

## 'One Thing Necessary' in Czech Education

Tomáš Cyril Havel

DOI: 10.32725/cetv.2021.042

### Abstract:

The text presents anthropological and cultural arguments that can newly open a professional discussion on the relationship between religion and education in the Czech environment. Firstly, the article identifies the potential of the relationship between religion and education. It uses the example of Comenius's thesis on 'One Thing Necessary' and the summary of several generally accepted arguments from foreign literature. Further, it defines the concept of spiritual competence and complements the term with foreign examples. Spiritual competence is understood as education leading towards the consciousness of the 'One Essential Thing'. In this sense, the presented text attempts to revive one of the key starting points of Comenius's thinking in the Czech environment and to inspire the search for possible ways to update it.

**Keywords:** John Amos Comenius, competence, spiritual competence, religious competence

### 1. An Older Man Walked...

An older man is walking along Aleš Square in Písek. He looks at the building of the former primary school, now the city library and education centre, and he is justifiably proud of it. On the one hand, he attended it in his youth, and on the other hand, his former school, which had borne the name John Amos Comenius for many decades, had been transformed into a modern library and its fame transcends the borders of Písek. We start talking and come to the statues that have adorned the shield since time immemorial. The man draws my attention to the statue at the highest place. In his opinion, it is John Amos Comenius. I look closely and see that it is not Comenius. With such a large cross, it can only be Christ. I shyly express my doubts. He almost starts arguing with me. He knows this for sure! It was Comenius's Elementary School! So I leave him with his thoughts. A sudden idea comes to me. Maybe that was why the statue of Christ could have stayed here before 1989, and no one minded. It was Comenius.

I have remembered this conversation several times since then, as questions have come to me repeatedly in various situations. I would like to think about them more comprehensively in this article and to offer suggestions for further discussion.

John Amos Comenius thought about education in an integral connection with religion.<sup>1</sup> If one wants to understand his ideas, Christianity is the key to many of them. But how can we imagine this

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Jedno nezbytné*, Praha: Kalich, 2020.

particular idea coming from his many important references, namely the close interconnectedness of religion (in the then context of Christianity) and education (even today) in the country to which Comenius had a relationship all his life, but which (due to further historical development of the last century) distanced itself from the connection between religion and education?<sup>2</sup> Is it justifiable to consider religious education as an integral part of general education? In what form? And if we want to thematise spiritual competence<sup>3</sup> in the Czech pedagogical environment and take into account the discourse which is used to define it abroad, what characterises it and how can it be inspiring for education in our country?

The text is written with the knowledge that in the history of pedagogy there are many authors who would see the relationship between religion and education critically<sup>4</sup> or even counterproductively.<sup>5</sup> For many educators, especially from the generation that has gone through the education system in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, the relationship between education and religion in pedagogical practice is a closed chapter. This text would like to contribute, among other things, to the resumption of discussion by presenting concrete arguments.

I will approach the topic in the following steps. First, I name the potential of the relationship between religion and education (2) with the example of Comenius's thesis on the 'One Thing Necessary' (2.1) and with a summary of several generally accepted arguments from foreign literature supporting the legitimacy of this connection in the present (2.2). Subsequently, I will define the concept of spiritual competence, which I specify on examples from abroad (3). Finally, I will offer answers to the above questions (4).

This paper is a kind of *coming out*, a moving towards Czech education with the assumption that more than three hundred and fifty years after Comenius and thirty years after the Velvet Revolution, despite the burden of prejudices and stereotypes, we will agree on the fact that the conversation between people who consider themselves 'religiously non-musical'<sup>6</sup> and those that could be described as 'religiously musical' could be a necessity and an enrichment for both parties.<sup>7</sup> In this

2 It is a historical fact that, at the time of Comenius, religion was a major topic in Europe. More precisely, there were various denominations within Christianity, which, among other things, caused Comenius to go into exile. Today, religion in Europe is a recurring theme, albeit more as a result of encounters with Muslim culture. In our country, subscribing to a religious faith is no longer the subject of persecution or even exile, as was the case until the 1990s (Cf., for example, Stanislav BALÍK and Jiří HANUŠ, *Katolická církev v Československu 1945–1989*, Brno: CDK, 2007), however, faith remains on the fringes of the interest of the majority of the population or even completely outside of it. See more in Dana HAMPLOVÁ and Blanka ŘEHÁKOVÁ, *Česká religiozita na počátku 3. tisíciletí. Výsledky Mezinárodního programu sociálního výzkumu ISSP 2008 – Náboženství*, Sociologické studie / Sociological Studies 09:2, Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2009; Zdeněk R. NEŠPOR (ed.), *Jaká víra? Současná česká religiozita/spiritualita v pohledu kvalitativní sociologie náboženství*, Sociologické studie / Sociological Studies 04:05, Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2004.

3 In foreign literature, we encounter the terms 'religiöse Kompetenz', 'religious competence', 'kompetencie religijne', 'competenza religiosa', 'competencia religiosa'. For the purposes of this article and given the Czech context, the term 'spiritual competence' will be used instead of the literal translation 'religious competence'. The reason is that the term 'spiritual' rather reflects the anthropological side of man, similar to the term 'transcendent', while the term 'religious' refers to a particular religion. Pedagogy as a science related to man should think about him in his entirety and thus with this 'anthropological constant'. © Eva MURONOVÁ, *Spiritální dimenze kultury školy na základní škole na příkladu ČR. Příspěvek k diskuzi z náboženskopedagogického pohledu*. Disertační práce, 2011 (online), available at: [https://is.muni.cz/th/opvtr/DISERTACE\\_KOMPLET.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/opvtr/DISERTACE_KOMPLET.pdf), cited 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2021; David HAY and Rebecca NYE, *The Spirit of the Child*, London – Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006. By using the term, among other things, the author expresses the fact that he does not want people to become members of a church, but he wants a discussion on pedagogical, resp. religious pedagogical level, which monitors primarily the personal development of man.

4 See, for example, Comenius's meeting with René Descartes.

5 An overview of specific authors and their arguments would go beyond the scope of the text.

6 To know more about the term 'Religious Unmusicality' see, for example, David BIERNOT, *Nenáboženský člověk a post-sekularismus: „Náboženská nemuzikálnost“* Richarda Rortyho, *Theologická revue* 4/2013, pp. 443–474.

7 © Grundlegende Kompetenzen religiöser Bildung (on-line), ed. Dietlind FISCHER and Volker ELSNBAST, available at: <http://www.sander-gaiser.de/Bildungsstandardscomenius.pdf>, cited 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020, p. 23.

sense, this text is an attempt to revive one of the key starting points of Comenius's thinking in the Czech environment and to become inspired by the search for possible ways to update it.<sup>8</sup>

Today, a number of authors ask questions of a similar focus. They are asking about the potential of religion and spirituality in general education:<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Schweitzer,<sup>10</sup> Christoph Lüth,<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Rekus,<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Nieke,<sup>13</sup> or Georg Hardecker<sup>14</sup> (in the German environment); David Hay and Rebeca Nye<sup>15</sup>, or Julian Stern<sup>16</sup> (in the English-speaking area); and Radim Palouš<sup>17</sup>, Jan Sokol<sup>18</sup>, Ludmila Muchová<sup>19</sup>, Eva Muroňová<sup>20</sup>, Noemi Bravená<sup>21</sup>, or Zuzana Svobodová<sup>22</sup> (in the Czech environment). Spirituality in pedagogical practice is becoming the topic of some bachelor's and master's theses.<sup>23</sup>

Also, a number of psychological and neurobiological studies, speak of 'spiritual intelligence',<sup>24</sup> 'relationship awareness'<sup>25</sup> as a basic category of spirituality,<sup>26</sup> or 'how a particular spiritual practice transforms the human brain'.<sup>27</sup> This justifies one to assume that religious, spiritual, or transcendent dimensions are integral parts of man. These adjectives need to be seen rather synonymously

8 The relationship between religion and education can be viewed from many angles. It is explored by one entire field of science – religious pedagogy. Religious pedagogy is a discipline that moves between pedagogy and theology. It substantiates the goals, contents, methods, and institutions of religious education and training pedagogically. For it, theology is a metapedagogical science from which it derives basic principles. In addition to other humanities and social sciences, theology is also a related science. It has a critical dialogue with them and adds new perspectives and impulses. It is a field that is no longer defined by mere confessional grounding in a particular church, but is devoted to religious education, interfaith dialogue, respect, human dignity... or, more broadly, to the spiritual manifestations of man and his sensitisation in the broadest sense. © Profil katedry (online), available at: <https://www.tf.jcu.cz/o-fakulte/katedry-a-oddeleni/katedra-pedagogiky/profil-katedry>, cited 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

9 Here it is necessary to transcend the horizon of perception of religious education (as defined, for example, by Jan Průcha) as education intended for believers. Jan PRŮCHA, *Moderní pedagogika*, Praha: Portál, 1997.

10 Friedrich SCHWEITZER, *Bildung*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014; Friedrich SCHWEITZER, Die religiöse Dimension der wissenschaftlichen Pädagogik in der Pluralität – Traditionen, Herausforderungen, Lösungsmodelle, in: *Religion in der Allgemeinen Pädagogik. Von der Religion als Grundlegung bis zu ihrer Bestreitung*. Religionspädagogik in pluraler Gesellschaft (RPG), vol. 9, ed. Hans-Georg ZIEBERTZ and Günter R. SCHMIDT, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006, pp. 88–99.

11 Christoph LÜTH, Allgemeine Pädagogik und Religion. Zum Verhältnis von Bildung, Erziehung und Religion, in: *Religion in der Allgemeinen Pädagogik. Von der Religion als Grundlegung bis zu ihrer Bestreitung*. Religionspädagogik in pluraler Gesellschaft (RPG), svazek 9, ed. Hans-Georg ZIEBERTZ and Günter R. SCHMIDT, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006, pp. 40–59.

12 Jürgen REKUS, Der religiöse Aspekt pädagogischen Handelns, in: *Religion in der Allgemeinen Pädagogik. Von der Religion als Grundlegung bis zu ihrer Bestreitung*. Religionspädagogik in pluraler Gesellschaft (RPG), svazek 9, ed. Hans-Georg ZIEBERTZ and Günter R. SCHMIDT, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006, pp. 102–114.

13 Wolfgang NIEKE, Religion als Bestandteil von Allgemeinbildung: Weltorientierung statt Religionslehre, in: *Religion in der Allgemeinen Pädagogik. Von der Religion als Grundlegung bis zu ihrer Bestreitung*. Religionspädagogik in pluraler Gesellschaft (RPG), vol. 9, ed. Hans-Georg ZIEBERTZ and Günter R. SCHMIDT, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006, pp. 191–210.

14 Georg HARDECKER, *Bildung – Eindruck und Ausdruck der Religion: eine systematische Analyse von Schleiermachers Bildungsverständnis aus fundamentealthischer Perspektive*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021.

15 HAY and NYE, *The Spirit...*

16 Julian STERN, *Teaching Religious Education. Researchers in the Classroom*, 2. ed., London – New York: Bloomsbury, 2018.

17 Radim PALOÚŠ and Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ, *Homo educandus. Filosofické základy teorie výchovy*, Praha: Karolinum, 2020.

18 Jan SOKOL, *Filosofická antropologie*, Praha: Portál, 2002; Jan SOKOL, *Člověk a náboženství*, Praha: Portál, 2003.

19 Ludmila MUCHOVÁ, *Úvod do náboženské pedagogiky*, Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 1994.

20 © Eva MUROŇOVÁ, Spirituální...

21 BRAVENÁ, *Přesah...*

22 Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ, *Nelhostejnost: Črty k (ne)náboženské výchově*, Praha: Malvern, 2005.

23 For example, Renáta MATUŠŮ, *Spiritualita pedagogů v tradičním a alternativním vzdělávání*, Zlín: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, 2016. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10563/37167>. Tomas Bata University in Zlín. Faculty of Humanities, Department of Pedagogical Sciences. Thesis supervisor Suchánková, Eliška; Kamila KEPKOVÁ, *Spiritualita jako duševní podstata školy*, Brno, 2017. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/ce7zts/>. Bachelor thesis. Masaryk University, Faculty of Education. Thesis supervisor Lenka Gulová; Anna RŮŽIČKOVÁ, *Křesťanství jako zdroj inspirace při rozvíjení spirituality v mateřské škole*, České Budějovice: Teologická fakulta Jihočeské univerzity, 2020. Available at: [https://theses.cz/id/bijr1e/DP\\_Ruzickova\\_Anna.pdf](https://theses.cz/id/bijr1e/DP_Ruzickova_Anna.pdf). Thesis. University of South Bohemia, Faculty of Theology. Thesis supervisor Ludmila Muchová.

24 Ian MARSHALL and Danah ZOHAR, *Spirituální inteligence*, Praha: Mladá fronta, 2003.

25 HAY and NYE, *The Spirit...*

26 Cf. © Eva MUROŇOVÁ, Spirituální...

27 Andrew NEWBERG, *How God Changes Your Brain*, New York: Random House, 2010.

in the breadth of the discourse in which they are used. This will also be the case in this article, which can be confusing for readers. This is, firstly, due to the different meaning in which the word *religious* is used abroad in connection with education, that is, not explicitly related to any particular institution, but related to the spiritual dimension of the individual as well. Secondly, it is caused by the fact that there is no clear consensus in the Czech environment about the name of the subject of this article.

## 2. The Potential of the Relationship Between Religion and Education

### 2.1 Comenius's *One Thing Necessary*

By reading Comenius's book *One Thing Necessary*, we find two things. On the one hand, the author reflects the fact that religion – in the historical circumstances of his life in particular – ‘has become a labyrinth, more confusing than anything else in the world.’<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, he is critical to the tendencies which are suspicious and say ‘that none is real, and everything is fabled.’<sup>29</sup> He writes of Christianity: ‘One part of Christians, however, believes and boasts about the fact that they are outside the labyrinth. They claimed to be so well organized under one head’<sup>30</sup> that disagreements cannot easily arise [...] However, if someone examined the laws of this unity closer, they would see a professionally constructed labyrinth.’<sup>31</sup>

The Labyrinth is an image that helps Comenius describe the reality of life. In addition to labyrinths, he also talks about the Sisyphean boulders or Tantalus's pleasures, which, in addition to religion, he also discovers elsewhere, for example, in politics or education.<sup>32</sup> Behind these sayings of ancient literature, we sense a thousand and one reasons for resignation, despair.<sup>33</sup> It is appropriate to ask not only for Ariadne's thread justifying (conscious) man's stay in labyrinths, but, above all, for the deeper meaning of this wandering. Comenius asks: ‘... why would God put such ingrained desires into the human heart if he had never wanted to fulfil them?’<sup>34</sup> ‘Why would that not be easy for our God to give man – his creation (who was created direct and simple, but who, through endless questions, becomes entangled in labyrinths of errors from which there is no escape, Ecclesiastes 7:29) a powerful stimulus and a way to return to the original straightforwardness and simplicity?’<sup>35</sup> Comenius devotes a substantial part of his book to the process of finding answers to these questions and proposing specific steps. He thus touches on the issue of limits, which are set in human life by the systems. In these, one is obliged to move. It could be the church. It can also be a school environment.

According to Comenius, the only reason for wandering through labyrinths is the inability of people to distinguish the necessary from the unnecessary.<sup>36</sup> And in order to get out of all the labyrinths, Comenius recommends finding a ‘*thread of simplicity* against many or too many elements.’<sup>37</sup> He

28 KOMENSKÝ, *Jedno...*, p. 44.

29 Ibid., p. 44.

30 Comenius means the pope here.

31 KOMENSKÝ, *Jedno...*, p. 45.

32 For more information, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 35–40.

33 What would Comenius's conversation with other personalities be like? He talked to René Descartes. But what if he talked to Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, or representatives of existentialism (not only in its Christian but also atheistic form)?

34 KOMENSKÝ, *Jedno...*, p. 47.

35 Ibid., p. 47f.

36 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51–65.

37 Ibid., p. 83.



means: 'Man should unite within oneself in God and with God – and not to expand outside of oneself and not to expand using things. And even when something is necessary, one should not to go further than is necessary.'<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, as Comenius notes, the most important thing is to be satisfied 'not with a few or one of the external values (*contentum esse... bonis extra se*), but *with oneself*, with one's internal values (gifts – *interioribus bonis suis*). These cannot be taken from man.'<sup>39</sup> And there is knowledge that 'all your goodness, man, comes from the image of God (according to which you were created). The more you become the archetype, God, the more goodness will come to you.'<sup>40</sup>

Did Comenius, with his question about One Thing Necessary and by focusing on the inner values, approach Nicholas of Cusa's idea of learned ignorance?<sup>41</sup> Or did he approach the experience of a generation younger's great mystics of Christianity, Theresa of Ávila<sup>42</sup> or John of the Cross,<sup>43</sup> who draw attention to the interior in the intentions of Carmelite spirituality?<sup>44</sup> Is there a question of meaning behind Comenius's search that could be applied today?<sup>45</sup>

Comenius thinks of his answer explicitly in a Christian way. The Christian religion provides him with a dictionary which allows him to name the essentials. Is it possible to understand Comenius's legacy without knowing this dictionary? More generally and more broadly, is it possible to name some important facts of life without knowing the dictionary of religion?

## 2.1 Religion and General Education

The traditional place of presence of religious content in the school environment is the teaching of religion at primary school. Thus, the claim arising from the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms,<sup>46</sup> which declares freedom of religious expression, among other things, through teaching, is realised. The conditions of this teaching at state schools are further stipulated in accordance with this Charter in the Education Act (§ 15),<sup>47</sup> where the optional subject *religion* is explicitly mentioned. After many decades of factual elimination of religious topics from school education, this was good news. But it was encouraging only until the core subjects of education and supplementary subjects of education were included in the Framework of Educational Programmes in 2004. The optional subject found itself on the level of an after-school activity, outside this framework. While ethical or drama education at that time was included in the offer of 'additional' subjects (from which the student must choose several) included in school curricula, the optional subject religion remained outside.

In schools, the space for talking about the topics of religion, about issues that transcend us, was left in the social sciences or in the context of some cross-curricular topics. This position raises the need for another question. Namely, how to preserve the freedom of the individual on the one hand, and, on the other hand, not to reduce the theme of religion to a mere list of information only.<sup>48</sup>

38 Ibid., p. 86.

39 Ibid., p. 209; cf. also p. 211.

40 Ibid., p. 93.

41 Gerhard WEHR, *Der Mystiker Nicolaus Cusanus*, Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2011.

42 Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582).

43 John of the Cross (1542–1591).

44 See, for example, Maria-Eugen GRIALOU, *Ich will Gott schauen. Weg des Getauften mit den Meistern des Karmel*, Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1993.

45 Viktor Emil FRANKL, *Vůle ke smyslu*, Brno: Cesta, 2006; Franz KETT and Robert KOCZY, *Die Religionspädagogische Praxis. Ein Weg der Menschenbildung*, Landshut: RPA-Verlag, 2009.

46 © PS PČR, Listina základních práv a svobod, (online), available at: <https://www.psp.cz/docs/laws/listina.html>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

47 © MŠMT, Školský zákon svobod, (online), available at: <https://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty-3/skolsky-zakon-ve-zneni-ucinnem-ode-dne-27-2-2021>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

48 See the section below: 2.4 Types of speech about religion in the educational process.

### 2.2.1 Change the Viewing Angle

Christian Kahrs<sup>49</sup> offers a possible answer through his call to change the perspective. He does not use the paradigm of individual subjects, but the paradigm of the phenomenon of religion inherent in all people. Kahrs assumes that during our lifetime, in certain situations, we ask ourselves, in varying degrees, the question of meaning and of our relationship to what transcends our lives.<sup>50</sup> Kahrs understands religion 'in terms of the theory and practice concerning the basic processes of perception of the environment and the world'.<sup>51</sup> Because everyone has their own private religion,<sup>52</sup> it is necessary, for keeping 'freedom and peace'<sup>53</sup> among people, to cultivate it by education.

Kahrs puts forward a concept of religious education that is compulsory for all students in such a way that 'private religion is confronted with the plurality of religions in a critical comparison within educational processes [...] one must use a variety of denominational views, values and forms'.<sup>54</sup> He offers even more arguments that, in short, rightly place religious education in the mainstream of school education.

General education asks about what is generally human in each individual. If we ask who a person is,<sup>55</sup> we must also take his transcendent side seriously.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, while it is justified to claim that religion should be and is a private matter, this does not mean that it is not one of the goals of general education. For man, it is a constitutive quality of human existence,<sup>57</sup> incomparable with football or love of nature expressed by membership in a fan club or in a gardeners' association.

Volker Ladenthin puts it unequivocally: 'Whether or not religion is a proper subject in school cannot be determined on the basis of one's religious affiliation, i.e. whether one is a believer or not. Rather, it is appropriate to ask – regardless of one's own position – whether "religiosity" is a constitutive element of humanity or not'.<sup>58</sup> The content of religion is a question of faith. The fact of faith itself, that is, if it is possible to believe, and also the question of whether it is appropriate to believe, are open to rational argumentation. As such, they are the subject of general education.

### 2.2.2 Education Concept

Education can be defined in various ways. In addition, the term which we use for education, that is, for the situation 'in which learning takes place on the part of an entity, i.e. a certain type of information is directly or indirectly revealed to this entity by another entity',<sup>59</sup> has a specific semantic tone in each language.

In German, the term *Bildung* was constituted for this process. The root of the word we translate as education is the word *Bild*. This fact implicitly refers to the biblical conception of man 'created as

49 Christian KAHRS, *Öffentliche Bildung privater Religion. Plädoyer für einen „Fachbereich Religion“ – obligatorisch für alle*, Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 2009.

50 This includes respect for the negative response.

51 KAHRS, *Öffentliche...*, p. 9.

52 In the sense of the fact that religion is everyone's personal matter.

53 KAHRS, *Öffentliche...*, p. 22.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

55 Emerich CORETH, *Co je člověk?*, Praha: Zvon, 1994; Vladimír BOUBLÍK, *Teologická antropologie*, Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2001; Naděžda PELCOVÁ, *Filozofická a pedagogická antropologie*, Praha: Karolinum, 2004; Erwin DIRSCHERL, *Grundriss Theologischer Anthropologie*, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2006.

56 POLÁKOVÁ, *Perspektiva...*

57 A number of ethnological and ethological studies offer evidence of this. For more information see Volker LADENTHIN, Braucht Bildung Religion?: das Fach Religion aus der Perspektive der Allgemeinen Pädagogik, *Katechetische Blätter* 5/1999, pp. 350–359.

58 LADENTHIN, Braucht..., p. 350.

59 PRŮCHA, *Moderní...*, p. 59.

the image of God' (Gen 1:27).<sup>60</sup> This determines one's uniqueness and at the same time one's own understanding of the process of education as such. It is, namely, about the contribution to the realisation of this uniqueness so that man is truly 'in the picture', oneself.<sup>61</sup> It is about the achievement of the fullness of one's realisation, in theological language, holiness. Education understood in this way naturally contains a religious level and it is not possible to think about it without this level.

Another argument for the need to include the issue of religion, resp. spirituality, in the thoughts about education is Jürgen Baumert's thesis about the four ways of meeting the 'world'.<sup>62</sup> These are anthropologically irreplaceable and cover the full range of things which one should encounter in the process of education in order to be educated in an appropriate unity. Baumert distinguishes:

1. **the cognitive-instrumental level** encompassing subjects such as mathematics or science;
2. **the moral-evaluative level**, which includes areas such as history, economy, politics, or law;
3. **the aesthetic-expressive level**, which includes areas such as language, literature, art or music;
4. **the level of constitutive rationality** which is covered by disciplines such as religion or philosophy.

Considering this reasoning, it is clear that, 'given the overall educational task of the school, the religious dimension is irreplaceable',<sup>63</sup> and that religion 'is an essential contribution to general and personal development'.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.2.3 Global Competence

Religious, resp. spiritual competence is not a direct topic of documents of the highest international importance, such as Agenda 2030<sup>65</sup> and the resulting programming documents for education, however, it is implicitly included in the global competence.<sup>66</sup> 'The starting point of the PISA study is education, which considers religious education to be an essential part of general education.'<sup>67</sup> The OECD defines global competence as a multi-layered, lifelong goal, where 'individuals can examine local, global, and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and worldviews, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being'.<sup>68</sup> Considering its sub-objectives, which directly affect the issue of religion, respectively spirituality, it is the development of intercultural receptivity and respect in direct experience with respect for different nationalities, languages, and cultures, the

60 God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

61 KOMENSKÝ, *Jedno...*, p. 93. For more see also the above section 2.1.

62 Jürgen BAUMERT, Deutschland im internationalen Bildungsvergleich, in: *Die Zukunft der Bildung*, ed. Nelson KILLIUS, Jürgen KLUGE and Linda REISCH, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, pp. 100–150.

63 © Günther BADER, Religiöse Bildung und Wertevermittlung in der Schule? Zum Anspruch und Profil eines kompetenzorientierten Religionsunterrichts, *Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 18/2010, (online), available at: <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/oerf/content/titleinfo/111449/full.pdf>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, p. 12.

64 © Martin JÄGGLE and Philipp KLUTZ, Überarbeiteter Lehrplan für den katholischen Religionsunterricht an der Volksschule, *Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 18/2010 (online), available: <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/oerf/content/titleinfo/111469/full.pdf>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, p. 59.

65 © Sustainable Development Goals, (online), available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

66 © Norman de Paula ARRUDA FILHO, The agenda 2030 for responsible management education: An applied methodology, *The International Journal of Management Education* 15/2017, (online), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2017.02.010>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, pp. 183–191.

67 © Grundlegende Kompetenzen..., p. 13.

68 © OECD: PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework, (online), available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/b25efab8-en.pdf?expires=1606838233&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=1D1CB6C3C18A92F0F958D734CD948271>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, p. 166.

development of the ability to seek one's identity in the community and in the world, or the ability to express opinions and choose appropriate forms of action.<sup>69</sup> Their legitimacy is justified by the need for a harmonious life in a multicultural society, sensitivity to intercultural understanding and mutual respect, as ethnic and cultural conflicts have become the most common cause of violence in the world, with religious affiliation playing an important role.<sup>70</sup>

According to PISA,<sup>71</sup> religion is a topic of education because it represents a concrete approach to the world, which is specific in many respects.<sup>72</sup>

In the case of religious education, it then matters whether we are talking about religious issues from within or from without, whether our efforts are religious speech or we just speak about religion. In the discussion on interfaith education, a distinction was established between three different types of speech below about religion within the educational process.<sup>73</sup>

**Learning in religion:** The mono-religious model (teaching 'in' religion) consciously aims to introduce young people into one particular religious tradition and assumes that they will gradually fully grow into the community of this religious tradition. Typically, this means a form of learning that seriously takes into account a legitimate interest of the person professing, for example, Christianity to know the chosen religion more deeply and to live it.

**Learning about religion:** The multi-religious model (teaching 'about' religion) is based on the fact that young people are introduced either in parallel or gradually into different religious or worldview traditions, without having any relation to these traditions. They can therefore assess them on the basis of bare information only. Typically, this means learning that leads to the acquisition of basic information about individual religions in order to know and orient oneself in them.

**Learning from religion:** The inter-religious model (learning 'from' religion) deals with important life questions and seeks out the answers offered by different religious and worldview traditions in their similarities and differences. Individual worldviews or religious perspectives are analysed using four perspectives: their stories, their ethics, their life in the community, and their rituals. The arguments and questions that individual religions and worldviews present to the person are examined. It is done in comparison with one's own life and, at the same time, in dialogue in which the partners exchange their perspectives. This third model is neither an inside view (in) nor an

69 According to the OECD, schools have a crucial role to play in developing this competence in young people. The school has the opportunity to offer space for critical thinking about global development, which is important not only with regard to the whole world, but also with regard to the individual's own life. Topics mainly include critical, effective, and responsible use of digital information and social networks, the development of intercultural receptivity and respect in direct experience with respect for different nationalities, languages, and cultures, the development of the ability to seek one's identity in the community and the world, or the ability to express opinions and choose appropriate forms of action. The authors of the OECD document refer here to the authors such as Castle SINICROPE, John NORRIS and Yukiko WATANABE, *Understanding and Assessing Intercultural Competence: A Summary of Theory, Research and Practice*, Technical Report for the Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project, *Second Language Studies*, Vol. 26/1, (online), available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid=D8D4BD8E0C5918D895EFC04B36C738E4?doi=10.1.1.517.1193&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, pp. 1–58; or Robert HANVEY, *An Attainable Global Perspective*, New York: Center for War/Peace Studies, 1975. See more at © OECD: PISA 2018...

70 Cf. © OECD: PISA 2018...

71 The PISA study seeks to identify and capture the degree of global competence (and thus religious/spiritual competence) at a cognitive level and on the basis of a questionnaire that helps to name broader contexts. For example, students' ability to think critically about global issues is examined. The influence of worldview and the different perspectives of those involved are taken into account. Pupils are also asked about topics that can document the degree of their ability to communicate and think in categories of interculturality, or reflect the degree of presence of these categories in school, or thematise forms of dealing with diversity and working with conflicts. The study also monitors the application of specific concepts of intercultural education, and also the method of teacher training which develops global competence in teaching. See more at © OECD: PISA 2018...

72 See more at © Martin ROTHGANGEL, *Kompetenzorientierter Religionsunterricht in Deutschland: Bildungswissenschaftliche und religionspädagogische Aspekte*, *Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 18/2010, (online), available at: <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/download/pdf/111445?name=Rothgangel%20Martin%20Kompetenzorientierter%20Religionsunterricht%20in%20Deutschland>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, p. 4. This is also confirmed by Baumert's fourth way of meeting the world, see chapter 2.3 above.

73 Cf., for example, © Grundlegende Kompetenzen..., p. 15.



outside view (about). It represents a specific form of sharing and dialogue.<sup>74</sup>

After experience with the last variant, the experts recommend deepening the hermeneutic dynamics of learning about religion significantly, through a communicative exchange directly between the students in the classroom. This critical encounter reinforces the ability to look deeper into one's own system, which gives one meaning in life, and to further explore the existential resilience that this system offers.<sup>75</sup> Religions with their traditions retain great potential. Such possibility cannot be drained by information about which statue adorns the facade of the building only. We also touch on the issue of a person's place in society, or even his search for himself, which is connected with it.

### 3. Spiritual Competence

#### 3.1. Definition of the Concept of Spiritual Competence

As in the field of religious pedagogy, the ability to interconnect the world of theological disciplines and the world of social sciences will be desirable in order to define spiritual<sup>76</sup> competence.<sup>77</sup> After all, the concept of spiritual competence implies a theological and pedagogical point of view.

In order to acquire concrete content for the concept of spiritual competence, it will be good to look at how it is considered in the context of religious education first.

Religious, resp. spiritual,<sup>78</sup> competence was dealt with by Ulrich Hemel in his habilitation thesis.<sup>79</sup> Even after several decades, his publications are among the standard works on the issue in German-speaking countries. According to him, this competence should primarily benefit the pupils' orientation in the given issue. Hemel writes: 'This (orientation) is an important role of school and family, education and upbringing in the information society.'<sup>80</sup> He says that the plurality of competing concepts of meaning 'causes orientation stress'. Recognising what one really wants is one of the biggest challenges not only for young people.<sup>81</sup> He then defines spiritual competence as 'an achievable, complex ability of responsible managing of one's own religiosity in its various dimensions and its changes in one's life story.'<sup>82</sup>

The authors, who phenomenologically observed the ways how religion manifests itself, tried to name the character of religion more specifically.<sup>83</sup> One of the most important of these is the American religious psychologist Charles Y. Glock. He distinguished the typical common features of different religions and named the various levels of human religiosity in the 1960s. He determi-

74 A specific model is, for example, communicative theology. Bernd Jochen HILBEREATH and Matthias SCHARER, *Kommunikative Theologie. Grundlagen – Erfahrungen – Klärungen*, Mainz: Grünewald, 2012.

75 A specific didactic model is, for example, an interaction focused on the topic of Ruth C. Cohn. See more at © Die wesentlichen Elemente des TZI-Konzepts, (online), available at: <https://www.ruth-cohn-institute.org/tzi-konzept.html>, cited 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

76 This term also includes what is meant by the discourse on religious competence in foreign literature. See above.

77 Reinhold BOSCHKI, *Einführung in die Religionspädagogik*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Darmstadt: WBG, 2015, p. 18; Burkard PORZELT, *Grundlegung religiöses Lernen*, Bad Heilbrunn: UTB, 2009, p. 14f.

78 The German language environment uses the term 'religiöse Kompetenz'. It includes not only explicit religious significance, but also a reflection of general anthropological quality, which is called 'spiritual competence' in the English language area. Due to the history of the relationship towards the concept of religion in the Czech environment and also due to the element of reflection at the pedagogical level, I prefer the term 'spiritual competence' in the next part of the text, even if I use the term 'religious competence' with regard to the original author.

79 Ulrich HEMEL, *Ziele religiöser Erziehung*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988.

80 © Ulrich HEMEL, Religiöse Kompetenz als Ziel des Religionsunterrichts, (online), available at: [https://institut-fuer-sozialstrategie.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/rel\\_vortrag\\_religioese\\_kompetenz.pdf](https://institut-fuer-sozialstrategie.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/rel_vortrag_religioese_kompetenz.pdf), cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, p. 2.

81 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 3.

82 HEMEL, *Ziele...*, p. 674.

83 Cf. PORZELT, *Grundlegung...*, pp. 65–82.

ned five qualities, which were subsequently commented on, changed, shortened, or expanded in various ways by other authors.<sup>84</sup> These are an experimental dimension, ritualistic dimension, ideological dimension, intellectual dimension, and consequential dimension;<sup>85</sup> that is, an area involving specific religious experiences, often of a very personal nature, an area expressed by specific religious rituals, an area of a specific doctrine of faith, an area of rational self-reflection of religious practice and faith, and an area of how one's relationship to religion manifests itself in a particular person's behaviour.

After a critical reflection on Glock's conclusions, which he found too general, Hemel tried to name them in such a way that they could be distinguished even in everyday pedagogical work.<sup>86</sup> When he speaks of the dimensions of religiosity, he means 'different perspectives of one and the same ability – to name oneself and the world religiously'.<sup>87</sup>

On this basis, he sets out the following five dimensions (the first four forming the basis and the fifth being the overarching one), which make it possible to grasp more specifically the various aspects of the context of spiritual competence.

#### **Dimension of religious receptivity, resp. competence to perceive religiously**

This is the affective side of religiosity. The development of perception and feeling for religious reality is important. It is therefore a personal competence. Pupils should develop the ability to perceive silence or beauty or to practice the skill of asking 'what is more than...?', etc.

#### **Dimension of religious knowledge, resp. competence to acquire religious knowledge**

This is the cognitive side of religiosity. It is important to develop the general ability to think also in theological categories. This presupposes the preferential development of one's 'mother tongue' and one's own worldview / religious tradition. This is the position from which it is then possible to learn about other traditions. It is therefore a cognitive competence. Pupils should have a standard of basic knowledge of their own worldview / religious tradition.

#### **Dimension of religious communication, resp. competence to understand and use religious forms of speech**

This is the communicative aspect of religiosity. It covers wide areas from orientation in the symbolic language of worship to a discussion group dealing with biblical texts, from a family conversation to a television talk show. It is therefore a social competence. Pupils should develop the ability to argue in favour of their worldview / religious beliefs or listen, with an understanding, to another person's arguments.

#### **Dimension of religious ability to express oneself, resp. competence to act religiously**

This is the pragmatic aspect of religiosity. It includes the ability to orient oneself in a specific religious environment and to take an appropriate attitude of socially appropriate behaviour (at baptism, marriage, or when attending Midnight Mass at Christmas). It is therefore a competence to act. Pupils should master the process of worship services and understand the importance of attitudes and other processes.

#### **Dimension of religious shaping of life, resp. competence to live religiously**

This is the aspect of the subjective significance of religiosity, and its development means the ability to distinguish the personal significance of religion for one's own life. It is therefore an affective

84 Cf. Detlef POLLACK, Was ist Religion? Probleme der Definition, *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 2/1995, p. 176f.

85 Translatable into English as: experiential dimension, ritual dimension, scientific dimension, dimension of rational reflection, dimension of consequences for life practice. Charles Young GLOCK, Über die Dimensionen der Religiosität, in: Joachim MATTHES, *Kirche und Gesellschaft. Einführung in die Religionssoziologie II*, Reinbeck: Rowolth, 1969, p. 151.

86 HEMEL, *Ziele...*, pp. 564–583.

87 © HEMEL, *Religiöse Kompetenz...*, p. 6.

competence. Pupils should reflect on the possibilities of shaping their lives according to their own religious beliefs.

Hemel's contribution is that he thematises spiritual competence as a multi-layered phenomenon.<sup>88</sup> Religious pedagogue Mirjam Schambeck offers a critical reflection on Hemel's proposed competencies.<sup>89</sup> Considering the key question, that is, *What does religious education want?*, she responds to it by bringing the need to realise that spiritual competence includes first and foremost a personal, reasoned attitude to this phenomenon and then the ability to apply religion to one's own understanding of the world and life. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between different degrees of interest and levels of adoption.

Schambeck distinguishes the following three:

- At the first level, it is a meeting with something else, something that is good to learn. In this case, it is a religion that we have perceived in some way, but rather sporadically and abruptly, without any claim to a more detailed understanding and thinking.
- At the second level, we consciously ask ourselves how this – in this case religion – can be intellectually grasped. There is an obvious attempt to obtain a 'balance' between religion and one's own patterns of understanding of the world and life.
- Finally, at the third level, we go through a constructively transformative process that transforms both into a meeting of my patterns of understanding of the world and religion.

Schambeck sees the core of spiritual competence in this ability to grasp religion at these three levels and thus deepens the view on Hemel's conception. In addition, Schambeck is well aware of the fact that not all levels, which she uses to specify the discussion of spiritual competence, can be deepened without further reflection in school.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, it is true that 'religion will remain empty if one does not grasp it in the service of oneself – but it also remains more than what people make of it.'<sup>91</sup> Schambeck thus seeks to strike a balance between both the functional contribution of religion and its substantive value, which lies in its own value, that is, in the value which it has in itself. Thus, within the base of its self-understanding, religion serves man and, in its traditional forms, is beneficial, for example, to the prevention of fundamentalism if it corrects what people create from religion.<sup>92</sup>

This list of dimensions of spiritual competence can be understood both as an 'area of interest' to which education pays adequate attention and as 'levels of getting closer to religion.'<sup>93</sup>

Contexts in which religion, resp. spiritual level, can exist in the school space are as follows:<sup>94</sup>

- Subjective religion, resp. the spirituality of individual pupils, as well as all other actors in the school, their personal beliefs and values appreciating the potential of the diversity of religions and beliefs (as much as those belong to the life of society and to the interest of the pupils).
- Religion related to the subject, that is, the one which is represented by a specific teacher and

88 Cf. Mirjam SCHAMBECK, Was bedeutet „religiös kompetent“ zu sein?, *Katechetische Blätter* 2/2011, p. 132.

89 Ibid., pp. 133–137.

90 Ibid., p. 139.

91 Ibid., p. 137.

92 On the relationship between functional and substantive understanding of religion, see, for example, PORZELT, *Grundlegung...*, pp. 65–82.

93 Cf. © Grundlegende Kompetenzen..., p. 17.

94 Cf. ibid., p. 18.

guaranteeing church, or religion as a social and cultural phenomenon and its interdisciplinary overlaps (with respect to works of art, literature, or music, or due to ethical or political conduct).

### 3.2 Example of an Educational Plan (Germany)

What can an educational plan look like if it also reflects the development of spiritual competence? Looking abroad can be helpful when consolidating one's understanding of this fact.

In 2006, the Comenius-Institut Münster submitted a paper identifying twelve core competencies for such education.<sup>95</sup> It also made the material available for experts and their discussion. The institute invited them to the critical reading of this material, and the results of this discussion were subsequently published.<sup>96</sup>

The document formulates the following outputs:

At the end of basic education, the student

- is aware of his personal beliefs, or personal understanding of oneself and the world, and is able to express, justify, and defend it in the discussion with others;
- understands the plausibility of patterns in the area of religious interpretation of life events and is prepared to verify them;
- recognises the religious relevance of decision-making situations in one's own life and their processing with the help of religious argumentation;
- names, distinguishes, and interprets basic forms of religious speech (e.g., myth, parable, symbol, confession, prayer, liturgical attitudes, dogma, ordinances);
- approaches his own understanding of a particular religion (basic motives and important moments in history);
- knows the occasional arrangement of basic forms of religious practice (e.g., holidays, celebrations, rituals, diakonia) and reflects on their use;
- distinguishes between life-supporting and life-preventing forms of religion on the basis of specific criteria;
- reasonably deals with other religious, or worldview beliefs and respectfully communicates and cooperates with members of another worldview, confession, or religion;
- is able to express doubts and criticisms of religion as well as indifference and verifies their legitimacy;
- recognises and expresses the religious background of social traditions and structures (e.g., tolerance, welfare state, the distinction between working day and Sunday);
- can explain basic religious ideas (e.g., human dignity, love of neighbour, justice) and name the contribution of these basic values in social conflicts;
- identifies, critically distinguishes (considering ideology), and explains the importance of religious motives and elements in culture (e.g., literature, paintings, music, advertising, films, sports).

95 © Grundlegende Kompetenzen...

96 Ibid.



### 3.3 Example of an Educational Plan (Austria)

Pupils acquire spiritual competence<sup>97</sup> through the experience of open encounter

- with people and their life direction;
- with the religion they are learning about and becoming acquainted with;
- with the forms of the presence of religion in society;
- with worldview diversity.

At the end of basic education, the student

- thinks about understanding himself, the world, and personal faith which he can name in conversation;
- thinks about the difficulties of life and can name them in the light of the Christian faith;
- acquires the key texts of the Holy Scriptures, prayers, and the doctrines of the faith of his own religion and names them with regard to his own life;
- describes ethical issues and knows Christian-based patterns of behaviour;
- is familiar with the organisation of the temple space and has an overview of the most important Christian holidays and the practice of their celebration;
- recognises religiously motivated values and appreciates their importance in conflict situations;
- recognises, interprets, and embodies religious motifs from history and from the presence (in the media, art, and culture);
- describes other beliefs and develops a respectful culture of conversation;
- discovers forms of diversity in Europe and values them as enrichment and a challenge.

## 4. Spiritual Competence as ‘One Essential Thing’

This paper has offered several arguments justifying thoughts about linking religious education with general education. What was a matter of course for Comenius may seem like a long-overdue reality, but the ‘One Thing Necessary’ has not ceased to be the ‘One Thing Necessary’. I have supported this statement through argument based on the very understanding of the concept of education, the current educational goals of the OECD, as well as the call for a change of perspective. At the same time, I have indicated possible ways to implement this interconnection. The basis is to expand the professional pedagogical discussion by adding the topic of spiritual competence. In the school space, in addition to the legally permitted presence of the subject of religion, there could be a living respect for subjective religion, resp. for the spirituality of individual pupils, but also for all other actors in the school. This could be realised, for example, through the appreciation of potential of different motivations to maintain certain values and ethical or environmental behaviour. Another form could be a conscious and sensitive thematisation of religious and spiritual topics within interdisciplinary relationships, for example, with regard to works of art, literature, music, but also when experiencing sudden borderline situations.

For the Czech educational environment, which is generally very closed to institutionalised religion, the thematisation of the presence of spirituality can still be very inspiring, especially for the personal development of individuals. It is the cultivation of spiritual competence that enables

<sup>97</sup> Cf. © Lehrplan für den katholischen Religionsunterricht an der Volksschule, (online), available at: [https://www.schulamt.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Volksschule\\_LP\\_2014.pdf](https://www.schulamt.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Volksschule_LP_2014.pdf), cited 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021, p. 7.

one to consciously think about one's life and the great questions associated with it.<sup>98</sup> The honest answers, proven by tradition and offered by religions, especially by Christianity in our cultural context, subsequently open up space for critical dialogue. This is very beneficial for personal maturation, and it provides space for the search for one's own identity, which is an important prerequisite for life in the global world.<sup>99</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to ask a hypothetical question: What would Comenius think about the present situation? He would probably perceive the contemporary world as an even more sophisticated labyrinth, and for that very reason he would not stop asking about 'One Essential Thing'. For him, the issue of spiritual competence in education would become one of the moments which would need to be considered further. And he would find ways to project it into teaching. He would not miss the opportunity to engage in a dialogue of pedagogy and theology, education and religion. These are much more diverse and global today than at his time. It is thanks to this dialogue that we still have a possibility of seeing into the paradise of the heart.

### Contact

**Tomáš Cyril Havel, Dr. theol.**

University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice

Faculty of Theology

Department of Education

Kněžská 8, 370 01 České Budějovice

thavel@tf.jcu.cz

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> See the issue of global education in section 2.2.3.