Article

Rethinking Islamic Religious Education in Europe Based on Empirical Research

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Abstract: The question of God is one of the central themes of religious education. Therefore, research in the field of concepts of knowledge and faith can provide a substantial basis for the work of educators and teachers and, thus, for the foundation of Islamic religious education. The following paper presents the results of a qualitative study on Muslim children's relationships with God. The results provide impulses for rethinking Islamic religious education in Europe.

Keywords: Muslim children; relationship to God; Islamic religious education studies; empirical research

1. Introduction

Scientific research on the religious development of Christian children began in 1881 with Granville Stanley Hall, when he presented studies on the religious imagination of children in his lectures. Subsequently, research also began in German-speaking countries (Oerter and Montada 2008, p. 609ff.).

For this purpose, stage models were developed which depict the development of religious knowledge, religious consciousness and/or spirituality in a Christian context. They are based on classical models from psycho-analysis and cognitive psychology such as those of Sigmund Freud, Erik H. Erikson, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. In addition, various researchers have recently begun to empirically investigate children's image of God, both in a denominational (Christian) context and in a non-denominational context. The studies deal with various aspects, for example, the development of the image of God, the character, the qualities and the appearance of God in the children's perspective, as well as the connections between the various aspects of socialisation, such as the religious orientation of parents and educators and the individual image of a children's God (at a glance: Schori 2004, pp. 164–65).

Empirical research in the field of Christian religious education studies began in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, but remained fragmentary and was marginalised in the authoritative concepts of religious education after the Second World War. In the context of a general reorientation of Christian religious didactics at the end of the 1960s, Klaus Wegenast in particular explicitly called for an "empirical turn in religious education" (Wegenast 1968). Wegenast called for empirical studies in religious education because there had been a wave of withdrawals from religious education in the 1960s. By means of a situation analysis, didactic and methodological suggestions for improvement were to be made. Wegenast's demand bore fruit: didactics and methodology were further developed, and the level of religious beliefs and the reality of students' lives in school were more strongly related to each other, even though empirical research in religious education remained marginal for quite some time.

In terms of Christianity, religious education studies (Religionspädagogik) is mainly divided into two areas. Its sub-disciplines are congregational pedagogy, which focuses on pedagogical tasks in the congregation, and religious didactics, which reflects teaching and learning processes in religious education at school. Scientifically based congregational

pedagogy has not yet become established in the field of Islamic religious education studies in Germany; religious didactics has been in the process of developing and profiling scientifically for about 15 years (Ulfat 2021).

The question of religious orientations and attitudes of children and adolescents with a view to the religious contemporary situation (secularisation, individualisation, pluralisation, globalisation, etc.) as well as with a view to categories such as gender, migration history, age, etc. plays an essential role for the conception of didactical approaches.

Current religious practice is examined with hermeneutical and empirical analytical tools (Riegel and Gennerich 2015). In the empirical field, methods of the empirical social sciences are used.

Since the empirical turn, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been chosen in empirical religious education research, sometimes in combination.

Islamic religious education studies were established as a scientific discipline at German universities with the recommendation of the German Science Council in 2011. As a young discipline empirical research on religious practice and religious education is required, in order to provide empirical foundations for qualified religious education in various fields of action on the one hand, and to better understand the religious life, thought and educational processes of Muslims in Germany on the other.

In schools, for example, the aim is to understand, reflect on and accompany the religious education and appropriation processes of children and adolescents didactically. This cannot only be achieved with theoretical assumptions, especially in view of the plethora of possible dimensions of the topic, such as development and age, (religious) socialisation, gender, culture, ethnicity as well as individual worlds of thought and belief of the children and adolescents etc.

In the following, the results of an empirical study by the author on Muslim children's relationships to God (Ulfat 2017, 2022) are outlined and the impulses they offer for Rethinking Islamic Religious Education in Europe are presented.

2. Current State of Research

Images and understandings of God are considered a central element of religious development in childhood and adolescence. Thus, in Christianity, there is a long tradition of research in the area of children's and adolescents' images and understandings of God. For example, the stage models of religious development should be mentioned. The best known are those of James Fowler (2000) and Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder (Oser and Gmünder 1992). These studies stand in the tradition of Piaget.

More recent studies focus on the heterogeneous individual interpretations of children and adolescents and take into account gender aspects (Klein 2000), socialisation aspects (Eckerle 2001) as well as the question of influences of non-confessionalism and secularisation (Szagun 2014). The main topic is the genesis of images and understandings of God in individual biographies. Methodologically, studies offer a broad spectrum, whereby qualitative approaches predominate.

In the meantime, the research questions are also being extended to Muslim children and adolescents. Methodologically, these studies are based on the proven procedures for Christian and nonconfessional children. However, there are differences in content. For example, Kader Zengin (2010) had Muslim children (primary and secondary school in Bavaria) reproduce the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve in a drawing. She found that for some Muslim children the graphic representation of God was unfamiliar and they tried to represent God in a different way. They put anthropomorphic ideas of God on paper as well as representations such as spirit, natural phenomenon, abstract symbols (Zengin 2010).

Studies with essays on the image and understanding of God as a survey method include, for example, that of Yıldız and Arık (2011). The sample consisted of 253 primary school students aged eight to eleven. They found that most children imagine God as a creator. Many children have anthropomorphic conceptions of God, but these decrease with

age. Children's knowledge of the difference between God and his creation increases with age. Children attach importance to the fact that God is not begotten and does not beget. Younger children predominantly imagine God as frightening and punishing, while the older ones increasingly imagine God as loving and protective (Yıldız and Arık 2011).

Interviews are also used as a survey method, for example by Adem Aygün (2013), who investigated the religious development of 70 Turkish-Muslim young people aged 15 to 25 in Turkey and Germany. Aygün's study uses a type classification (traditional, ideological, secular, individual), which he compared with Fowler's model of faith development.

According to Aygün, "the concepts of God of Turkish youth show greater diversity compared to their German-Turkish peers" (Aygün 2013, p. 190). Overall, the young people's conceptions of God remained "conventional and institutional", God is for them an "authority that prescribes everything for humanity", and he has a "punitive and rewarding image" (ibid.). Khizar Zuberi (1988) also used interviews (understandings of God by three children in Canada aged 6, 8 and 10 from Pakistani, Egyptian and Bangladeshi backgrounds). Zuberi concludes that children's understandings of God are crucially influenced by adults and that children use different cognitive strategies to describe God's attributes (Zuberi 1988).

The first quantitative findings on the image and understanding of God among Muslim youths were provided by the Shell Youth Studies, which point to clear differences between Christian and Muslim respondents. In particular, the relevance of faith in God seems to be strongly pronounced among Muslim youth (Albert et al. 2019). The Tübingen study "Youth-Faith-Religion" (Schweitzer et al. 2018), which included Christian and Muslim young people in both its quantitative and qualitative parts, goes in a similar direction and points to various differences in the images and understandings of God.

Last but not least, in view of the increasing interest in religious plurality, comparative studies of the images and understandings of God of Christian and Muslim children and adolescents can be found. In Germany, the studies by Ilse Flöter (2006), Zita Bertenrath (2011) and Axel Wiemer with Celine Hennings ((this is a Master's thesis) Wiemer and Hennings 2017) are to be mentioned.

All of these studies focus on the cognitive dimension of faith in God, or on the children's explicit religious knowledge about God. On the other hand, there is still a great need for research on the emotional dimension of Muslim children's faith in God, or on its relevance for action.

3. The Dimensions of Faith in God and Research Question

Psychologists of religion differentiate between different dimensions of faith in God:

Bernhard Grom and Kalevi Tamminen, for example, distinguish between the "cognitive" and the "emotional-motivational" dimension of faith in God (Grom 2000, p. 115). They call the "cognitive" dimension "understanding of God" and the "emotional-motivational" dimension "relationship to God". These two dimensions are interconnected. They understand the relationship to God as shaped by experience and the understanding of God as the product of a developmental process.

Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) also distinguishes between a more cognitive God concept as "God concept" and an emotional and motivational dimension based on relationship as "God image". Rizzuto focuses more on the dimension of "God image" which is based on experience (Rizzuto 1979, pp. 47–48).

Fritz Oser argues similarly, although much more sharply. He distinguishes between a "merely learned God and the real God in the psyche" (Oser 1993, p. 8).

The cognitive dimension of faith in God can be linguistically explicated relatively unproblematically, since this area is based on learned, propositional knowledge.

The empirical study presented here, however, focused on the emotional dimension of "faith in God" or, speaking with Grom, the "relationship to God". According to religious educators, research on religious development needs to focus more attention on this emotional dimension (Naurath 2014, p. 29). Researchers attribute to it a decisive influence on religiosity (e.g., Eckerle 2008; Hanisch 1996; Szagun 2014).

The emotional dimension is considerably more difficult to explain linguistically, since it is based less on propositional knowledge than on implicit knowledge in the sense of Mannheim. The emotional dimension of the relationship to God is thus an individual phenomenon, but according to Mannheim it emerges from the context of social practice (Mannheim 1980, p. 296; 1997). According to Mannheim, implicit knowledge is a form of knowledge that a person simply has at his or her disposal without having to explain it "in terms of everyday theory" (Nohl 2012, p. 4). The children's relationship to God is to be sought in this implicit knowledge. According to Fritz Schütze, this knowledge comes to light in narratives (Schütze 1976, p. 225), which has implications for the selection of the data collection method and the evaluation method.

Therefore, the research question of the empirical research work presented here is: What action-oriented relevance does the emotional dimension of faith in God have for Muslim children? (Ulfat 2017, 2022).

4. Methodological Design

In determining the state of research, theoretical considerations were made which led to the assumption that three aspects are of crucial importance for the reconstruction of a relationship to God:

- The experiences of children, which they interpret religiously (Tamminen 1993): In the field of religious development of children and adolescents, Kalevi Tamminen has explored from a psychological perspective the question of whether children have religious experiences, and if so, of what kind. Drawing on existing research, especially based on the work of Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, Tamminen defines: "Religious experience is an experience with which a feeling of dependence on or connection to God/the divine and the transcendent is linked" (ibid., p. 36). Tamminen states that a child's experiences only become "religious" when the child interprets these experiences in the light of his or her emotional relationship to and cognitive ideas about God. According to Tamminen's empirical findings, it is possible to have experiences of God's presence, closeness and guidance in difficult situations or situations characterized by loneliness and/or in explicitly religious situations (e.g. funeral, church visit), that is, to interpret the situation as one of God's closeness or guidance (ibid., pp. 49–50). According to Tamminen, situations of loneliness, emergencies (especially escape from danger), questions of morality, religious practice, school and, in a few cases, situations of joy are particularly suitable for primary school children to interpret religiously (ibid., pp. 54–60).

  For the research presented here, it was therefore important to design a narrative-generating input stimulus for the interviews that included an emergency situation. Therefore, the scenario in a story constructed by the author herself aimed to put children in a situation where thinking about God and praying to him can be activated, facilitating the children's access to the situation and the linguistic setting.

- The "experiential spaces" in which they make the religiously interpreted experiences (Mannheim 1980, p. 214): Karl Mannheim assumes that people's knowledge can always only be reconstructed in relation to their social and cultural living spaces, which he calls "conjunctive experiential spaces" (ibid., p. 219). In a conjunctive experiential space, the members can understand each other directly because they share common experiences. As soon as no conjunctive experiential space is given and one wants to communicate their own conjunctive experience with those who are not taking part in it, the meaning of the activity must be explained theoretically. Here, Mannheim speaks of "communicative" knowledge, which is necessary for communication beyond conjunctive experiential spaces (Nohl 2012).

  In relation to the work presented here, this means that a religious community (here the Muslim one) also represents a conjunctive experiential space. The structures of thought and the orientation frameworks of the individuals are determined by the religious collective ideas. The members of this experiential space thus have a conjunctive

knowledge to interpret and process their experiences. This conjunctive knowledge and the orientations based on a common space of experience cannot simply be explicated in conceptual theoretical terms. Mannheim calls the conjunctive knowledge that is intuitively available "atheoretical" because it is not explicit. The atheoretical knowledge that guides action is acquired and experienced in social practice. Muslim children's action-guiding knowledge regarding their construction of God is thus linked to individual experiences, but it has emerged in a specific social practice, which in turn is embedded in a shared space of experience. For the research, it was therefore necessary to select a specific survey and evaluation method to be able to reconstruct this implicit, action-guiding knowledge of the children.

- The "individual relevance systems" of the children, that gives elements of the religious symbol system its own weighting (Nestler 2000, p. 151): Nestler changes the perspective of analysis with his concept of the individual relevance system and places the individual construction performance in the foreground. The child with its individual, active processing performance moves to the center of research interest.

  For the work outlined here, this means that the children actively seek access to religion through their individual systems of relevance and can accordingly arrive at individual positions. In order to meet the requirement of bringing the children's outlined individual relevancies to the fore, survey methods must be used that give the children interviewed the opportunity to articulate their relevancies, both explicit and implicit. If one places the child and his or her subjective constructions at the center of research, a number of new theoretical challenges arise that have found their way into the work presented here.

  For an adequate survey of the children's "individual relevance systems", a methodological self-limitation is crucial, which is rarely applied consistently in religious research. From the moment the researcher introduces God or religious patterns of interpretation into the interview in his or her conversational impulses, there is no longer any possibility to differentiate whether the interviewees, when they themselves thematise God or religious patterns of interpretation, do so out of their own individual relevance system or merely in reaction to the researcher's impulse. Thus, if one wants to find out whether God or religious patterns of interpretation have a real biographical meaning for a Muslim child, the researcher must not raise the issue him/herself under any circumstances. This is all the more important because every Muslim child has a stock of declarative knowledge about Muslim patterns of interpretation that he/she can update immediately, if necessary, if he/she has the impression that the interviewer want this.

In order to get findings about the relevance of the child's relationship to God, the following qualitative reconstructive design was used for this study: The sample of the interviewed children was compiled using the method of „theoretical sampling" by Glaser and Strauss (2010). The children of the sample were at the age of 10 years, they participated in Islamic religious education at school (except two contrasting cases) and also in the mosque lessons (except two contrasting cases). They were at the end of the fourth schoolyear (except two contrasting cases) and they had completed the basic school curriculum of Islamic religious education. Within the sample, gender, culture and language, as well as religious education in the family, community and at school were differentiated. In this way the inner-Islamic diversity was represented as comprehensively as possible. After 15 individual interviews (Schütze 1976) (8 girls, 7 boys), a theoretical saturation occurred. The survey was carried out at school during school hours (Ulfat 2017, pp. 87–89).

These qualitative interviews were evaluated with the documentary method according to Bohnsack (2009). The documentary method provides access to the children's implicit knowledge that guides their actions by not asking about what the content is of what is said, but about what the meaning is of what is said. For this purpose, minimal and maximum comparative horizons were worked out in the case-by-case comparison, which illustrate

"how social reality is produced based on similar spaces of experiences" (Nentwig-Gesemann 2007, p. 278).

A Japanese narrative theatre, the so-called Kamishibai, was used for the narrative-generating stimulus. The Kamishibai consists of a toy-sized theatre stage, which is closed by two wooden doors. The author chose this access based on previous experiences from her school practice. The stimulus that the author designed for the narrative theatre was kept as open as possible[1]. The author looked also for two stage sets suitable for the stimulus and had small wooden figures to support the narrative. This provided an extraordinarily fruitful appeal, on which the children generated long and detailed narratives. For the questioning of the investigation, it was of decisive importance that neither the narrative-generating stimulus nor the impulses that were set during the narrative phase were mentioned by the researcher on the subject of God or religion. This was the only way to ensure that the children develop their individual relevance systems without being influenced by traditional or theological interpretation patterns (Ulfat 2017, pp. 76–80).

5. Central Empirical Results

It was possible to identify three typical forms of *self-relating*, which could be found in the children's narrations:

Type A: Relating of the self to God in the mode of personalization. This type is characterized by the fact that God, as a counterpart, is at the center of one's own faith (Ulfat 2017, pp. 121–22).

Type B: Relating of the self to God in the mode of moralization and orientation towards tradition. This type is characterized by the fact that the relationship with God falls into the background, and the observance of commandments and traditional orientations form the core of the faith (Ulfat 2017, pp. 169–71).

Type C: Relating of the self to immanent dimensions in the mode of distance from God. This type is characterized by a large absence of transcendental references; instead, immanent variables such as interpersonal relationships are at the center of personal attitudes (Ulfat 2017, pp. 208–10).

In the following, the three types are described in more detail and illustrated with empirical material:

Type A: Relating of the self to God in the mode of personalization.

The interviews show that this type brings God into the narrative with a high degree of abstraction and thereby creates references to social issues, interpersonal and hereafter phenomena, as illustrated[2] by Leyla[3] (lines 174–191):

I: Are you sometimes afraid?

Leyla: I am sometimes afraid of the darkness or when I cannot breathe or I am afraid that I get asthma or that I lose my parents maybe or my brother or someone I like very much like my cousin. She's dead and I do not want anyone to die again

I: Tell me more about it

Leyla: . . . so. My cousin was 17 or 16. She wanted to cross the road, the traffic light was green but she was run over by a bus. I was very sad, I cried. So, I told Allah that it should never happen to my parents or relatives or anybody I like very much, so I now mostly find someone nice before he dies or something like that

I: (questioning) you said that to Allah

Leyla: yes, I opened my hands and said that that should never happen. I did dua[4]. I also told my mother that she should also make dua. Perhaps there is an effect or something and since then I always pray. I am making namaz[5].

This type constructs God as a counterpart whose existence is not questioned. However, not only transcendence-related self- and world-interpretations play a role, but also immanent self- and world-interpretations, as in Dilara's interview (lines 147–166):

> **Dilara:** He must not give up in any case. When he gives up, it's bad. He must try something. He has to do something, so in any case he has to try it, so he can believe it. He must be able to believe in himself and he must not be afraid. First, he has to try and not give up, so he does not leave so easily and sits there and does nothing. He must find a way to get out. He can, for example, dig or so, and in any case, he must not give up. He must try it. . . .

Furthermore, the material shows that the perception of duties and responsibility towards other people is anchored in a responsible perspective, which this type partly religiously frames, as in the following example of Hagen (lines 191–203):

> **Hagen:** Then, they all lived in the forest . . . yes . . . and then they had a huge field full of tomatoes and plants. They would have become rich if they had sold it, but they did not want to. They wanted to have that for themselves. They did not want to get rich with it. Then, they built a prayer tower, and made a small space where one can pray, and when it was praying time, he called the adhan[6], and then all came to pray and prayed. Additionally, they had water in such a small pond. There were also frogs and so in there and then they lived there in it and taught themselves. They have practiced because the parents could already do the whole thing and so with math and so. Yes, and then they knew each other and knew what to do in the forest and then lived there.

In this type, it becomes clear that religious interpretative patterns represent a part of the entire interpretation of life. Type A deals with the religious interpretation of the world and man individually. This pattern is evident throughout the entire material in type A.

Type B: relating the self to God in the mode of moralization and orientation towards tradition.

In contrast to type A, type B is oriented towards tradition and social expectations. God is assigned the role of the creator of a reward and punishment system and can be influenced through religious achievements. The perspective of God has a moralizing, dichotomizing focus, as illustrated by the example of the interview with Canan (lines 95–105):

> **Canan:** If you were a good person and did the five prayers a day and donated to help the poor people, you go to dschannat[7] and if you were a bad person, you did not pray and steal things, for example, you got to the dschahannam[8]
>
> **I:** Dschahannam? Tell me about it
>
> **Canan:** So if you were a bad person, there is a fire there when you were a bad person and if you were a good person, you can get eight people or seven out of dschahannam and I do not know more
>
> Both here and in other sequences, it becomes clear that type B has religious knowledge, which is shown by the Islamic-religious terms the type uses. However, no reference to this knowledge could be reconstructed. It could be reconstructed that the connection that is established to religion almost exclusively reflects social desirability.

In the material, it becomes clear that this type reduces religion to the aspect of belonging to the Muslim community, which is exemplified here by a sequence from Kaltrina's interview (lines 535–546):

> **Kaltrina:** So my aunt is Muslim and my aunt has married a German and my teacher said it always depends on the father what the child is. However, my aunt has said that is wrong, because the child was not baptized
>
> **I:** Mhm

Kaltrina: That is why it's Islamic

I: Mhm

Kaltrina: Additionally, my uncle does not know what he wants to do now. If he still wants to be German or become a Muslim. Then, I asked him. He said he would choose Islam.

It turns out that Kaltrina sees "Being German" and „Being Muslim" as opposites, in which nationality and religiosity are put into one. Kaltrina constructs something like a nationally religious space. This pattern is also evident throughout the entire material in Type B.

Type C: Relating of the self to immanent dimensions in the mode of distance from God.

In contrast to type A and type B, type C is characterized by the absence of a relationship with God and a distance from tradition. This type differentiates sharply between imagination and reality, whereby God is assigned to the fantasy area, as exemplified by Gökmen (lines 242–245):

I: Tell me a story about you and Allah

Gökmen: A dream?

I: Whatever you want

Gokmen: I have no story me and Allah

In Type C, God exists as an element of social reality. The empty space at the point of the relationship with God is filled with immanent dimensions, such as interpersonal relations and social-worldly references. This is exemplified by the interview with Navid (lines 330–340):

I: Is there something that will help you if you are afraid

Navid: the opposite always helps me. If I am alone in the dark, then I go inside, where it is bright.

I: mhm

Navid: A bright day. That helps me then. Or, for example, in nightmares. When I get up, it helps me

I: mhm

Navid: or sometimes, for example, there are monsters in my nightmares. They disappear all of a sudden. That helps me then also. Otherwise, for example, when I lie down on the bed and relax.

Navid himself introduces fasting into his narrative, whereupon the interviewer mirrors this back to him (lines 238–249):

I: (questioning). have you ever

Navid: no. However, I think I can do that. I can lose weight very quickly. Once I put the scale on a bath mat and stood on it. Then, I saw 23.6 but that was not true because the weight was changed because it was on the bath mat. On the floor it was then right again.

Here, it becomes clear that, although Navid is inspired to talk about fasting, he nevertheless does not perform a religious framing, but rather locates fasting in a secular context and deals with it immanently in connection with losing weight. Subjects with religious normative potential are not religiously framed in contrast to types A and B. This pattern is also evident throughout the entire material in type C.

6. Summarised Description of the Types:

6.1. Type A: Relating of the Self to God in the Mode of Personalization

The children who can be assigned to this type speak in the mode of a personal construction of God. The perspective from which they construct God shows a closeness

based on biographical experience. God is experienced as a Being whose existence is not questioned. Social-worldly, interpersonal and otherworldly phenomena are brought up in a high degree of abstraction, whereby references to God are usually made. In this context, it becomes apparent that religious or transcendent self- and world interpretations play a role in certain situations for action, but immanent self- and world interpretations are also included.

Responsible-ethical attitudes dominate here in Weber's sense, which are also justified from religion. The central aspect of ethical responsibility that is evident in narrations of this type is the perception of duties and responsibility towards other people, so that they and one's self are well off.

6.2. Type B: Relating of the Self to God in the Mode of Moralization and Orientation towards Tradition

This type is characterized by the fact that the children speak in the mode of an orientation to the socially expected or to tradition, which they adopt as a social norm. The orientation towards tradition is reflected in a moralizing, dichotomizing perspective on God. The children address God almost exclusively in the dimensions and categories that the traditions they have learned prescribe. Beyond that, there is no implicit action-guiding reference to God or to religious content.

Here, in the Weberian sense, convictional–ethical attitudes dominate. A purposive relationship with God becomes clear in the sense that a religious achievement must be made in order to be able to influence the ultimate. God is assigned the role of the creator of a reward–punishment system, whereby type B focuses on the system, but not on God.

On the explicit level, this type is characterized by the fact that the children know traditional religious narratives and can reproduce a minimum of religious knowledge from which they draw their religious interpretation patterns. Their response strategies are shaped by Islamic religious linguistic markers. It becomes apparent that the connection made to religion is, in many aspects, a mirror of the social desirability of their social environment.

6.3. Type C: Relating of the Self to Immanent Dimensions in the Mode of Distance from God

For this type, God exists peripherally as an element of social reality. Type C is characterized by the absence of a reference to God, to religion or to transcendence-related questions, as well as by a presence and a focus on interpersonal interactions and references.

Interpersonal and social phenomena are primarily perceived from a responsible ethical perspective. The expressions of type C are socially anchored. There is no behavior that could be described as ethics of conviction in the Weberian sense. Topics with normative potential, in contrast to the other two types, are not framed in religious terms. The empty space in the place of the God relationship is filled with immanent interpretations of the world and the self.

Declarative knowledge about God is also hardly presented by this type, although these children have also taken advantage of religious educational opportunities (school and mosque). The material shows that this type makes a clear separation between fantasy and reality, whereby God is mostly located in the realm of fantasy.

Type C represents a decisive yield of the methodological approach of the study presented here. It only becomes visible at all when one starts exclusively from the children's relevance systems in the interview. The direct question about God always produces an answer in which propositional contents can no longer be checked for their anchoring in the children's real experience and interpretation of reality. The direct question about God makes—at least in the Muslim context—type C invisible.

7. Discussion of Results in Relation to the Question of Rethinking Islamic Education

The findings of this study point to critical areas that require a theological as well as a didactical discussion. For instance, the results of this study reveal that Muslim children

develop their individual religious views according to their personal life experiences and biographical decisions.

The narratives of God from different theological schools of thought, such as those of the Mu'tazila and Aš'arīya, are reflected in the children's narratives of God. Thus, in the formulations of the children of the sample, orientations become visible that point to the tension between God's omnipotence and man's freedom of will. This relationship is weighted differently in the three types as follows:

Type A constructs his concept of God in an individual way depending on his experiences in his life world. He assigns agency to both God and man. He separates these areas, but in some cases, they can also overlap. This type basically relates man's freedom of will to all areas of life except death. This type is aware that one's own existence is dependent on the existence of God. Although his ethical actions are autonomous, they are also placed from a God perspective.

Type B, on the other hand, assigns God the role of the Almighty, upon whom man can only act through religious performance. His relationship with God is accordingly purpose-rational. In the material, it becomes clear that prayers have a quasi-magical function which, if "correctly" performed, fulfil a purpose, namely to be protected or to have wishes fulfilled. Accordingly, God is assigned more power to act than man. However, this type is also aware that the "effect" of the prayers does not necessarily have to come true, i.e., their wishes are not necessarily fulfilled. In such a case, the children first look for the fault in themselves. Aspirations and hopes are placed in a God perspective, especially when it is certain that they themselves cannot achieve anything. However, even if this type fails in its attempt to influence events, there is a tendency to attribute what has happened to God, not least for their own relief.

In type C, the human being's freedom of will stands without an opponent. When asked, God is also associated with death, but it is clear that God's will or omnipotence plays no role in the interview situation for this type.

This study shows that, at the age of about ten years, the children already show different types of references to God, and thus the faith in God is already heterogeneous in this age group. There are, therefore, among Muslim-educated children, individuals with a mature relationship with God (type A). Furthermore, among Muslim-educated children, there are individuals with a traditionally dominated relationship with God (type B). Finally, it becomes clear that there are also Muslim children with a missing relationship with God and a distance from tradition (type C).

The results of the present study can be connected to religious–sociological studies with adolescents and young adult Muslims, such as those of Gerlach (2006), Tressat (2011), Tietze (2001), Karakaşoğlu-Aydın (2000), Kiefer (2010) and others. Following these investigations, it can be assumed that type A is able to frame religiosity in a highly individualized and plural society in a reflective manner, yet still remain in touch with tradition. For type B, on the other hand, it can be assumed that religiosity, which is reduced to the feature of belonging, can lead to a lack of reflexivity and to moral rigidity. Type C illustrates that the non-religious human being is also part of the inner-Islamic plurality (Ulfat 2017, pp. 251–60).

From the discussion of the results, a contribution can be made to the didactics of Islamic religious education and to the pedagogy of religious education.

For example, it becomes clear that recognizing, interpreting and discussing the diversity of the God narratives, which exists in the Islamic tradition, leads to flexibility in thinking and a change in perspective, as in the case of type A. Especially in type B, it becomes clear that this diversity is not given. It follows from this that the diversity of the God narratives must occupy a much larger place in religious education.

Based on both these reflections and the empirical results, the task of Islamic religious education is formulated in three theses:

Thesis 1: The specific task of Islamic religious education is to introduce children to the diversity of religious narratives and thereby enable flexibility, multi-dimensional expansion of the horizon of perception and the ability to change perspectives.

Thesis 2: The task of Islamic religious education is to widen the unreflected faith, which usually develops on an individual level by enculturation, by a narrative and rational approach to faith and to offer forms of verbalization.

Thesis 3: The task of Islamic religious education is to enable children and young people to talk about religion, between the world and its problems on the one hand and God on the other, or between their own faith and the faith of their different social environments.

These tasks have the aim to encourage the development of a vivid relationship with God by the child or, in the case of type C, to give options for a vivid relationship with God (Ulfat 2017, pp. 294–314).

8. Conclusions

On a pedagogical level, the results of this study suggest that the discourse on religious education should no longer exclusively work with models of maturity, but at least additionally come from processes of subject-oriented co-construction (Röhner 2003) leading to different, simultaneous forms of the relationship with God. This means that there is not *one* form of relation to God, but a plurality of references to God.

Thus, the work is compatible with the implications of the paradigm shift in childhood research (Bamler et al. 2010). It also becomes clear in relation to the question of God that children are not passive recipients but active constructors of their own reality.

The results of the empirical study show that Islamic religious education studies currently face the challenge of formulating a theological concept of religious education aimed at the children's lifeworld, which is also domiciled in the Islamic tradition.

This requires a revitalization of theology, by reviving countless elements of tradition neglected by the current mainstream, initiated and guided by the challenges of the reality of life as experienced by the children.

Since there is no consensual, single worldview in the modern age, the educational challenge for Islamic religious education studies consists in empowering children to find their own path in a world of plural, contradictory interpretations of the world. Preparing young believers for a life in a religious-plural society, a personal relationship to God and the reflexivity of one's own religion respectively distance to religion are crucial prerequisites for the prevention of radicalization and moral rigidity.

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Notes

[1] The narrative-generating stimulus tells of a boy who is very popular with his class teacher and is also liked by his classmates. However, some classmates are envious of him and want to annoy him by locking him in an old hut on the way home. The boy calls for help, but no one hears him. The day is coming to an end. The interviewed children were asked to continue their narration from here on.

[2] The following sequences do not represent empirical evidence. They are merely intended to illustrate the type by typical examples.

[3] All names have been anonymized for privacy reasons and masked if necessary.

[4] Arabic term for supplication.

[5] Turkish term for prayer.

[6]   Arabic term for prayer call.

[7]   Arabic term for paradise.

[8]   Arabic term for hell.

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