Introduction

Embracing otherness, an inclusive attitude to learners and an invitational spirituality: these are some of the characteristic features of Ludmila Muchová’s approach to education in general and to moral education and religious education (RE) specifically. In this Festschrift we want honor her dedication and have therefore invited her colleagues, friends and students to reflect on her research, her teaching, her person and her legacy. We also invited junior researchers who are not familiar with Ludmila to join in the broader reflection on major concepts that can be found in her work. The result is an interesting patchwork of original ideas, theoretical comparisons and foundational thinking, but also of practical observations and methods and, not to forget, personal souvenirs and experiences of authors encountering Ludmila as a teacher and a friend.

Ludmila is one of the doyens of Czech/Czechoslovakian RE. She was the one who introduced religious pedagogy as an autonomous research field into academia after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Her research interests were broad and her ability to think and to work comprehensively within these fields of interest was immense. She discussed in writing and teaching, among other things, issues on RE in dialogue with contemporary society, didactics of religious symbolism, aesthetics and RE, philosophizing and theologizing with children, RE and interreligious dialogue, dialogical Christian identity, faith formation in a post-conciliar church, etc. Despite of Ludmila’s crucial contribution to the formation and establishment of RE in the Czech Republic, her thoughts were also highly influential in German speaking countries (Austria and Germany) and in Slovakia and Poland. In the biography and bibliography, the reader can discover more of the central concerns and interests of Ludmila, which are also deeply woven into her personal and professional life.

This Festschrift aims to offer a window on those concerns and interests. Different genres of writing can be discerned: academic texts, essays, reflections, meditations and souvenirs. And although the authors come from different backgrounds – academic colleagues and students, inspired friends and people working daily in RE in schools and church – they all share the same passion: lending children and young people a voice that makes a difference, a spiritual voice to face the future resiliently. The papers in this Festschrift are presented some in English and some in German. It is because this book originated as an international project and we were afraid that using Czech language could have doomed the book to provinciality. Even though in many aspects particular texts celebrate contextuality it has a better chance to reach out to its readers as whole when texts appear in more widely spread European languages. It is our experience that when East and West meet options for common language used must always be done, and for the sake of better fellowship and community English or German are usually chosen as the most efficient operant languages. In our book we also made this decision. Further, the papers in this Festschrift creates a mosaic proportionally distributed into the pattern of four thematic sections: (1) Religious education in the public sphere, (2) Pedagogical and didactical elements for religious education, (3) Philosophical and theological impulses in religious education, and (4) Moral education and religious education. The book starts with a short biography and concludes with the bibliography of Ludmila Muchová.

The first section opens with the contribution of Martin Jäggle, which is in fact a historical document: it contains unpublished parts of his inaugural lecture as a professor of RE at the University of Vienna in 2004 and is worth being reflected from a contemporary standpoint. The author discusses the issue of boundary crossing as a fundamental habitus of educators within the European learning space. Based on his longstanding experience of intensive
programs in RE teacher education he reflects on intercultural learning, dealing with radical differences and the issue of justice. In re-reading his lecture from today’s perspective one becomes aware of the huge need of continued efforts in European educational encounters and communal learning processes.

The paper of Roman Mička deals with the concepts of ‘post-true age’ and ‘post-truth politics’ from the perspective of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. The author formulates challenges for the area of civic and RE. In the area of civic education, it is primarily about the development of critical thinking and the ability to identify the credibility of reports, the relativity of political models, and the value basis of the democratic order. In the field of RE, the focus is on the formation of an open, not rigid religious position and the elimination of misleading ideas about religion.

Sarah Reuter discusses in her essay the thesis that issues on diversity, the heterogeneous nature of humanity and inclusion radically cut ties with the belief that there is a way of being, a way of thinking or living perhaps, that is ‘normal’ or ‘normative’ for everyone or anyone. The challenge then is: how can society become inclusive without assuming this in/out binary? How can we implement an idea of inclusion that can lead to a society devoid of supremacist thinking and negative normativity? The essay offers a biographical approach to inclusion that is reflected in a practical theological way to promote an inclusive epistemology.

Janieta Bartz, Vera Janhse and Christoph De Oliveira Käppler discuss the enormous challenge of inclusive schools in North-Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) and the need for what they call a “post-identity narration” of religious and worldview plurality in schools. Through open processes of “living and learning in the presence of the other” they hope to achieve a new, just and humane common ground for RE and worldview education. They offer an insight in this successful approach through their work with university students in special education and young unaccompanied refugees in Dortmund.

The second section starts with the contribution of Zuzana Svobodová, in which she analyses the contribution of Ludmila Muchová in establishing RE and its didactics in the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Ludmila was not only teaching and writing about various aims and methods in RE, but most of all stressing the importance of a “renewed” learning of the language of religious symbols in a post-totalitarian country. Human beings are necessarily reliant on interpretation, their “logos” is always “analogous”. By learning the language of symbols and trying to interpret their more or less hidden meanings, the author refers to the educational work of Ludmila Muchová, understood as the “cultivation of the religious dimension” in every learner.

Thomas Krobath engages in the discussion on the future of confessional RE in the Austrian multi-religious school context. Based on his longstanding experience with denominational plurality in RE in schools and in teacher education in the city of Wien, he discusses the cooperative model of dialogical-confessional RE as a possible way to deal successfully both with confessional particularity and social diversity in an open, democratic Austrian society.

Jana Šídlová develops a theological and religious educational frame to work with the concept of the “Kingdom of God”, referring to the broad scale of different religious and political interpretations of the concept. Her approach is correlational, relying on the work of Edward Schillebeeckx: the longing of human beings for a better and just world can be read, motivated and critiqued in the light of the Gospel. In RE young people are invited to start the
conversation on how to make this world a better place, learning within such a correlational frame of reference.

The meditation of Tomas van Zavrel and Alena Bernardová focuses on Matthew chapter 25, verse 36: “I was naked and you gave me clothing”. They read this eschatological saying of Jesus in the light of the passion of Jesus and distill elements for a spiritual learning process out of this comparison. Concrete steps for a children’s and youngster’s catechesis are presented at the end of the paper.

The third section starts with the contribution of the German RE expert Gerhard Büttner, one of the founding fathers of the “children’s theology” movement, reflects on the tension between philosophizing and theologizing with children. The issue of God can be articulated as thought experiment, both in an ethic course and a religion course, both in a church and school setting. Based on empirical findings he concludes that different contexts and their related language games will shape the process of religious learning differently.

Veronika Blažek Iňová starts a virtual conversation with some friends and her “Doktormutter” Ludmila Muchová on the role of aesthetics in RE as a way to faith. Based on the work of among others John Dewey, Karl Rahner and Hans-Urs von Balthasar she reflects on the tension immanence-transcendence. The experience of beauty and the interpretation of this experience cannot be dissolved. In the interpretive setting of the school this experience needs to be further evaluated as an aesthetic and/or religious experience.

František Štěch documents in his paper the origins and development of the emerging concept of ‘youth theology’ established within the field of RE. The focus here is on the context of RE in German schools, where youth theology has received perhaps its clearest contours so far and inspires contemporary authors both within and outside Germany to follow up, engage with, and develop the concept of youth theology further. The second part of the paper presents such a follow up, namely the “theology of embrace”, as a way to reconsider the theological dimension of youth spirituality and youth work.

Bert Roebben presents the philosophy of education of Thomas Merton as an interpretive tool for the work of Ludmila Muchová. Both espouse a personalist view on education, human development, and spiritual growth. Central in their work is the theme of responsibility, the idea that the human being is called to live an answerable life, a “self beyond all ego” (Thomas Merton). The confrontation between the work of Merton and Muchová offers interesting stimuli to reinvigorate moral and spiritual education today – in their radically inclusive, spiritually resilient, and hermeneutically irritating forms.

The final section of the book starts with the essay of Tomáš Cyril Havel, in which he reflects on the issue of truth in society and education. His starting point is not an absolute essential concept of truth, but the ongoing existential readiness of human beings to open themselves for the truth found in and through relationships and encounters. What are now the conditions for this encounter? Based on the insights of comparative theology the author develops a concrete framework for RE in a context of lived diversity.

Marija Sertic offers a comparative perspective on two distinctive yet related traditions in moral education. Firstly, she analyses Nel Noddings’ views on the question of how to raise a young person to become a good human being and discusses her ideas on the proper design of an educational system that supports the moral growth of students. Alongside these
philosophical views, the paper presents theological inputs from the teaching of the Catholic Church, both referring to its rich moral tradition as well as to its limitations. The final section explores the similarities and differences between the two approaches to moral education.

Jan Samohýl reflects on the concepts of authority and tolerance with an etymological lens and challenges the reader to rethink these concepts in an eschatological perspective, based on the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 12: “[…we want] to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised”. In this theological-eschatological reading the concepts of authority and tolerance receive a new yet “patient” dynamic: authority will open itself for the growth of the other and tolerance will change into restless carrying the burden of the otherness of the other.

The paper of Barbora Wernerová finally deals with the common philosophical thoughts of Viktor E. Frankl and Karl Jaspers, with an emphasis on the understanding of human existence in relation to transcendence. Frankl and Jaspers speak of “marginal situations” in which the human existence over and over again needs to redefine itself, situations such as death, suffering and guilt. According to Jaspers, to experience marginal situations means to exist. Frankl confirms this by experiencing marginal situations in the concentration camp during the Second World War. The aim of this paper is to point to the consensus of these two thinkers.

When East and West meet in their passion for a vivid and convincing RE today, exciting things can happen in the middle. In this Festschrift colleagues, students and friends of Ludmila Muchová, coming from Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Germany collected their interests and concerns as a gentle tribute to the work of Ludmila and as a common ground for further research and development. Along the lines of this encounter the spiritual heritage of Europe was in the center of our attention. We hope that the reader will join us in this intellectual journey.

Bert Roebben and František Štěch