All clergy should obey him and not the Pope. Bishops had to swear an oath on the emperor before they swore an oath on the Pope.\textsuperscript{23} 

In 1781 Joseph II. also issued an enactment about tolerance of Jews which gave the Jews more freedom in the exercise of their religion. In 1785 he also legalised Freemasons.\textsuperscript{24} 

The Congress of Vienna in 1815 renewed the alliance between throne and altar. The landlords had no right to decide in questions of faith. The bishops were subjects to the landlords in secular questions. Priests told the people about their duties towards the landlords and prayed for their landlords. Priests served as state officials in religious and political public questions. People in the 18th century had to make a visual profession towards the clerical and the secular reign.\textsuperscript{25} To sum up, with his reforms Joseph II. brought the Catholic church into total dependence of the state.\textsuperscript{26} 

\section*{2.6 The Dominance of the Catholic Church}\textsuperscript{27}

After the March Revolution in 1848 a constitution was promised. The archbishop of Vienna had a controversy with the lower clergy. The archbishop stated that priests

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] cf. Tropper (2010), 295ff.
\item[23] cf. Ehrlich (2009), 186ff.
\item[26] cf. Ehrlich (2009), 196.
\item[27] cf. Liebmann (2010), 364ff.
\end{footnotes}
should not intervene in politics and the clergy stated the dependence of the church on
the state – the Catholic church should stay the dominant church in the state. After the
democratic election of the Reichstag the constitution of Pillersdorf (‘Pillersdorfsche
Verfassung’) became law. Some clerical bodies petitioned. Laymen claimed to free
teachers from the paternalism of the church and the transformation of elementary
school into public institutions. Furthermore, they wanted no state church or state
religion, but religious freedom. Protestants claimed to be called “Protestants” instead
of “non-Catholics” (‘Akatholiken’) and free change of confession. A decree from
January 1849 confirmed the Protestant claims.
On 4\textsuperscript{th} of March 1849 the imposed imperial constitution (‘Reichsverfassung’) was
issued and at the same time an imperial patent about the political rights. It contained
the constitutional law of free practice of religion and the right for the church to decide
on their own about their issues. But the Catholic church wanted to have a dominant
role in the political system. So they arranged the first Austrian Bishops’ Conference in
Vienna without inviting any member of the government. They wanted to discuss about
the possibility of a concordat but the nuncio had another agenda for them. The
decisions the bishops made on their conference had a huge impact on the concordat
and on the relationship between state and church for nearly a century.
In April 1850 the regulations had been prepared according to the wishes of the bishops.
In 1851 the constitution was prescribed by the emperor and Austria became an
absolute monarchy. In 1853 negotiations about the concordat began. The concordat
was ratified in 1855 and became Austrian Reich law for the whole monarchy. The
problem was that the concordat was outdated already at this time. For example, the
school system was put under the control of the church and matrimonial canonical law
was established. The Catholic church was happy about the concordat but it assumed
a reality of a Christian state that was not given anymore.
Immediately a battle against the concordat began. Opponents mainly criticised
clericalisation of matrimonial law and school. This was eased as recently as absolute
monarchy ended. In 1859 Austria came back to a constitutional era. In 1861 the
‘Protestantenpatent’ was issued. It allowed Protestants to have their own rules and
their own administration of their clerical issues. The structure of the Protestant church
was set in this patent. The deans had to be elected and confirmed by the landlords.
The counsellors of the imperial-royal Protestant High Consistory were appointed by
the emperor. There were no more restrictions about building a church and it was
allowed to put up schools and associations. The Pope showed displeasure about this patent.

After the Austrian defeat in the Battle of Königgrätz, many people blamed the “soldiers of the concordat” and claimed same rights for all confessions. When in 1867 the constitution (‘Staatsgrundgesetz’) was issued, fundamental clauses of the concordat were annulled. The constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and conscience. The school system was put under public institutions, only religious education was the responsibility of churches and religious societies. Catholic bishops protested against the constitution and the emperor tried to annul the concordat mutually. He finally found a reason for that after the First Vatican Council claimed the dogma of the papal infallibility. The Catholic church did not accept that annulation.

The May laws (‘Maigesetze’) from 1874 meant the end of confessional law-making. The relationship between church and state was rearranged. Issues of the law were the religious fund, Catholic law and the acceptance of religious societies. The main point was not the separation of church and state. It was about the privileged position of the Catholic church. Because the Catholic church has a public position the state should have the right to influence clerical issues. The Bishops’ Conference and the Pope resisted this laws.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{2.7 From the 20\textsuperscript{th} century until today}\textsuperscript{29}

In 1912 Islam was recognized by the law as a religious society in Austria. When on 12\textsuperscript{th} of November 1918 the German-Austrian Republic was proclaimed the bishops advised the people to be loyal towards the state. As a consequence of the proclamation of the republic the imperial law of nomination terminated and the Austrian state council abandoned all imperial rights referring to the church. In 1921 the Pope accepted the annulation of the concordat.

The Bishops’ Conference sent a petition to the Apostolic See to start negotiations about a concordat. In 1933 Federal Chancellor Schuschnigg negotiated with the Apostolic See about the concordat. But it was claimed that Protestant churches get a similar treatment.

In 1933 the Austrian Bishops’ Conference negotiated about the total retreat of priests from politics. Many priests also had political posts until then.

\textsuperscript{28} cf. Liebmann (2010), 387f.
\textsuperscript{29} cf. Liebmann (2010), 395ff.
During the First Republic and the austrofascist corporative state the Protestant Church of Austria depended on the state in terms of money, the High Consistory was matter of the state, the republic was responsible for the administration of the church. In this time Protestants remembered the time of counter-reformation. In 1934 they got a new church constitution. Then an amendment was made to the ‘Protestantenpatent’. Many Protestant priest became members of the illegal NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party). The Party and the church made a symbiosis, that is why the Protestant church was called “Nazi-church”.

The Catholic church at this time was split in a group pro National Socialism and a group contra National Socialism. In 1937 the Austrian Bishops’ Conference made a critical statement against National Socialism. In March 1938 they made a recommendation on the national referendum about the annexation of Austria to Germany. On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of May 1938 Adolf Hitler stated that the concordat was terminated. German matrimonial law was established, religious education was suspended, schools were not confessional anymore, the law for the collection of a church contribution was issued. In 1939 state and church were financially separated. This was the end of the funding of the church in the personnel area and the material area. The Nazis tried to starve out the church. But it didn’t work. Bishops protested against this law. The Nazis removed Catholic associations. In October 1938 there was a huge anti-clergy demonstration in Vienna. Monasteries and churches were placed under confiscation. Bishops did not appeal to the people to resist, although they rejected the ideology of the Nazis. Many priests became victims of the Nazi regime. But the Catholic church was loyal to the Nazi regime.

Also the capital of the Protestant church was placed under confiscation by the Nazis and they had to face the new law about the collection of a church contribution. The High Consistory became denationalised. The Protestant church in Austria fell into some kind of stiffness, passive attitude and resignation. There was secret resistance and attention to the Confessing Church. Most members thought the best thing was to endure, like they did in the time of counter-reformation.

After the end of the Nazi regime there were some political and legal alterations. Religious education became an obligatory subject in schools. Confessional private schools were opened again, but refounding was not allowed. The German matrimonial law and the law on the collection of a church contribution were adopted. The Austrian Bishops’ Conference stated in 1946 that there was from then on no commitment of the
church to any political party. The Pope urged the bishops to support discussions about
the approval of the concordat. In 1960 there was a new arrangement on the concordat.
The Protestant church in Austria got a new constitution in 1949. On the 6th of July 1961
the Protestant law was issued. It gave the church the autonomy for her inner issues.
The churches are now equal and there is a partnership between church and state.
In 1967 the law for the Orthodox church was issued and in 1998 the law for the approval
of religions was issued.

2.8 Summary
In this chapter it has been demonstrated that the relationship between religion and
politics has a long history. For centuries the (Catholic) church had political power. Since
the time of counter reformation it is the leading and major church in Austria. Religious
minorities always kind of depend on the Catholic Church. This gets obvious when later
the laws concerning religious education in school are discussed. Today there is a
partnership between churches and state, the roles and missions have changed.
Against this background today’s situation of religious education at schools has to be
understood. Churches, respectively religious societies, and the state are also partners
referring to the issue of religious education. The following chapter discusses the legal
framework and current model of denominational religious education in Austria.
3 Religious Education in Austria

3.1 Legal Framework

In Austria churches, respectively religious societies, and the state are acting as equal partners. Churches and religious societies are independent and autonomous and can receive the status of a public law corporate body. Several churches and religious societies have their own legal regulations concerning their relationship with the state. This is for example for the Catholic Church the Concordat of 1933/34 (amongst others). Austrian’s Basic Law (‘Staatsgrundgesetz’) says that the respective churches and religious societies are responsible for religious education at schools.\(^\text{30}\) The same law also guarantees the freedom of religion.\(^\text{31}\)

Religious education is also positioned in the Federal Constitutional Law (‘Bundesverfassungsgesetz’, in short: B-VG) and in the School Organisation Act (‘Schulorganisationsgesetz’, in short: SchOG) of 1962. §2 of the School Organisation Act describes the duties and aims of the Austrian school. There it says that school shall contribute to the development of young people in accordance with moral, religious and social values.\(^\text{32}\) The Federal Constitutional Law states that school has to enable young people “to assume responsibility in a way that is oriented towards social, religious and moral values. Every young person should (...) have an open mind towards the political, religious and ideological views of others.”\(^\text{33}\) So religion has a position in the Austrian school system which is independent of further regulations of denominational religious education. Religion is an important part of the aims and duties of school.

Other important laws concerning religious education are the Religious Education Law of 1949 (‘Religionsunterrichtsgesetz’, in short: RelUG) and the so-called ‘Schulvertrag’ (which can be translated as ‘school contract’) of 1962, which is a contract between the Apostolic See and the Republic of Austria.

The ‘Schulvertrag’ remains valid only for the Catholic Church and its regulations are binding under international law, which means the contract is secured. Furthermore, other churches and religious societies benefit from the ‘Schulvertrag’ because a consequence from the binding under international law is the principle of equality. This means that all churches and religious societies recognized by the law have to be

\(^{30}\) cf. §17 StGG
\(^{32}\) cf. §2 SchOG
\(^{33}\) § 14 Abs. 5a B-VG, cited in: Jäggle/Klutz (2016), 43.
treated equal. Most regulations are in tune with the Religious Education Law, but if they are not, the ‘Schulvertrag’ has priority.\textsuperscript{34}

\subsection*{3.2 Current Model}

As this paper deals with religious education in compulsory school in Austria, it has to be said first, that pupils in Austria have nine years of compulsory school, starting at the age of six. Pupils start with four years of primary school (‘Volksschule’) and then continue with four years of secondary academic school lower cycle (‘Allgemein bildende Höhere Schulen Unterstufe’) or lower secondary school (‘Neue Mittelschule’). Then pupils can choose between different types of schools.\textsuperscript{35} Austria has a free and public school system, private schools (confessional and non-confessional) also exist. Denominational religious education is a compulsory subject for all pupils who are members of a church or religious society which is recognized by the law. Pupils, respectively their parents when pupils are under the age of 14, have the option to opt out. But there is no alternative subject to religious education if they opt out. At secondary level II pupils at some schools have the alternative of ethic classes, which has been a school pilot project for more than twenty years now. Pupils who do not belong to any church or religious society which is recognized by the law have the possibility to enrol to religious education as an optional subject. In this case they can choose between the respective denominations.

Religious education is organised by the respective denominations. At the moment there are 16 churches and religious societies recognized by the law and therefore allowed to give religious education at schools. These are: The Catholic Church, the Protestant Church (Lutheran and Reformed), the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church in Austria, the Syrian Orthodox Church in Austria, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Austria, the Old Catholic Church in Austria, the Evangelical Methodist Church in Austria, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) in Austria, the New Apostolic Church in Austria, the Jewish Religious Association, the Islamic Religious Community in Austria, the Austrian Buddhist Religious Society, the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Austria, the Islamic Alevite Religious Community in Austria and the Free Churches in Austria.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} cf. Katzinger (2010), 53f.
\textsuperscript{35} cf. Weiß/Tritscher-Archan (2011).
\textsuperscript{36} cf. https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/kirchen-und-religionsgemeinschaften.
Depending on the number of pupils who take part in the respective religious education, they have one or two lessons of religious education per week. The regulation is set by the state (§7a RelUG). If there are less than ten pupils of a denomination in a class who take part in religious education and if that group is counting less than half of the class they have one lesson of religious education per week. If the size of the group decreases to less than three pupils, religious education is dropped. In those cases churches or religious societies can bear the costs of the religion education classes or students from different grades can be pulled together to form larger classes.\(^\text{37}\)

The state and the churches and religious societies share responsibility for religious education. The state has to provide financing of religious education, which is mainly the payment of the teacher’s salary (no matter if the teacher is in contractual relationship to the state or to a church or religious society) and educational material. Responsible for the determination of the curricula are the churches and religious societies because of neutrality of the state.\(^\text{38}\) Although textbooks and teaching aids are not reviewed by the state they have to be in tune with civic education and Christian doctrine.\(^\text{39}\) Designation of religious education teachers is also the responsibility of the churches and religious societies.

Supervisors who exercise surveillance over religious education are religious education teachers too, so they are authorised by the churches or religious societies and paid by the state. Königsberger and Kurbarth state that these are rather weak legal instruments to control religious education.\(^\text{40}\)

Allowed to teach religious education are religious education teachers and religious leaders like church ministers. They have to pass the training at the university college of education if they want to teach in compulsory schools or they have to study at the university if they want to teach at secondary level II. Details of the teacher education will be discussed in chapter five.

Most prevalent in compulsory school are Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim religious education. This is – as it has been shown above – because most Austrians are Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox or Muslims (except for those who have no religious affiliation). It is not unusual that a teacher of religious education has to work

\(^{38}\) cf. van Dellen (2016), 161ff.
in several schools and this can be very challenging for the organisation of a timetable. This issue will be elaborated below.\textsuperscript{41}

3.3 Educational Aims and Teaching Responsibilities

Curricula for Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Islamic religious education in compulsory school have a preliminary section about the educational aims and teaching responsibilities of the respective religious education. They point out the tasks and goals of religious education.

The Catholic curricula for compulsory school sees religious education as teaching subject as the realisation of the school’s mission to contribute to religious education. It is a service to the pupils and to the school. Focus of religious education is the pupils, their life and their faith. It contributes to the quest of meaning and to the organisation of school life. Pupils should discuss their own heritage and their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church to support the personal development which helps to open up in an unbiased way towards others. Pupils should be able to tolerate others and be competent in factual discussions about religion.\textsuperscript{42}

Protestant religious education is also seen as a service to the pupils. It is justified in the church’s mission to preach and educate and in the public school’s mission to educate. Protestant religious education should contribute to the religious-moral-philosophical dimension of education at schools by helping pupils to find the meaning of life. It gives pupils the chance to discuss the gospel of God’s love to all human beings. The curriculum states that Protestant religious education is a “pedagogically absolutely essential part of education in a pluralistic society.”\textsuperscript{43}

Orthodox religious education has the duty of the religious and moral education of the pupils. It starts out from the Orthodox view of the world and of humans and teaches basic knowledge of Christian life and faith, scriptural history of salvation and existential meaning of Orthodox faith. It further strengthens the religious identity of the pupils, so it helps understanding the Christian culture of Europe. Pupils should know about their own denomination to be grounded and to face other cultures, religions and ideologies with tolerance and respect.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} see chapter five.
\textsuperscript{42} Catholic Curricula (2010+2017).
\textsuperscript{43} Protestant Curricula (2002+2010).
\textsuperscript{44} Orthodox Curricula (2008+2010).
Islamic religious education also understands itself also as a service to the pupils with the aim to educate them to become Muslim Austrians, respectively Muslims with the main place of residence in Austria. It is oriented towards the sources of Islam and the life-worlds of pupils. Islamic religious education helps pupils to orient and find their own point of view and at the same time teaches pupils to respect and accept the point of view of others. The most important aim is “the creation of an identity which identifies Austria as the homeland and Islam as a personal belief system.”

Furthermore, to only give a brief glimpse into the education fields of the mentioned curricula, pupils do not only learn about their own religion or denomination. They also learn about other religions from the respective point of view.

The analysis of these curricula emphasises that denominational religious education in Austria sees itself as service to the pupils and the school. It is justified by the schools’ mission to contribute to religious education (as stated in §2 SchOG). All the curricula point out that it is important for the pupils to know about their own denomination and be strengthened in it and to find their own identity. This helps in discussions with people of other religions or ideologies to better respect and tolerate them.

A position paper by the Austrian Religious Education Forum (‘Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum’ in short: ÖRF) lays emphasis on the same issues. In their opinion religious education opens up perspectives for a successful, meaningful life. But it is not a service that only informs about religion - existential orientation and critical reflexion of religion should also be possible.

### 3.4 Facts and Figures

In the 2016/17 school year there have been about 570,000 pupils in compulsory school in Austria and about 73,000 teachers. According to the numbers of previous years it can be assumed that in the 2017/18 school year the numbers of pupils and teacher will be about the same as in the 2016/17 school year.

The official statistics do not give any information about how many pupils take part in religious education in a school year. One has to ask education authorities of the respective churches or religious educations for the respective numbers.

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46 cf. ÖRF (2010), 62.
47 Statistik Austria: [http://www.statistik.at](http://www.statistik.at)
In the 2017/18 school year there are 597 Protestant teachers of religious education teaching 35,019 pupils. In compulsory school 20,180 pupils take part in Protestant religious education.\textsuperscript{48}

In the 2016/17 school year 7,061 Catholic teachers of religious education were teaching 607,284 pupils. 372,607 of these pupils were in compulsory school.\textsuperscript{49}

Further numbers of other churches and religious societies are missing here\textsuperscript{50}, but it can be stated that most of the students in compulsory school take part in religious education. One can say that in compulsory school religious education is popular because of the high number of participants.

### 3.5 Summary

Religious education in Austria is established by law. Various laws like the so-called ‘Schulvertrag' between the Republic of Austria and the Apostolic See or the Religious Education law settle all the issues referring to religious education. In various curricula for religious education the school subject itself is justified by §2 SchOG where it says that school has a mission to contribute to religious education. Religious education as a school subject is seen as a service to the pupils and the school according to the curricula. Those curricula have in common that they understand religious education as a place where the pupils learn about their own denomination to be strengthened in it. Furthermore, the pupils learn about other religion from their respective point of view. In this way religious education contributes to tolerance to others.

Religious education is a compulsory subject for all pupils who are members of a church or religious society which is recognized by the law. But they have the option to opt out. Other pupils can enrol in denominational religious education. Looking at the numbers of participants of religious education in compulsory schools one can say that religious education as a school subject is popular.

After this overview of the current model of religious education in Austria, the following chapter discusses a classification of ‘learning' in religious education and different models of religious education in Europe on the basis of examples from different European countries.

\textsuperscript{48} According to information from Karl Schiefermair, High Consistory of the Protestant Church in Austria.

\textsuperscript{49} According to information from Helmuth Gattermann, Archiepiscopal Office for Teaching and Education.

\textsuperscript{50} Further education authorities of churches and religious societies have been asked, but no answer was received.
4 Models of Religious Education in Europe

4.1 Concepts of ‘Learning’ in Religious Education

A common distinction of different understandings of ‘learning’ in religious education comes from the English speaking countries. Especially Michael Grimmitt, the British teacher of religious education, made this distinction popular. According to it, religious educational learning can be classified into learning from religion, learning about religion and learning in religion.51

This differentiation can be useful to understand the core of religious education. And in combination with the different models of religious education discussed later it can help understand challenges of these different models of religious education. Learning about religion can give information about different religions and worldviews, it is done from an observer’s perspective. “The focus is on the cognitive dimension of knowledge, understanding and analysis with the aim to develop and improve pupils’ religious competence.”52 This means, learning about religion is mainly about gaining knowledge about religion and learn facts. It is a cognitive approach to religion.

Learning from religion aims at the personal discussion of religion by the pupils. “The focus is on the affective dimensions of receiving, judging and being determined by it with the aim to develop and improve pupils’ self-competence and social competence.”53 The social and ethical dimension are issues of learning from religion. Pupils get into a personal discussion with religion and find out for example what they can learn from a Biblical story.

Learning in religion means teaching from the internal perspective. “The focus is on the affective and pragmatic dimensions of perceiving and trying out religious forms with the aim to develop and improve pupils’ competence of creatively working with religious forms as well as their self-competence.”54 This means, learning in religion works with religious forms, pupils can try them out and experience them in different ways.

To sum up briefly, the difference between these three concepts is either learning facts about religion, a personal discussion of religion (e.g. what can be learned from a Biblical story?) or trying out religious forms from the internal perspective.

52 Domsgen (2014), 336.
54 Domsgen (2014), 336.
These three concepts are de facto hardly clearly distinguished. The following section shows with its examples how these concepts can be mixed.

4.2 Different Models in Europe

Jean-Paul Willaime identifies three situations of religious education in Europe. These are: no religious education at schools, confessional religious education, and non-confessional religious education. To understand the differences and similarities between this three models, they will be described below on the basis of examples from different European countries.

The model of no religious education in schools can only be found in France. Between 1882 and 1886 France established laws that led to the secularisation of the school system and to the separation of Church and school system. That means there is no religious education in schools (except in Alsace-Moselle). In primary school pupils get one day off per week (other than Sunday), so parents can make arrangements for the religious education of their children if they wish so. The responsibility for religious education lies with the parents and religious institutions. But absence of religious education as a subject in school does not mean that there is no religion at all in schools. Facts about religion are taught in other subjects, like history, humanities and arts. Pupils learn about the history of religions, about the Bible and the Koran, but they can also discover the meaning of Biblical stories because there are so many references or allusions to Biblical themes in French. This gives pupils the chance to discuss these references or allusions. So religion is a (sometimes minor and sometimes major) part of various school subjects in France. Since 2004 wearing symbols or clothing that manifest a religious affiliation has been prohibited in schools.

By describing the situation of religious education in Austria above, an example for confessional religious education has already been given. For a wider range of examples also the Finnish model of confessional religious education should also be mentioned here.

At compulsory school in Finland religious education is a compulsory subject. In Finnish religious education pupils should learn about and from religion. Since 2004 the discussion has rather been about ‘religious education according to one’s own religion’ than about ‘confessional’ religious education. If a denomination or religion is a

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55 The term ‘confessional’ is used here instead of ‘denominational’ because Willaime uses this term too.
registered community in Finland and has a curriculum that is approved by the National Board of Education, religious education is given by request if there are a minimum of three pupils in one municipality. Lutheran religious education and Orthodox, too, do not need to be requested. Also Ethics, which can be chosen as an alternative subject, needs no request. Lutheran and Orthodox pupils have to attend their own religious education classes, while all the other pupils can choose which class they want to attend.\footnote{Ubani/Tirri (2014), 107f.} In Finland the situation is different from Austria because responsible for religious education at school is not the church but the state.\footnote{Ubani/Tirri (2014), 111.} So churches and religious societies do not evaluate textbooks for religious education. And the subject is usually taught by class teachers (in basic education). Recent debates in Finland have been discussing if providing religious education should rather be the responsibility of the church than that of the state. Other debates are about changing the subject into a non-confessional religious education like it has become usual in other Northern European countries.\footnote{Ubani/Tirri (2014), 110f.}

The model of non-confessional religious education is popular in Northern European Protestant countries like Sweden. Concepts of non-confessional religious education can also be found for example in Switzerland (e.g. the school subject ‘Religion and Culture’ in the Canton of Zurich), England and Wales.\footnote{Willaime (2007) 61.} In Sweden compulsory schooling was introduced in 1842. An important part then was “teaching in the Evangelical Lutheran Christian tradition.”\footnote{Osbeck/Skeie (2014), 240f.} The Lutheran confessional character of teaching disappeared in 1919 with the abandonment of Luther’s catechism as a teaching material. In 1962 the compulsory school system in Sweden underwent a larger reform. One part of this reform was the aim to teach pupils not only about Christianity but also about other religions; the subject of ‘knowledge of religion’ was established. Swedish pupils should learn about and learn from religion until today.\footnote{Osbeck/Skeie (2014), 240.}

The German Land of Hamburg established the so-called ‘religious education for everyone’ (‘Religionsunterricht für alle’) at the beginning of the 1990s. The whole class takes part in religious education, no matter what their religious heritage is. But pupils have the possibility to opt out of religious education. The justification for this kind of

\begin{footnotes}
  \item[58] cf. Ubani/Tirri (2014), 107f.
  \item[59] cf. Ubani/Tirri (2014), 111.
  \item[60] cf. Ubani/Tirri (2014), 110f.
  \item[62] Osbeck/Skeie (2014), 240.
  \item[63] cf. Osbeck/Skeie (2014), 240f.
\end{footnotes}
religious education was the alienation of young people from their religious heritage and the more and more multicultural and religiously diverse situation in public schools. Hamburg has 106 religious societies. ‘Religious education for everyone’ understands itself as being interreligious. A discussion group for all religious societies who want to take part has been installed to give the possibility of co-creation and co-responsibility for the subject.  

4.3 Summary

To understand the core of the respective religious education in a country it is necessary to find out if it is meant as learning from, learning in or learning about religion. Examples from different European countries demonstrate the various characteristics of religious education. They also issue how the historical development of a country referring to its religion is reflected in the development of the model of religious education. A discussion of these examples emphasises that the various models of religious education that can be found across Europe today have to be understood against the background of the respective country’s tradition and development. In general, there are three different models: no religious education in schools, where there is no subject of religious education; confessional religious education, where the pupils attend their respective religious education class; and non-confessional religious education, where all the pupils of a class learn together about religion. The differences between the models are in the ways how the subject of religious education is organised (respectively, how religion is part of other subjects) and in the content and approach to religion – the pupils learn about religion in general or from the point of view of their own confession.

The next chapter comes back to denominational religious education in Austria and discusses recent challenges and debates of it before similarities and differences of the various models and systems can be stressed.

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5 Recent Challenges and Developments

5.1 Changes and Debates in Education and Social Policy

5.1.1 Teacher Education

At the moment teacher training in Austria is shifting towards a full and equal academic training for all teachers from primary school to secondary school. The so-called ‘PädagogInnenbildung NEU’ (which can be translated as ‘a new type of teacher training’) was decided in 2013 by the Austrian Parliament. The background of this decision was a different education for primary and secondary school teachers. Primary school teacher education takes place at university colleges of education while secondary school teacher education takes place at universities.⁶⁵

One can study to become a teacher for primary school or a teacher for secondary school. The bachelor consists of 240 ECTS⁶⁶ and eight semesters of study, while the master can consist of 60, 90 or 120 ECTS, depending on if one wants to be a teacher for primary school (60 or 90 ECTS) or for secondary school (120 ECTS).

Within the bachelor programme a focus consisting of 60 ECTS has to be chosen and this focus can be religion (of one’s respective denomination). Afterwards the master programme also deals with the focus on religion – either one studies the 60 ECTS programme to teach in first to fourth grade or the 90 ECTS programme to teach in first to ninth grade (which is the full compulsory school). Finishing the master programme allows one to teach religious education of the respective denomination or religion.⁶⁷ But one is at the same time teacher for primary school, respectively has a second subject as a teacher for secondary school.

The new bachelor programmes have been run since 2015, master programmes are still work in progress.

Until 2015 there was a separate bachelor program for religious education teachers. This program qualified one to be a religious education teacher of the respective denomination or religion. The bachelor program consisted of 180 ECTS and six semesters of study.

⁶⁶ European Credit Transfer System
This means, if one wants to become a teacher for religious education he or she has to study much longer than before. On the other hand, one has another string in his or hers bow by being both, a teacher for primary and secondary school (not only religion). Time will tell if and how this new development influences the number of teachers for religious education in the future. In a few years it can be evaluated if this new type of teacher training really is a challenge for denominational religious education. But it has to be mentioned here as it will have an impact on the number of religious education teachers and the quality of the teacher training either way in the future.

5.1.2 Competencies and Educational Standards

In the 2008/09 school year Austria has introduced educational standards (‘Bildungsstandards’). Their aim is to change principles of teaching and of school by orientation on competencies.68 This orientation on competencies is still work in progress for the subject of religious education in compulsory school. It has to be discussed which competencies pupils should gain in religious education and theses competencies need to be formulated. So far, only the curriculum for Catholic religious education has formulated competencies during its last revision. A discussion among experts, if religious education can be standardised is still going on. As it is with the issue of the new teacher education, the issue of competencies and educational standards is one that needs further evaluation and debates. No intensive debates or research on this issue has been done until today. Jäggle and Klutz state that “… the issue of competences and educational standards in the area of RE is one that requires academic research.”69

5.1.3 Ethics Classes

Ethics classes – as an alternative subject to religious education – have been a school pilot project at some schools for more than twenty years now. It was introduced in the 1997/98 school year. Since then a debate about replacing religious education with ethics classes has appeared every now and then. By now the discussion about ethics classes is no issue at compulsory school because they are only installed at secondary level II.70

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68 cf. https://www.bifie.at/bildungsstandards-und-kompetenzorientierter-unterricht/
69 Jäggle/Klutz (2016), 61.
But it is worth taking a look at the arguments in this discussion because the installation of ethics classes could be a possibility at compulsory school too.

In 2011 an enquiry took place in the Austrian parliament to discuss the situation of ethics classes and denominational religious education at Austrian schools. In the discussion representatives of political parties took part as well as representatives of churches and religious societies and experts in different fields of education or philosophy. The discussion stressed the pros and cons of the debate about the installation of ethics classes. Most participants in the discussion agreed that ethics classes had been a school project for a far too long time now (it was 14 years back in 2011, today it is 21 years) and it should become a regular subject in the school system. Anton Bucher evaluated this school pilot project in 2001 and found out that pupils, school staff and parents were very satisfied with it. Pupils argued – amongst others - that attending ethic classes contributes to general education and it strengthens tolerance.

A majority of the discussion’s participants argue that there should be both – ethic classes (for pupils without any religious affiliation and those who opt out of their respective religious education) and denominational religious education, as compulsory subjects. Representatives of religious minorities fear that religious education will be weakened by this regulation, but they support the importance of ethical issues at schools. Some have reservations because they fear that religious education as a school subject could be replaced by ethics classes in the future. But it is also argued that if this happens, fundamentalism will be strengthened. It is agreed by the majority of the discussion’s participants that ethics classes should for the moment only be installed at secondary level II.

One of the major concerns back in 2011 was the education of teachers for the subject of ethics. It was common then that teachers of religious education also taught ethics classes. This can still be found today. There was a training course for teachers of ethics and meanwhile a university course for applied ethics has been installed which qualifies one to teach ethics at school.

A major concern – especially by politicians – are the costs for the installation of ethics classes in all schools. But in this discussion there was no suggestion how it can be funded.

In summary it can be said, therefore, that on the one hand there are arguments how important it is for pupils to learn and know about their own religious heritage, which can also be helpful for their integration. But on the other hand arguments stress how important it is for pupils, in a religious diverse and at the same time more and more secular classroom, to learn together about values and ethics instead of being separated into the respective religious education classes.

As it has been said before, this discussion mainly concerns secondary level II, but compulsory school has to be kept in mind in all these discussions. This is because installing ethics classes at compulsory school could happen in the future, which is why the transition from compulsory school to secondary level II has to be considered in curricula for example.

5.1.4 Religious Symbols in Public Schools

The Austrian government has recently (since the beginning of April 2018) discussed a prohibition of headscarves for girls in public schools and kindergartens. The (right-wing) vice chancellor, Heinz-Christian Strache, states that girls who wear a headscarf in school or kindergarten are at a disadvantage compared to other girls because they can be discriminated against because of their religion. He further says that this prohibition of headscarves is not a matter of religion but of integration. The minister of education states that this law will show that Austria is a secular state. A further main argument in this discussion is, that wearing a headscarf is not necessary before puberty. Arguments of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria are still missing in this debate.73

The Islamic Religious Community in Austria is concerned that this law will cut the freedom of religion for Muslims. The Jewish Religious Association is at the same time concerned that wearing a kippah could also be prohibited by law. They stress how important it is for Jews to wear it. Experts say the law will be formulated in a neutral way and serves only the prevention of discrimination.74

On a related note it has to be mentioned that it is set in the ‘Schulvertrag’ to install Christian crosses in classrooms of public schools when most of the pupils are members


of a Christian religious confession. But there are no further regulations existing about other religious symbols.

### 5.2 Secularisation

Concerning secularisation, it is necessary to discuss how religion is valued at homes today and what children nowadays know about religion from their parents. These things change the conditions of religious education at schools, because it makes a difference in the practice of teaching if pupils have already come in touch with religion or not.

#### 5.2.1 Facts and Figures

In 2011 a study amongst young people (at the age of 14 to 29) on their values was conducted, the so called ‘Jugend-Wertestudie’, by the research institute for youth culture. The same study took place in 1990 and 2000, which means there is data to be compared. In this study young people were asked – amongst others – about religion and their religiousness. The findings say that religion is relevant only to a very small number of young people in Austria. It has a less important part in their lives than politics (36% of all the people who were asked say that politics is very important to them). 8% of the people questioned say that religion is very important to them, while 37% say that religion is absolutely not important. Further findings of the study are a decreasing relevance of religious traditions among those young people and growing scepticism against institutionalised religiousness. While in 1990 91% said they are “confessionally bound”, the number decreased to 72% in 2011. The participants of the study were also asked how religious they feel. 72% say they are rather less religious, while 28% state they are religious.\(^{75}\)

One can conclude with these findings that religion is a minor issue for young people in Austria. Furthermore, one can have a guess that religion is something that families are not concerned with very much because it is a minor issue in the life of young people. Therefore, religious education at school often is the first intense contact with religion.

#### 5.2.2 Conditions and Background of Pupils

In an article the German Christian theologian Fulbert Steffensky describes how the background of the families of pupils has changed over the last years.\(^{76}\) He describes

\(^{75}\) cf. Heinzlmaier/Ikrath (2012), 39f.

\(^{76}\) cf. Steffensky (2000), 171ff.
a Catholic world in the countryside where he was raised.\textsuperscript{77} It was a world without alternatives. There was no comparison to other life plans because there was no television or radio at this time. It was a world of solid (Catholic) traditions. Everybody knew what was right or wrong, there were hardly doubts. One could have felt secure within this closed world, but it was a world that neither let somebody else in nor let somebody else out of it. According to Steffensky today’s secular time is the total reversal of the situation described. This time is marked by four aspects: diversity, the loss of traditions, the break-up of communities which supported and influenced the people, and the loss of religious forms. This means religious knowledge got lost and it is mixed up with other religions too. The religious traditions and forms that once shaped the rhythm of life in a family or in the community are no longer there or have become very weak. And this is the world where pupils are raised today, their religious conditions and background have changed rapidly over the last decades.

This means, pupils have to learn the basics of religion and make their first experiences with religion in school. That is why it has to be clarified what religious learning at school means. It is not possible to substitute missing socialisation by the family in school. Lehner-Hartmann states that religious education at schools should focus on learning from and learning about religion, while learning in religion should take place in families and parishes.\textsuperscript{78}

5.3 Religious Diversity

5.3.1 Basics

The religious landscape of Austria has been described right at the beginning of this paper, in chapter one. There it has been shown that Austria is getting more and more religiously diverse. This situation has also consequences for religious education at school.

A survey amongst religious education teachers in Austria shows that multiculturalism is seen in a positive way by them. The teachers interviewed feel very comfortable in their own religious tradition and prefer the concept of ‘teaching about religion’ in their practice. Schelander states that “the results show advantageous premises for a co-operation of various religions and cultures. The targets of the religious education allow

\textsuperscript{77} Steffensky was born in 1933.
\textsuperscript{78} cf. Lehner-Hartmann (2014), 108.
an estimated perception of various positions and dialogue."\textsuperscript{79} In his discussion of the Austrian results of the study, Schelander further states that cooperation in religious education until now only takes place among Christian confessions (corresponding projects will be discussed later in this chapter). The question is if this remains an isolated Christian approach or if it could spread among other religions too.\textsuperscript{80}

5.3.2 Organisation of Religious Education in Schools

Denominational religious education can make it harder for school staff to organise a timetable. To understand this issue and problem two (extreme) examples will be given.

In the first example there is a school where all the pupils are Catholics and all of them attend Catholic religious education. There is one teacher for the subject. The school has eleven classes, in every class there are more than ten pupils. So every class has two lessons of religious education per week. The teacher needs 22 lessons a week to have a full-time job. In this example religious education can be treated like every other subject because there are no specific things to take care of. The teacher does not need to teach at other schools too because he has his 22 lessons of teaching at this school and as all pupils are Catholics no other religions need to be considered. Furthermore, no oversight has to be organised for those pupils who do not take part in religious education because all of them take part.

In the other example there is a school with Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish pupils and pupils who do not belong to any church or religious society. Some pupils opt out of religious education, some of those without religious affiliation enrol in religious education. At the school Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim religious education can be organised because there are enough pupils to manage at least one lesson of the respective religious education per week.

To establish a timetable in this school the following points have to be considered:

- The teachers of the respective religious education have to work at several schools to do their 22 lessons of teaching per week.
- A class with a majority of Catholic pupils has two lessons of religious education per week. It has to be managed how the other pupils of the class who do not attend Catholic religious education are monitored during this time. If possible, the best way is to organise other religious education at the same time. It is not

\textsuperscript{79} Schelander (2009), 28f.
\textsuperscript{80} cf. Schelander (2009), 28f.
allowed to do any other subject at the same time as religious education takes place.

- Religious education for religious minorities usually takes place at the end of the schoolday when all the other pupils of the class have finished their day at school and can go home. Then there are no pupils who have to be monitored left in the class. The question is if the very young pupils can be expected to stay longer at school. This can sometimes be a reason why pupils opt out of religious education because it is too late in the afternoon.

- What makes the situation even more chaotic is the fact that in the first five days of a school year the number of pupils who enrol in or opt out from religious education are taken. Therefore, the final number of students who take part in the respective religious education is not known in the first week of a school year. This means the timetable cannot be fixed until the second week of a school year and teaching cannot start before that.

These two examples are deliberately exaggerated to help understanding how difficult it can be to handle religious diversity when establishing a timetable for the school. It also illustrates that the second example is more expensive because more teachers are needed – for more different religious education lessons and for the monitoring of those pupils who do not attend religious education – and because the teachers have to teach at several different schools which causes a rise in travel expenses.

The second example has a special case, Jewish pupils. Their religious education takes place in dislocated classes. In Vienna the Jewish religious community collects all pupils who do not attend a Jewish private school in religious education classes in their private schools in the afternoons.  

But also other churches and religious societies who have very few members (and therefore pupils in schools) offer dislocated classes for their pupils. Despite that, in the school report a grade for religious education will be named, no matter where and when the teaching takes place.

5.3.3 Cooperative Denominational Religious Education

Cooperative denominational religious education (‘konfessionell-kooperativer Religionsunterricht, in short: KoKoRu) has been a project in a few schools in Vienna since the 2002/03 school year. Four Christian churches (the Catholic Church, the

81 cf. https://www.ikg-wien.at/schulen/
Protestant Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic Church) in Vienna support this project. In the 2012/13 school year a further school project started in Vienna and Carinthia at schools where the organisation of denominational religious education is getting more and more difficult. This project “…aims to provide RE for which the churches and religious communities bear collective responsibility.”82 In the meantime, cooperative denominational religious education has become a pilot project at schools in other provinces of Austria too.

The aim of cooperative denominational religious education is to strengthen similarities between the respective denominations and to meet the differences of them. The subject of religious education shall be strengthened by making it possible for all students to take part. Various forms of cooperation between the denominations can be done within the framework of this kind of religious education. Team-teaching is the most common form of cooperation. This means two or more teachers of different confessions plan and teach a class together.

From a legal point of view this form of religious education is justified if it is seen as religious education from the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and the Greek Orthodox Church as religious societies involved.83

5.3.4 Teacher Education at the University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Krems

Although teacher training in Austria is undergoing a change at the moment, there is a special situation for the training of teachers for religious education in Vienna. At the University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Krems (‘Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule’, in short: KPH) interreligiosity is one of the main issues. Teachers for Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Free Churches, Islamic, Jewish and Islamic Alevite religious education are educated there. Within the respective curricula for the teacher training there are some courses where all students come together. These are pedagogical but also theological courses. The aim of this is to get to know each other, learn how to work together and reduce prejudices. Future religious education teachers should not only be focused on their own religion, but also know about other religions and know how to work with religious education teachers of other religions. To give an example, during this teacher education, students discuss

82 Jäggle/Klutz (2016), 53.
83 cf. van Dellen (2016), 156.
how they can organise interreligious and ecumenical observances at school. Issues that have to be considered are discussed. But students also learn about similarities and differences between the respective religions and denominations. Cooperative denominational religious education is also part of the teacher training. This kind of teacher training helps students to later find contact to each other at schools and not to be afraid of working together with other religions. The skills they learn can be very useful in a more and more religiously diverse society.84

5.4 Awareness of Religious Education at Schools
The section about the organisation of religious education at schools reveals further challenges of the subject. Religious education is just one subject among many others, but it has to deal a lot with its awareness and visibility. This is because it is a much discussed subject, it does not mean something to everybody. And the fact that it could be very hard to organise religious education in the timetable does not make it more popular either.

Because of this organisation, religious education is often marginalised in terms of location and timetable. Therefore, it happens that religious education is not visible at all in the end because it is not much noticed when and where it happens. For teachers who have to teach at several schools it is even harder to be present at a school because they often have only very little time in their schools. So, in some schools they might never even meet colleagues. Such conditions make it difficult to cooperate with others.

5.5 Summary
In this chapter the recent challenges of denominational religious education in Austria have been outlined and recent debates in education and social policy have been issued. It has become obvious in this chapter that there have been recent developments in education and social policy that have to be evaluated in the future to find out about their influence on the current system of denominational religious education. Major challenges for denominational religious education are religious diversity and secularisation. This should be made clear by demonstrating how difficult it could be to arrange a timetable at a school. But there is also a chance in this religiously diverse and secular situation in classrooms, for example in the training of

religious education teachers or the project of cooperative denominational religious education.

After this focus on recent challenges and developments, the next chapter deals with understanding the Austrian system of denominational religious education against the background of Austria’s history of the relationship between religion and politics.
6 The Present Situation against the Background of History

6.1 Religious Education and History

It has been stressed before that all systems of religious education have to be understood against the background of the respective country’s history and development. For that reason, the recent situation of denominational religious education in Austria shall be analysed against the background of Austria’s history with religion.

Today’s situation of the relationship between religion and politics and the freedom of religion is often taken for granted. Most people who live in Austria today are raised against the background of this situation. They have not experienced anything else in Austria.

It has been discussed in chapter two what a major role religion played throughout the country’s history. It was not always easy or even allowed to believe whatever you want. It has been illustrated how the churches and religious societies worked against each other in the past. But these were different and bygone times. Society has changed since then and religion is no longer as important as it once was.

Talking about religious education today, it is quite natural that some churches and religious societies are in a weaker position because they are a religious minority. Catholics are often in a better position because they still are – and will be, according to the study mentioned in the introduction of this thesis – the majority of all religious affiliations of Austrians. Looking back into history, the Catholic Church fought for its dominant position for a long time and with the process of secularisation, it finally lost this position. But the Catholic Church is still a strong partner to the Austrian state.

Considering how long it took to tolerate other churches and religious societies beside the Catholic Church, it can be guessed that it will still take a while to find new forms of cooperation of the churches and religious societies in Austria.

6.2 Forms of Cooperation

Since 1958 many Christian denominations have already been working together in Austria in the so called ‘World Council of Churches in Austria’ (‘Ökumenischer Rat der
Kirchen’, in short: ÖRKÖ). They organise events and services or give joint statements, for example on the work of the Austrian government. It is easily conceivable to have a similar coalition of all churches and religious societies who are recognised by the state to work together for example on the question of religious education at schools. Religious diversity and secularisation are challenges to all churches and religious societies. For many years the Catholic Church, which is still the major church in Austria, has regretted the high number of people that quit every year. Therefore, it could be a good chance for the churches and religious societies to work together. Similarities could be stressed in such a collaboration while the differences have to be tolerated.

The subject of religious education in schools is one of many questions about religion in the public sphere. It is a question about the secular state itself. Religious education is one place where religion and politics meet.

6.3 Religion in Austria and Around the World

Can it be justified to have religious education in public schools because religion belongs to the history of the country? It is often argued in public that religion belongs to the history of the country and therefore Christianity belongs to the culture of Austria. Sometimes culture and religion even are mixed up. But even in these arguments it has to be considered that Austria is not the religiously nearly homogenous country anymore that it once has been. It has been clearly outlined until now that religious diversity is growing in Austria while at the same time secularisation is also growing. Religion does not anymore play the same role in the life of people as it once had.

But seeing the bigger picture – not only the Austrian one – it gets obvious that religion is a major issue around the world. Picking a random newspaper can prove that – articles about terrorism in connection with religion can be found there, also articles about religious extremism or fundamentalism. This has been much debated in the last couple of years, at least since 9/11. The world is also concerned about how extremists recruit young people for their ideas. There are still fights and even wars around the globe because of religion – in the year 2018.

For people here in Austria – or even in Europe – this seems to be so far away on one hand because in this country, wars because of religion are long gone and the freedom of religion is established by law and taken for granted. But on the other hand, people

\[85\text{ cf. http://www.oekumene.at/}\]
see what is happening around the world and those wars seem to come closer with every terror attack in Europe. And with that, discussions about religion start again in a country (or countries, if one considers the European situation) where people are not interested in religion that much anymore, a secular country.

6.4 Summary
This chapter issued the relevance of understanding the Austrian system of religious education against the background of Austria’s history and of the relationship between religion and politics. After a long history of working with – and even fighting against - each other, the times have changed. People in Austria enjoy freedom of religion while religion is not as important to them as it once was. Therefore, churches and religious societies should look for new forms of cooperation, especially in the area of religious education at schools.

The following chapter deals with an analysis of similarities and differences of the Austrian system of denominational religious education in comparison with systems of religious education of other European countries, which have been mentioned in chapter four. The analysis will be based on the recent challenges and developments in Austria which have been identified in chapter five. The countries Austria will be compared with are France, Sweden, Finland and the German Land of Hamburg because they have been mentioned and discussed as examples for the different systems of religious education in Europe before.
7 Similarities with and Differences to Other Systems

7.1 Changes and Debates in Education and Social Policy

7.1.1 Alternative Subjects to Religious Education

In some countries, if there is the possibility to opt out of religious education, there is an alternative subject, usually ethics. Finland for example has such a regulation. France has whether religious education classes nor ethics classes in schools, but the pupils there learn about religious facts in other subjects. In Sweden there is no need to have an alternative subject because ‘knowledge of religion’ is a compulsory subject for all the pupils. In Hamburg the pupils can choose between ‘religious education for everyone’ or ‘ethics’ from 9th grade on.

In Austria ethics classes are only provided at secondary level II, and it is still just a school pilot project. This has been outlined in detail before. If one argues that schools should contribute to the religious education of pupils, as it is stated in the School Organisation Act, there should also be an alternative subject to religious education if there is the possibility to opt out of the subject of religious education.

The main problem in Austria is at the moment, that ethics classes are still a school pilot project. They should be installed in the school system\(^{86}\) to have this alternative to religious education at all public schools at secondary level II. With an installation of ethics classes at secondary level II, the installation of ethics classes at compulsory school should also be considered. Why should there be no alternative to religious education there?

The world today has to deal with more and more religious extremism and fundamentalism. Facing this, one can argue that there has to be a place in school where all the pupils learn about religion. It is part of general education to be able to discuss religious diversity and secularisation. Therefore, this education should start at compulsory school and not just at secondary level II.

But on the other hand, it has to be considered where pupils learn about their own religion – which is one of the main concerns of denominational religious education – if they choose ethics classes instead. And this brings up the question if it is necessary to learn about one’s own religion in school or is it more important to learn about religion

\(^{86}\) According to the majority of the arguments that have been mentioned before – see chapter five.
in general? This can be also discussed in the context of the question if religious education should be confessional or non-confessional. It is becoming obvious that all the different points of discussion go hand in hand, one way or another.

On the other hand, the whole discussion can soon be over, if one argues that religious education should not be part of the public school system and only in the responsibility of churches and religious societies. This argument is absolutely justified, too, because Austria is a secular state, so, theoretically, the separation of religion and the school system is possible. But even in this case, it is possible to have ethics classes as a compulsory subject at schools.

7.1.2 Religious Symbols in Public

The current discussion about religious symbols in public in Austria is not a new one. It has been issued many times before. The difference of the current discussion to earlier ones is, that new laws have been passed that prohibit wearing a headscarf in public schools. Another law that was passed in October 2017 is the ban of face covering. This has also been argued for the sake of integration.

Opponents of religious education at schools also argue that there should be no Christian crosses in classrooms, it has even been discussed to ban religious symbols from all public institutions.

It has been mentioned before that in France it is prohibited to wear symbols or clothing in schools that manifest a religious affiliation. Such prohibitions cannot be found in Sweden, Finland and Hamburg. But there is a difference between the two prohibitions – the one in Austria and the one in France. While in France it is prohibited to wear any religious symbols or clothing, in Austria only wearing a headscarf is prohibited. Also the reasons for the prohibitions are different: in Austria the law is argued for the sake for integration and in France it is an expression of the separation of Church and school system.

Of course it is controversial that young girls wear headscarves, but discussing this here in this paper would go too far, because of limited space and subject.

But it should be considered that there is a law in Austria (the so called ‘Schulvertrag’) that says there should be Christian crosses in classrooms if the majority of the pupils belong to a Christian denomination. But what about the other religions? There are no regulations saying for example that there should be religious symbols in classrooms if the majority of the pupils are Muslims or Buddhists.
The most important question within all these discussions is if pupils should be allowed to express their religious affiliations at public schools or not. Ultimately it is a question of the freedom of religion. In discussions about religious symbols in public schools it should be considered if there are any disadvantages – for example discrimination – for the pupils if they wear religious symbols. It could be that it is necessary for the state in this case to protect pupils. On the other hand, the question is to what extent the state may interfere in such a very personal question as religion is. It is becoming clear that the question of religious symbols in public is a very tricky one with many arguments that have to be considered. It gets obvious how complex the relationship between state and religion is.

7.1.3 Responsibility for Religious Education in Schools

An interesting question has been raised in Finland in recent debates. There, religious education at schools is the responsibility of the state and not the responsibility of the churches and religious societies. Now it is being discussed if that should be changed and the responsibility should belong to the churches and religious societies. In this point the situation in Austria is different because here is the responsibility for religious education at schools is in the hand of the churches and religious societies. Although Austria is a secular state, the churches, respectively the religious societies, are partners to the state. Therefore, they are also partners concerning religious education at school, although the responsibility is in the hands of the individual churches and religious societies.

Because of this difference between the two countries, the pros and cons of the responsibilities shall be discussed here in short. In Finland the subject of religious education is in the hand of the state, so the state can control who teaches the subject and what is taught. It can be criticised that this is not appropriate for a model of confessional religious education, because if pupils should learn about their own religion, the respective churches or religious societies should also be responsible for it. But the model in Finland understands itself rather as a weak model of confessional religious education because it does not aim faith formation or any devotional issues. In Austria the churches and religious societies are not only responsible for the education of the teachers of religious education, but also for creating a curriculum – which has to be approved by the state – and they are especially responsible for the

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87 Ubani/Tirri (2014), 108.
organisation of religious education classes in the schools. The churches and religious societies have to organise which teachers teach at which schools and at which schools the respective religious education can be provided because there are enough pupils to organise it. Again, it can be criticised that churches and religious societies should not be present at public schools because Austria is a secular state. In this case, it can be discussed if the responsibility for religious education should rather be with the state. Concerning the question of responsibility for religious education at public schools, it can be interesting to follow the discussion and arguments in Finland and see what decisions will be taken there.

Sweden, France and Hamburg have different model of religious education, that is why it is hard to compare the models in this question. In Sweden the state is responsible for religious education because it is non-confessional, and France does not have to deal with this question in public schools. It is obvious that in France religious institutions are responsible for religious education outside of school. Hamburg has installed the previously mentioned discussion group of all churches and religious societies that want to take co-responsibility of religious education.

7.2 Secularisation

Is it a specific quality of a secular state to have non-confessional religious education at schools? Sweden is believed to be a very secular state today and there a non-confessional model of religious education, the so called subject ‘knowledge of religion’, can be found.

It can be concluded, that in a very secular state it is not necessary or even possible to teach children in religion because they have this secular background where they have been raised. But it seems to be necessary to teach the children about religion because there is no subject that does so. Pupils learn some basics, some knowledge about religion.

Concerning secularisation and incorporating all the findings about it that have been discussed before, the concept of ‘learning’ in the subject of religious education at schools has to be considered.

In Finland and Sweden, it is clearly stated that religious education (respectively ‘knowledge of religion’) at school means learning about religion and learning from religion. It can be guessed that it is the same in France, where religion is part of various subjects in school, but not an extra subject. Also in such cooperative forms like the
model of Hamburg (‘religious education for everybody’) it is hard to learn in religion because of the many different religious societies who take part in this model. It has been outlined before that the three classifications of ‘learning’ in religious education can hardly be clearly distinguished. Therefore, some kind of mixture of these classifications has developed within every system. It has also been issued before that Lehner-Hartmann states that religious education at schools should focus on learning from and learning about religion, while learning in religion should take place in families and parishes.\(^88\) But this requires that there is some kind of religious life that takes place in families and that pupils have contact to the parishes and for example attend church services there. And these conditions are rarely given in a secular world. Often the first intensive contact between families, specifically the children, and the church or religious society they belong to takes place at school with the subject of religious education. This means, denominational religious education is very important for the churches and religious societies to get in contact with their members. This brings up the question, if they can find other forms to get in contact.

### 7.3 Religious Diversity

#### 7.3.1 Forms of Organisation of Religious Education

In Finland the situation of the organisation of religious education is similar to Austria. Religious education of the respective denomination in Finland and Austria is given if there are a minimum of three pupils of a denomination. The challenges of organising a working timetable with all the various religious education classes may be very similar. But there is a slight difference. Not all of the pupils have to attend their own religious education classes, this is only valid for Lutheran and Orthodox pupils. However, in Austria pupils have to attend their respective religious education of the denomination they belong to.

The Finnish model may make the organisation of various religious education classes at a school easier. Lutheran and Orthodox religious education are given without any request and are planned anyway. Therefore, if most pupils who are not Lutheran or Orthodox choose one of those classes instead of their own respective denominational religious education class, there are not so many factors to consider.

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\(^{88}\) cf. Lehner-Hartmann (2014), 108.
In Sweden and Hamburg all the pupils of a class take part in religious education or ‘knowledge of religion’. So the subject can be treated equal to all others because there are no pupils who have to be monitored while the classes take place.

In France there is no subject of religious education, but parents can take a day off per week to organise it for their children if they wish so. This means religious education takes place in the religious institutions or in the families. The advantage for schools is that they do not have to organise anything because religion is no extra subject but part of some other subjects. The advantage for the system is that religion and school are separated and no church or religious society interferes in the school system. Pupils do not get in touch with religious institutions in schools.

This can be seen as a positive thing when religion should be understood as a private matter. But concerns can arise because it is not clear what pupils learn in religious education in the religious institutions. There are pros and cons for both sides – religious education inside school and outside of school.

If religious education takes place inside the school, the state has some kind of control over the content of the teaching, as it can control the curricula, respectively the teachers. In Austria the curricula and used school books used for religious education have to be in tune with civic education. On the other hand, this restricts the freedom of religion and the freedom of expression.

One advantage of religious education outside of school is, that there are no problems regarding to the organisation of religious education. Additionally, it expresses the separation of religion and the school system, which could be a natural thing in a secular state. A major disadvantage of religious education outside the school system can be seen in having no control over what children learn in religious institutions. There does not need to be any curriculum for this kind of religious education because it does not take place in public. This can be a good ground for religious fundamentalism and extremism. Children possibly even do not learn or hear much about other religions and how to deal with religious diversity or secularisation in a positive way. Of course this view on religious education outside the school system is a very negative one, but various possible points of views have to be considered in this discussion.

### 7.3.2 Forms of Cooperation

In a school that has to deal with religious diversity more and more, new forms of cooperation may be found to handle the situation. First approaches have been done in
Austria by installing cooperative denominational religious education in some schools and by installing a common teacher training for teachers of religious education, which has been described before.

Sweden has a model of non-confessional religious education, which is organised by the state. Therefore, there is no need for religious societies to work together in this matter because the religious societies are not involved as the responsible organisations for religious education at school.

It has been said before that there is no subject of religious education in France, but facts about religion are taught in other subjects because Biblical themes are part of the French culture. Would some kind of interdisciplinary learning also make sense in a system where there is a subject of religious education? It could be a chance for a special cooperation between different subjects in schools and value religious education because it would not only be a subject amongst others, but a subject one can enter into a dialogue with.

With the concept of ‘religious education for everyone’, the German Land of Hamburg found a way to deal with its situation in school, which is more and more religiously diverse and where the pupils are raised on a more and more secular background. The installation of a discussion group for all the religious societies who want to take part seems to be a good way to bring different interests together.

A similar way has been found in Finland. In 1917 the Finnish Ecumenical Council was established. It has eleven member churches, five partner observer churches and several partner organisations. One of their committees is the Committee of Education which supports the current model of religious education, especially of minorities. Although the committee has no official power, it has political and indirect power by issuing statements concerning religious education at schools and the children’s right for religion.89

**7.4 Summary**

In this chapter the Austrian system of religious education has been compared to other systems in Europe. Similarities and differences have been described on the basis of recent challenges and developments in Austria. This makes it easier to discuss pros and cons of the respective systems.

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89 cf. Ubani/Tirri (2014), 113f.
For the future of denominational religious education in Austria it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel. It can help to think outside the box and to learn where other systems are successful or not.

The final chapter leads to a conclusion and summary of all the findings of this paper. These findings will be stated and finally there will be answers to the following questions: What can the Austrian system learn from other systems? What can be applied in Austria? To which extent can it be applied? How can denominational religious education in Austria deal with the growing religious diversity and secularisation in the future?
8 Summary and Conclusion

8.1 Summary of the Findings

Before a final conclusion and answer to the research question can be done, the most important findings of the paper so far shall be recalled and summarised in short.

In the very beginning of this paper the religious landscape in Austria was described including a prediction for the next decades. It became clear that Austria has to deal with religious diversity and secularisation, already today and even more so in the future.

But the first step in this thesis was a look back into history. In chapter two it was described how the relationship between religion and politics developed over the last centuries. The Catholic Church was very dominant in Austria for a long time and even had political power. It was a long way until Protestants were tolerated, as well as other religions. Religion played a major role throughout history in Austria and in the lives of the people. The majority of Austrians are still Catholics today, but religion is not as important to them as it once was for people.

In the next chapter the situation of religious education in compulsory school was issued. The Austrian school system was described as well as the governing law referring to religious education. It is important to know that religious education is established by law. The subject is justified by §2 of the School Organisation Act, where it says that school has a mission to contribute to the religious education of children. Religious Education is a compulsory subject for all pupils who belong to a church or religious society that is recognised by the law, but pupils have the possibility to opt out of the subject. Curricula for religious education are established by the respective church or religious society and controlled by the state if they are in tune with civic law.

In the next step the concepts of ‘learning’ in religious education were described, which are learning from religion, learning in religion and learning about religion. In practice the concepts are usually found in some kind of mixture. How different the characteristics of religious education can be, was demonstrated by giving examples from different European countries. In France there is no religious education at all, Finland has a similar confessional model as Austria with some differences to it, Sweden has a non-confessional model of religious education and in the German Land of Hamburg there is a cooperative form of various religious societies,  ‘religious education for everyone’.
Afterwards chapter five discussed recent challenges and developments of denominational religious education in Austria. Recent developments in education and social policy are still new and need to be evaluated in the next years to see if there is any impact on the subject of religious education – like the new kind of teacher training. Religious education in schools has to deal with growing religious diversity, which can be a problem when organising a timetable with all the respective religious education classes, but it can also be a chance for new forms of cooperation. Another challenge is secularisation, because people have less interest in religion which gets obvious if one looks at the religious conditions and backgrounds the pupils are raised from.

Then the recent situation of religious education was analysed against the background of the historical development of the relationship of religion and politics. It was argued that it is easier to understand a situation if one knows about its development. Times, conditions and values have changed over the centuries for the people in Austria. It was suggested that churches and religious societies may look for a form of cooperation, especially in the question of denominational religious education at schools.

The next step was to analyse the Austrian situation in comparison with other systems of religious education in Europe. Similarities and differences were emphasised to see what the Austrian system of religious education may be able to adopt or learn from other systems for the future. It was stressed that all the different systems have to be understood against their respective historical background. The largest differences to the Austrian system of religious education can be found in countries which adopted a different model than Austria, which are no religious education at schools or non-confessional religious education.

8.2 Possible Scenarios and Suggestions for the Future of Denominational Religious Education in Austria

After these detailed discussions of all the mentioned issues, it shall finally be concluded what the Austrian system of denominational religious education in compulsory school can learn from other European systems of religious education and in what ways it can be adapted to a more religiously diverse and secular Austria in the future. This conclusion consists of various possible scenarios and suggestions for the future.
8.2.1 Abolition of Religious Education at Schools

A very drastic scenario for the future could be the total separation of churches and religious societies and the school system, like the model of *no religious education at schools* in France. It has been argued at some point before in this paper that this step could be absolutely appropriate in a secular state. Advocates of this opinion usually argue in this way. But in this scenario there are some points that have to be considered: First, the development of the relationship between religion and politics in France is different to the one in Austria. In France the principle of secularity has firmly been established by law for more than hundred years now. Austria is in a contract with the Apostolic See, which leads to the next point. Second, the so called ‘Schulvertrag’ between the Austrian state and the Apostolic See guarantees denominational religious education in Austria. Therefore, a serious discussion about the abolition of religious education in Austria cannot be done without the Apostolic See. Third, in the case of the abolition of religious education it has to be considered whether religion could then be part of other subjects at school like it is in France or if instead of religious education the subject of ethics can be established or if there would then be no religion at all in the Austrian school system. Fourth, the question of religious symbols at schools has to be considered in this discussion too.

8.2.2 Adaption to the Demographic Conditions

Lehner-Hartmann outlines the importance of also considering different demographic conditions throughout Austria when thinking about new ways of religious education. She argues that it could be possible to have several different models of religious education next to each other.\(^90\)

It could be possible for example, to establish a similar system as the one in Hamburg ('religious education for everyone') in Vienna and other larger cities, while in the countryside denominational religious education fits much better. This is because in Vienna the number of Catholics is as low as nowhere else in Austria while at the same time the number of people without any religious affiliation is as high as nowhere else in Austria.\(^91\) In contrast, in the countryside there are still villages where the majority of the population belongs to the Catholic Church, which means schools do not have to deal with major challenges in organising religious education.

\(^{90}\) cf. Lehner-Hartmann (2014), 106.
\(^{91}\) Goujon/Jurasszovich/Potancoková (2017), 33.
Different demographic conditions can also be seen throughout Europe, which lead to different systems of religious education in the discussed countries. While Austria, Sweden and France are known as having a long history of migration and have to some extent very multi-ethnic populations, Finland did not have to deal with a high number of immigrants until very recently. This situation also contributes to the development of the different models of religious education. While France and Sweden reacted by establishing their current models of religious education, in Finland there was no need to change something and Austria did not change its model. Therefore, Austria – and maybe Finland, too – can learn from Sweden and France in this point because they have a similar development and similar demographic conditions.

8.2.3 Interdisciplinary Learning and Cooperation with Other Subjects
What the Austrian system of religious education can learn from France is that – without immediately abolishing religious education – religion could be part of other subjects too. It could be possible to have the subject of religious education at school and give the subject the chance to be a partner for other subjects too. Various subjects could work together. This would on one hand demonstrate that religion is a part of people’s life and part of the world we live in and on the other hand strengthen the subject of religious education. Religion can be issued at a school without the presence of a teacher of religious education – the problem of the visibility of religious education at schools has been described before. In addition, forms of collaboration between different subjects could be formed.

8.2.4 Forms of Cooperation between Churches and Religious Societies
There are already some kinds of cooperation between churches and religious societies in Austria, like the joint teacher training of teachers for religious education in Vienna or the cooperative denominational religious education. Apart from the issue of religious education, Christian denominations are working together in the World Council of Churches in Austria.

Especially the model of Hamburg, ‘religious education for everyone’, can be kind of a role model for some areas in Austria, like it has been mentioned before. But not only the subject itself serves as inspiration, but also the kind of organisation. Hamburg installed a discussion group for all religious societies who want to take part in the organisation of this kind of religious education.
Facing more and more religious diversity in Austria such a discussion group for all churches and religious societies could be a good thing for Austria too. The group could come together to discuss current issues of religious education at school and maybe find forms of collaboration in areas where it is getting harder to organise denominational religious education, like it has been mentioned before about Vienna. But there is also another possible point of profit for such a discussion group. If for example a Catholic teacher of religious education wants to teach his pupils about different religions, he can invite religious education of those respective religions. The discussion group can organise this kind of communication between the religious education teachers. It can become a general platform for communication between religious education teachers of various denominations.

Religious education is not only confronted with religious diversity but also with secularisation. Therefore, this is another reason for installing a discussion group of all churches and religious societies in Austria to work together, especially concerning the matter of religious education. Finland did this by establishing the Committee of Education within the Finnish Ecumenical Council, which can be the other role model for Austria.

8.2.5 Learning from, about and in Religion

The other point about secularisation is the question of which concept of learning should be adopted in religious education.

In Finland and Sweden for example it is clearly stated that pupils should learn from religion and learn about religion in school. In Austria this is not so clearly formulated, but forms of learning in religion can also be found in the curricula of religious education. It has been outlined before that this concept of learning in religion is getting harder in a secular world where pupils are less and less in contact with religion outside school. Here it would be a good thing to adopt the clear separation as it is usual for example in Finland and Sweden. In school pupils should learn about religion and they should learn from religion. But learning in religion should take place in the families and religious institutions. Learning in religion in school would mean an overextension for those pupils who had no contact with religion until then and school cannot compensate what pupils back then learned in their families quite naturally. These conditions have changed over the years.
Religious societies and churches have to lead the charge in this case. They need to look for new forms how their members can learn in religion – outside school, if this is important to them.

8.3 Closing Words
In this final conclusion it has been discussed what the Austrian system of religious education can learn from other system and what are some ways it can be adapted to a more religiously diverse and secular Austria in the future.

To sum up, one main important point in this discussion is, that religious societies and churches may find a way in the future to install some kind of discussion group to work together on the future of religious education in schools. Facing more and more religious diversity and secularisation it will become necessary to work together in the future, instead of working next to each other.

One could argue that religion does not belong to the public sphere and much less to public schools. This is an absolutely justified argument considering that Austria is a secular state. A total separation of religion and the public school system would need a change of some laws, whereby this has to be cleared with the Apostolic See because of the ‘Schulvertrag’.

But facing religious extremism and fundamentalism – all around the world – would it not be better to educate children particularly with regard to religion? There is already so much lack of knowledge and superficial knowledge about religion. This does not contribute to any process of tolerance of religions.

It has become clear throughout this thesis that there are many things on the move in Austria. Changes in education and social policy have recently been debated as well as secularisation, religious diversity and the historical background of the current situation of the relationship between religion and politics in Austria.

This situation of being on the move could be seen as a chance for the subject of religious education. Religious societies and churches could work together in this matter to strengthen religious education in schools when it is faced with all the challenges and developments that have been mentioned before. It is also a chance to point out the importance of having such a subject in public schools. Other countries in Europe are dealing with similar challenges as well and it can be good to have a look at their systems of religious education and evaluate what can be learned from each other.
It seems that in Europe the times of big wars and fighting against each other because of religion are hopefully over. Therefore, a time of working together can start, to avoid intolerance and discrimination because of religion, and to avoid fear of others because of a lack of knowledge, furthermore, to prepare the pupils to navigate in a religiously diverse society. Religious education at school is a good place for children to learn about all this and to get in contact with religion – to learn about religion and to learn from religion.
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