

# RELIGION EDUCATION, RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

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AN IDEA ANALYSIS OF TWO DEBATES CONCERNING RE IN  
THE NORWEGIAN STORTING

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## Abbreviations

CoE	Council of Europe
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
Innst. O.	<i>Innstilling fra</i> [name of the Standing Committee] <i>om</i> [name of the issue]. A recommendation to the <i>Odelsting</i> from a Standing Committee in the Storting.
Innst. S.	<i>Innstilling fra</i> [name of the Standing Committee] <i>om</i> [name of the issue]. A recommendation to the Storting from a Standing Committee.
KRL	The first initialism used as a name for a Norwegian integrative RE subject, introduced in 1997. Before 2002 the full name was 'Christian Knowledge with Orientation on Religion and Life Stances' and after 2002 it was 'Christian and other religious and ethical education'.
KRLE	Initialism for the name of the RE subject in Norway since August 2015. The full name of the subject is 'Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics'.
MP	Member of Parliament
NOU	Official Norwegian Report, or Green Paper
O.tid.	<i>Odelstingstidende</i> , the published version of the proceedings from debates in the chamber of the Norwegian Storting called the <i>Odelsting</i> , where, until 2009, three quarters of Norwegian MPs were members.
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	The Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
Ot. prp.	<i>Odelstingsproposisjon</i> . A Proposition to the <i>Odelsting</i> , in which a government may propose new legislation.
RE	Religion Education
RLE	Name of the RE subject in Norway from august 2008 to 2015. The full name of the subject is 'Religious and Ethical Education'.
S.tid.	<i>Stortingstidende</i> , the published version of the proceedings from debates in the Norwegian Storting.
St. meld.	<i>Stortingsmelding</i> , Report to the Storting (White Paper).
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Committee

Translations of terminology used in Norwegian education are from the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training's online dictionary.<sup>1</sup> Translations of terminology associated with the Norwegian Storting are from the official English pages of the Storting<sup>2</sup> and the glossary published by the Storting.<sup>3</sup> Translations of Norwegian policy documents are, unless noted otherwise, my own.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.udir.no/arkivmappe/Ordbok/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/Stottemeny/Dictionary/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/diverse/glossary.pdf>



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# 1 A political-ideational approach to RE

## 1.1 Introduction

Politicians have played an active role in the shaping of the religion education (RE) subject in the Norwegian public education system, all the while negotiating ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education (Alberts, 2011; Andreassen, 2017; Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007; Gravem, 2004; L. L. Iversen, 2012, 2014; Plesner, 1998, 2013; Skeie & Bråten, 2014; Thomassen, 2006; Tuastad, 2006; Wingård, 2011). Through a hermeneutic (Gadamer, 2004), deductive, and descriptive idea analysis (Beckman, 2005; Bergström & Boréus, 2012; Bratberg, 2017) of two debates in the Norwegian Storting<sup>4</sup>, this dissertation contributes to understanding how politicians negotiate such ideas.

A political-ideational approach to RE is useful because it studies a vital part of RE: ideas about its relationship to religious traditions, its organisation and what the aims of RE ought to be, as expressed by a group of actors who have had, and still wield, significant influence on the shaping of the subject (Alberts, 2017, p. 191). The politicians express and negotiate ideas about what they want for society and how they understand the world, and in doing so provide us with an image of key ideas in society.

Furthermore, by analysing ideas about RE together with ideas about two other topics, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, it becomes possible to look for relationships among the ideas and to consider how they develop. In this way, a deeper appreciation of the way RE is part of both society and education may be achieved.

Norwegian RE has developed significantly since the confessional<sup>5</sup> Christianity subject<sup>6</sup> was replaced with the integrative subject known by the initialism KRL in 1997. The decision

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<sup>4</sup> The Norwegian Parliament is called the Storting. As of 2005, there are 169 seats in the Storting, and parliamentary elections are held every four years. An overview of the Storting's current Rules of Procedure may be found here: <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/Parliamentary-procedure/> (last accessed February 15, 2019). Note, however, that some of the policy documents referred to in this dissertation were directed to the *Odelsting* and not the Storting, due to the fact that until 2009, the Storting had two chambers, the *Odelsting* and the *Lagting*.

<sup>5</sup> In English, the word 'confessional' may be distinguished from 'denominational', whereas in Norwegian, the word *konfesjonell* may cover both these meanings (Bråten, 2013, pp. 22–23). The meaning and use of 'confessional' for the purposes of this dissertation is established and discussed in Section 3.1.

<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to refer to the former separative RE subject in Norway known as *kristendomskunnskap* as 'the Christianity subject'. This is a translation of the Norwegian word *kristendomsfaget*, which is frequently used to refer to this school subject.

resulted in controversy, ending with a judgement against Norway in the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 (Lied, 2009). For this reason, Norwegian politicians have had to consider their policies on RE carefully and repeatedly, for instance, how to balance a desire for integrative RE with the importance ascribed by some to Christianity as a cultural heritage and tradition for Norwegians. This recent history makes a study of the ideas expressed by Norwegian politicians relevant from the perspective of RE.

The approach taken in this dissertation is to analyse ideas expressed in two debates in the Norwegian Storting, one in 1995 and one in 2008. Both Norwegian society and the world in general have seen significant developments and changes between these two points in time. Globalisation, immigration, and increased diversity have influenced the way we understand religion, nationality, identity, and education. By looking closely at these two debates, another part of the picture of this development may be provided.

For each of the debates, ideas about RE have been analysed along with ideas about the relationships between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education. Focusing on proceedings from debates in the Storting, particularly only two such debates, is a new approach to studying the politics of RE, as is the use of idea analysis. The goal is to contribute, by means of a thorough analysis of the ideas expressed at two points in time, to furthering our understanding of the ideas expressed about RE and the two other topics, and to look for developments and relationships among them.

The phrase ‘ideas about RE’ refers to answers to questions such as why RE should be part of education, how it should be organised, and what the aims of RE ought to be. These ideas are the focus of the first research question of the dissertation:

*What developments in ideas about RE may be seen based on a comparison of ideas expressed in the debates?*

The first of the other two topics, the relationship between religious and national identity, has been chosen because different relationships between religious and national identity have been shown to be a part of the makeup of RE in several countries (Rothgangel, Jäggle, & Jackson, 2014; Rothgangel, Jäggle, & Schlag, 2016; Rothgangel, Skeie, & Jäggle, 2014). In Norway, this question has often revolved around the relationship between being a Norwegian and a Christian, which has been an important part of the political debate about RE (L. L. Iversen, 2012, 2014; Seland, 2011; Tuastad, 2006; Wingård, 2011).

The second of the other two topics, the purpose of education, has been chosen based on what was shown by Alberts (2007, pp. 360–366), that ideas about RE were tied to ideas about education in general. Since the turn of the millennium, global education policy has played a key part in the development of Norwegian education (e.g. Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Karlsen, 2014, 2015; Thuen, 2017; Volckmar, 2016). Given this development, it is especially relevant to explore if there may be a relationship between the increased influence of global education policy and politicians’ ideas about RE. Furthermore, the emphasis on seeing RE as part of education, as in Alberts’ (2007) approach, may be strengthened.

The research interest concerning the ideas about RE and the two other topics may be expressed as follows, in the second research question of the dissertation:

*What relationships may be seen between the ideas about RE expressed in the debates and ideas expressed about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education?*

Compared with earlier research on the recent history of RE in Norway, such as the work done by Gravem (2004), Bakke-Lorentzen (2007) and Plesner (1998), and the significant number of articles discussing the issue (e.g. Alberts, 2011; Andreassen, 2013; Lippe & Undheim, 2017; Plesner, 2013; Skeie, 2003), my approach is different with regard to the selection of the two points in time that are to be analysed, the method of analysis, and the theoretical perspectives applied to the analysis.

Previously, Plesner (1998), Tuastad (2006) and Wingård (2011) used the distinction between ‘communitarian’ and ‘liberal’ to distinguish between different political positions concerning RE. In this dissertation, Charles Taylor’s (2002, 2007, 2011) understanding of different ways in which the relationship between religious and national identity may be configured is used instead, with the aim of bringing something new to the field.

Furthermore, while the parliamentary debates have been analysed before (Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007; Plesner, 1998; Tuastad, 2006; Wingård, 2011), this has not been done from within the field of RE, as in this dissertation. For each of the previous analyses, the Norwegian RE subject has been used as a case study, or as part of a case study, for understanding something else. Here, the ideas about RE itself are the main focus. Considered in the light of recent reviews of the Scandinavian field of RE, this dissertation is another example of the wide extent of research

interests, methods, and theoretical perspectives in the field (Husebø, 2014; Osbeck, 2011; Skeie, 2017b).

By way of introduction, I will now recount the development of RE in Norway, from its beginning in 1739 to the most recent revision that was made in 2015. Before that, however, I wish to briefly comment upon a matter of terminology. In this dissertation, RE stands for religion education. In scholarly writing about RE, this has come to be used interchangeably with ‘religious education’, as, for instance, shown by the anthology edited by Franken and Loobuyck (2011). As argued by scholars such as Jensen (2011) and Andreassen (2013), using the phrase ‘religious education’ as the general term for a subject concerning the study of religions is open to the interpretation that the education in question could itself be religious. The term ‘religion education’ avoids this potential interpretation and will therefore be used as the general term in this dissertation. Here, it is used to refer to any school subject that concerns religions, whether, as in the past, the subject itself could be characterised as religious, or, as in more recent history when it cannot be. A downside to the use of this term for all kinds of subjects dealing with religion in education, is that it does not include a reference to the non-religious beliefs or philosophies of life that may be part of the content of such subjects, or to other parts of the subject such as philosophy and ethics. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will still refer to all of the different subjects as religion education subjects, but in an expanded sense, referring to both confessional and non-confessional subjects, and a keeping in mind that there are often other components than religion in RE subjects, such as the study of non-religious beliefs, philosophy, and ethics.

After giving an account of the development of RE in Norway in Section 1.2, I will finish this chapter with a brief overview of the structure of the dissertation in Section 1.3.

## **1.2 Religion in Norwegian education**

In 1736, the rite of confirmation in the Evangelical Lutheran church was made compulsory in Norway, and three years later, schools were established in every parish (Oftestad, 1998, p. 68; Thorkildsen, 1999, p. 134; Thuen, 2017, p. 18). At the time, Norway was governed from Denmark, where, since the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the king had been the head of both state and church (Oftestad, 1998, p. 48) and the people were required to belong to the Evangelical Lutheran church (Oftestad, 1998). The educational ideas in the laws of 1736 and 1739 were influenced by Evangelical Lutheran Pietism, an example of how the king used his power to further this form of Christianity (Montgomery, 1995). From its inauguration, the

purpose of Norwegian education was drawn from a specific Christian tradition. RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education were tied closely together.

### **Developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Danish monarchy was forced to cede sovereignty over Norway to the king of Sweden. In the process, Norwegians gained a measure of independence, especially through the Constitution of 1814. Concerning religion, the Constitution continued the policies of the Danish kings, referring to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as the official religion of the state, and not introducing religious freedom (Thorkildsen, 2014). Public education remained a key instrument for teaching this faith to the young, still serving as baptismal education leading up to confirmation (Haraldsø, 1989, pp. 14–18). However, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, at least two different processes came to influence the relationship between RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education. Firstly, nationalism became an increasingly relevant force in Norway, as the entire Nordic region shifted from being dominated by Danish and Swedish rule to a situation where five separate nations emerged, among them Norway (Thorkildsen, 2017). Secondly, the purpose of education came to include ideas about qualifying the population for more active citizenship, in addition to the aims concerning Christianity.

In 1848, the purpose of education was for the first time codified in a section of educational legislation, referred to as the objects clause (Stray, 2011; Thuen, 2017, p. 61). The first objects clause outlined a dual purpose for education: firstly, to support the upbringing of the young by providing them with knowledge about Christianity, and secondly, to ensure that they had the knowledge and skills that any member of society should possess (Thuen, 2017, p. 61). As analysed by Thuen (2017), 1848 marks the point when Norwegian education formally ceased to be the domain of the church alone. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the control the church had over education was further weakened.

Roos (2016) has shown that the time between 1850 and 1900 was a key period for the development of Norwegian education. As the church's power in society was reduced, ideas from other sources became part of the national debate on education (Roos, 2016, pp. 92–93). This resulted in a tension between on the one hand, actors who wanted to reduce or remove Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as the ideological foundation of the schools, and on the other, actors who believed that ensuring a good Christian upbringing was the best strategy for raising good citizens (Roos, 2016, pp. 120, 129).

In this latter way of understanding the issue, Lutheran faith was seen as the supreme source of knowledge and understanding of the world and one's identity, and education was to serve as protection against foreign forces that could destabilise the nation (Roos, 2016, pp. 132–134). In the former way of understanding, by contrast, knowledge was tied to the Enlightenment, and accordingly, there was more to being a good citizen than having the correct religious identity (Roos, 2016, p. 135). As a result, these actors proposed a new school subject for education with the aim of providing pupils with an introduction to the political system and other important aspects of society (Roos, 2016, pp. 126–139).

While the Norwegian public education system was still confessionally anchored in Evangelical Lutheran Christianity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the church still dominated the Christianity subject, the debates and tensions involving RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education that erupted in the period from 1850-1890 were to continue for a long time.

### **Two significant changes in 1969**

The Christianity subject would formally continue to serve the role of baptismal education until 1969, when parliamentary politicians indicated that although the church understood the subject as such, this was not their understanding (Innst. O. XIV (1968–69), pp. 31–32). According to the politicians, the Church of Norway itself was responsible for baptismal education. The Christianity subject remained confessional, however, and the teaching was still required to be in accordance with Evangelical Lutheran doctrine.

The same politicians also passed a new revision of the objects clause. In the period from 1848 to 1969, the objects clause had been revised four times, but its structure remained the same (NOU 2007:6, pp. 81–83). In a broad sense, it combined two aims: supporting the homes in providing a Christian upbringing and qualifying pupils to become useful and independent people in home and society (Thuen, 2017, p. 61).<sup>7</sup>

The wording of the objects clause from 1969 shows first how what goes on in public education is tied to the home, referring to the role of the parents. Next, three aspects of the purpose of education are listed: a Christian and moral upbringing, developing abilities and providing general knowledge. In addition to the goal of forming useful citizens, the politicians in 1969

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<sup>7</sup> The objects clause introduced in 1969 is quoted in full in appendix II.

added the word ‘independent’ and the aim of promoting intellectual freedom (Innst. O. XIV (1968–69), p. 56). Looking back at the debates covered by Roos (2016), the changes enacted in 1969 show a further weakening of the influence of the state church on the public education system. However, the objects clause of 1969 was still referred to as ‘the Christian objects clause’, since it included the aim ‘to help give pupils a Christian and moral upbringing’ (Bostad, 2008). This iteration of the objects clause was long-lasting, and, as shown by Wingård (2011, pp. 186–188), was still something of a constant element in Norwegian educational politics until the turn of the millennium. For a large majority of the MPs in the Norwegian Storting, changing the reference to Christianity in the objects clause was out of the question.

### **Developments in Norway from 1970–1990**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, Norway gradually became more secular (Schmidt, 2010) and in the 1970s, the Norwegian economy started growing more rapidly, fuelled by offshore oil. One of the consequences of this development was an increasingly diverse work force, as people elsewhere began to see Norway as a destination for migration. With them, they brought beliefs and practices that most Norwegians previously only had known from books and media. Throughout the 1980s, the increasing diversity led to debates about the organisation of RE in public education. At the time, RE for nearly every pupil was a confessional Christianity subject and still almost solely concerned with Lutheran Christianity.

After 1974, pupils with at least one parent who was not a member of the state church could be offered an alternative RE subject that provided orientation on philosophies of life (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1974, pp. 354–358). Thus, the organisational strategy for dealing with minority needs concerning this aspect of education had been one of separation. Note, however, that statistics from later years show that for most Norwegians, the separation was in principle and not in practice (Hindahl, 1995; NOU 1995:9, p. 14).

Following the logic of separation, increasing diversity would lead to an increasing number of parallel RE subjects. For some, however, separating pupils according to the religious or non-religious affiliations of the parents seemed like a missed opportunity for integration (Tuastad, 2006, p. 266). In the 1990s, this idea eventually gained wide support and as part of national reforms of the education system, the Christianity subject and its alternatives were replaced by a new compulsory RE subject known by its initialism: KRL. The first step in these reforms, however, was the Core Curriculum from 1993 (The Royal Ministry of Education, 1993), which



set out the course for debates about RE, religious and national identity and the purpose of education in the 1990s.

### **The Core Curriculum of 1993**

Accepted by the Storting in 1993, this 44-page document replaced the first chapter of the curriculum plan from 1987 (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987) and came to function as an ideological foundation for Norwegian public education for more than 25 years. The role of the Core Curriculum was to interpret and explicate the objects clauses of the various acts regulating education in Norway. Its contents are strongly associated with then Minister of Education Gudmund Hernes who, in two research interviews (Seland, 2011, p. 200; Volckmar, 2004, p. 169), has named Hirsch (1988) and ‘The Cultural Literacy Movement’ as an important inspiration for his thinking. This concept emphasises the shared background information assumed to be held by ‘the common reader’ (Hirsch, 1988, p. 13). Hirsch argued that because this knowledge had a particular national character, schools ought to focus primarily on the knowledge associated with the nation rather than taking a multicultural perspective (Hirsch, 1988, pp. 17–18).

In the case of the core curriculum, it appears that Hernes decided that Christianity had a unique status as knowledge associated with the Norwegian nation (Andreassen, 2014a; Bygstad, 2007; L. L. Iversen, 2012; Skeie, 1998, 2003). According to Andreassen (Andreassen, 2014a, p. 270), the Core Curriculum was the curriculum text of the 1990s with the strongest ‘emphasis on Christianity as cultural heritage’. He argues that, in the Core Curriculum, a notion of cultural Christianity is mobilised for the purposes of strengthening national identity, as a response to forces of globalisation (Andreassen, 2014a, pp. 276–277). Iversen has also analysed the Core Curriculum and argued that it reconceptualises values as a matter of identity rather than ethics (L. L. Iversen, 2012, p. 125). Through metaphorical imagery presenting religion as something deep (L. L. Iversen, 2012, p. 139), identity was ‘religionised’ (L. L. Iversen, 2012, p. 161) as religion was ‘mobilised as a tool for solidifying a Norwegian identity’ (L. L. Iversen, 2012, p. 168).

Bygstad (2007) analysed the value system of the Core Curriculum and found that the conceptualisation of Christianity was focused on society as a group, and not on individual believers. Furthermore, he argued that the Core Curriculum presented a reduced form of Christianity, in the sense that many concepts that traditionally have been significant for Christian theology were left out. He described this as a shift from a personal to a cultural

understanding of Christianity (Bygstad, 2007, p. 198). Similarly, Skeie (2003, p. 61) has referred to the presentation of religion in the Core Curriculum as ‘culturalisation’, where religion becomes a matter of ‘national heritage’, in ‘the service of national and rational identity formation’ (Skeie, 1998, p. 253).

Thus, the Christian unity that is supposed to be achieved through a shared national heritage not only applied to those confessing Christian faith. Instead, an image was portrayed of how Christianity permeated through the entire nation, even across boundaries of religious persuasions (The Royal Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 7). In this way of thinking, there appears to be a cultural level of Christianity common for all Norwegians, even those belonging to completely different religious traditions, or who are without such affiliations. Seland (2012) has shown that in this way of thinking, Christianity became the integrating ideology for education.

### **Norwegian RE in the early 1990s**

Before the education reforms of the 1990s, the curriculum plans for RE dated from 1987 and included both a Christianity subject and a Philosophies of Life subject for pupils who were exempted from the Christianity subject (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987).<sup>8</sup> However, few parents had their children exempted from the subject. Even though the number of exempted pupils increased from the mid-1980s and onwards, almost 95% of Norwegian pupils attended the Christianity subject in 1993 (Hindahl, 1995; NOU 1995:9, p. 49).

In the curriculum plan, the Christianity subject was legitimised by the fact that a large majority of the population were members of the Church of Norway and other Christian church bodies (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987, p. 102). Furthermore, the plan stated that ‘In accordance with the Primary Education Act, the teaching in the subject is to be anchored in the Evangelical Lutheran doctrine’ (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987, p. 103), using phrasing similar to that as seen a century earlier.

However, several passages from the plan indicate that instruction in the subject was not intended to encourage pupils to become Christians through preaching. For instance, after

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<sup>8</sup> The curriculum of 1987 also included an option for other religious or non-religious communities to develop their own plans and provide alternative RE, with financial support from the government (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987, pp. 303–304). By 1995, some municipalities were preparing plans for an Islamic RE subject, but there does not seem to have been much practical use of this option (Hovdelien, 2003; NOU 1995:9, p. 46).

mentioning the possibility that there may be students with different backgrounds, and also some with no affiliation to any church body, the text of the plan stressed that '[t]he teaching must be marked by broad-mindedness and the will to understand and respect people with different opinions on religious and ethical issues' (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987, p. 103). Thus, while the Christianity subject presented in the curriculum plan from 1987 was confessional, it was also intended to be open.

In contrast to the Christianity plan, the curriculum plan for the Philosophies of Life subject did not mention any anchoring of subject content. Instead, the opening paragraph pointed to the plurality of answers that people have given to basic questions of religion, philosophies of life and ethics (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987, p. 120). It stated that the subject should 'provide information about ethics, religions, and philosophies of life, in such a way that we become more able to live together and understand and respect each other' (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1987, p. 120).

Using Alberts' (2007) terminology, the Norwegian model of RE before the education reforms of the 1990s may be labelled separative, because different groups of pupils were allowed to attend separate subjects according to their parents' wishes, when an alternative RE subject was available at their local school. The great numerical difference between attendances in the two subjects, however, indicates that in most places the Christianity subject served as the RE subject for everyone.

Through the reforms of the 1990s, both the Christianity subject and the Philosophy of Life subject would come to be replaced by a new, integrative, RE subject, but before the political debates on the pros and cons of such a subject could begin, a different debate was held.

### **Debating neutral RE in 1995**

In 1993, independent<sup>9</sup> MP Ellen Chr. Christiansen submitted a Member's Bill proposing to replace the confessional Christianity subject with a subject that was neutral with regard to religion (Dokument nr. 8:51 (1993–94)). In March 1995, the proposal was debated and rejected by a large majority of parties represented in the Storting (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2401–2420).

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<sup>9</sup> Christiansen was elected to the Norwegian Storting as a member of the Progress Party in 1993, but after the events at the Annual Conference held by the party at Bolkesjø in 1994, she and several other MPs left the party. For the rest of the parliamentary term, she was registered as an independent MP (J. M. Iversen, 1998, pp. 137–138).

The debate concerning Christiansen's proposal has previously been analysed in both Tuastad (2006) and Wingård's (2011) dissertations. Tuastad found that between 1985 and 2005, matters of RE were also matters of immigration and integration (Tuastad, 2006, p. 255). All the politicians involved in the debates he analysed seemed to share the idea that RE ought to serve an integrative purpose in society, but the politicians had widely differing ideas about the relationship between this purpose and the role of Christianity in the subject.

Some politicians seemed to imagine Christianity as a superior source of good morals (Tuastad, 2006, p. 273), while others saw knowledge about Christianity as a form of basic knowledge that everyone needed in order to interpret and cope with Norwegian society (Tuastad, 2006, p. 277). A third perspective was focused on the differences between an imagined culture of immigrants and the imagined Norwegian culture. In this case, the culture of immigrants was associated with a list of negative characteristics and participating in an integrative RE subject providing knowledge of Christianity was thought to alleviate the problem and make immigrants more aware of the Norwegian culture (Tuastad, 2006, p. 289). Thus, it was not Christianity as a religious tradition that was presented as superior, but rather an imagined Norwegian culture, in which Christian traditions were seen to play an important part.

However, there were also politicians during this period who spoke of the RE subject as an arena for integration without giving a special role to Christianity (Tuastad, 2006, p. 280). For them, the purpose of the subject should not be to support any religious or non-religious upbringing of the pupils, instead leaving that task to parents. However, as society was becoming more plural and diverse, the subject was to be a place where pupils of different beliefs could encounter each other and learn to understand how others think (See also Tuastad, 2006, p. 278).

Concerning the debate in 1995 specifically, Tuastad (2006, pp. 271–272) distinguished between three main groups: the non-socialist parties, who imagined Christianity as part of Norwegian citizenship, the Socialist Left Party and Christiansen who wanted the state to be neutral in matters concerning religion, and the Labour Party, which was more difficult to place. For some of the Labour politicians, Christianity was 'the religion for Norwegians', while others only reject the ideas of a neutral state for practical reasons (Tuastad, 2006, p. 265).

The parliamentary debate concerning Christiansen's proposal was a debate about principles (Tuastad, 2006, p. 261). Christiansen's proposal was based on the idea that the state should be neutral in matters of religion (Dokument nr. 8:51 (1993–94)) and the MPs who disagreed with her also responded by expressing ideas about this relationship. This fact is one of the key

reasons behind the choice of the debate on Christiansen's proposal as the first debate which will be analysed in this dissertation. Furthermore, this debate is well suited to provide an image of principal ideas expressed about RE, the relationship between religious and national identity, and what was seen as the purpose of education before the political debates about RE in Norway began revolving around the new integrative subject proposed later in 1995, and which eventually became a part of Norwegian education in 1997.

### **The introduction of integrative RE in 1997**

By the mid-1990s, a majority of Norwegian politicians had come to believe that separating pupils in matters of religion and ethics ran counter to the goals of integration (Wingård, 2011, p. 174). As part of a general reform of primary education in Norway, a committee was formed with a mandate to consider the situation in Norwegian society and to propose a form of RE that could answer the need for knowledge about Christianity and other religions (Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007, pp. 66–67). Only a few months after the debate on Christiansen's proposal, in May 1995, the resulting Green Paper was published. Titled 'Identity and Dialogue' (NOU 1995:9), it contained a proposal of an extended Christianity subject as a new, compulsory, and integrative form of RE (NOU 1995:9, pp. 4–5).

The proposition in the Green Paper set off a long and intense political debate about RE in Norway.<sup>10</sup> In the autumn of 1995, a majority consisting of the Labour Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democratic Party<sup>11</sup> agreed to vote in favour of a modified version of the proposition (Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007, pp. 94–95). It was at this point that the initialism KRL first became the name of the RE subject in Norway, with the full name of the subject being 'Christian Knowledge with Orientation on Religion and Life Stances'.

Wingård has shown that for the Norwegian politicians of the 1990s, the present was a time of change (Wingård, 2011, p. 56). Furthermore, it was a time when aspects of Norwegian society that a majority of the politicians valued were perceived to be under threat (Wingård, 2011, p. 70). Still, the large majority of them remained convinced that they possessed, in the Christian

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<sup>10</sup> The development of RE in Norway since the early-1990s has been charted by several scholars over the years. The following is my own presentation, which is based on readings of public documents, in addition to the contributions made by Alberts (2011), Andreassen (2013, 2014a), Bakke-Lorentzen (2007), Bråten (2013), Plesner (2013, 2016), Skeie and Bråten (2014) and Thomassen (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Here, and elsewhere when I list political parties, the sequence of the list is decided by the parties' share of popular votes in the general election previous to the events I am describing (in this case, 1993), going from the largest to the smallest party by share of the vote.

cultural heritage, the necessary resources to face these challenges (Wingård, 2011, p. 80). The new integrative RE subject KRL then became an arena for presenting this cultural heritage to all Norwegian pupils, and through that for giving pupils what they needed to cope with the challenging times they were growing up in.

Through the RE subject, pupils were to receive a common foundation of culture and values, based on Christianity (Wingård, 2011, pp. 112–119, 135, 147). Through this, social cohesion was also expected to be strengthened, and RE could function as part of a nation-building project (Wingård, 2011, pp. 119–121).

Wingård has shown that for the majority of Norwegian politicians of the 1990s, RE was tasked with providing all pupils with what they needed to acquire well-developed identities and cope with present day society. This was not a matter of faith (Wingård, 2011, pp. 122, 126). Instead politicians applied the metaphor of providing the pupils with ‘roots’ (Wingård, 2011, pp. 108–109). According to Wingård’s analysis, the majority of the politicians argued that this was something pupils needed to live good lives, and the RE subject could be a place to learn about and connect to one’s roots.

Given that the RE subject would succeed in providing pupils with roots and values, it was then supposed to be an arena where they could be trained in dialogue. The sequence is important. First the pupils were to develop sound identities with strong roots, and then they could engage in dialogue with others (Wingård, 2011, pp. 137, 141).

A main point of contention in this period was the right to exemption from the subject (Wingård, 2011, pp. 168–169). From one perspective, the KRL subject was still enough of a confessional Christianity subject that parents should have the right to fully exempt their children. However, from the perspective of the majority in the Storting, the KRL subject was sufficiently neutral that only a partial right to exemption was necessary (Wingård, 2011, pp. 170–173). This policy from the Storting received strong criticism, and after the turn of the millennium, the first iteration of the KRL subject was found to be a violation of human rights legislation, as I will return to later.

### **Evaluations of KRL and the introduction of the 55%-norm**

When passing the legislation to establish the first KRL subject, the Storting also required that the subject be evaluated (Hagesæther, Bleka, & Sandsmark, 2000; Hagesæther & Sandsmark,

2006; Johannesen & Aadnanes, 2000).<sup>12</sup> One of the findings of the evaluations was that there was a great deal of variation in how classroom time in the subject was allocated (Hagesæther et al., 2000; Hagesæther & Sandsmark, 2006; Johannesen & Aadnanes, 2000; Lied, 2009; St.meld. nr. 32, (2000–2001)). In some places, more than 80 % of classroom time in the subject was spent on Christianity, whereas the time spent in other places was less than 30 % (St.meld. nr. 32, (2000–2001), p. 72). On average, around half the classroom time in the subject was spent teaching about Christianity, while the other half was split between the remaining two topics (St.meld. nr. 32, (2000–2001), pp. 73–74).

In the publication presenting the new iteration of the KRL subject in the fall of 2002, the averages from the evaluations were used to specify that for the national<sup>13</sup> part of the curriculum, about 55% of the time in the subject was to be allocated to Christianity, 25% to other religions and philosophies of life, and the final 20% to ethics and philosophy (Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 2002, p. 13). In this manner, the 55%-norm for the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity was introduced for RE in Norway.

The evaluations also led to a shift in the name of the subject. The initialism KRL was kept, but now, the full name was to be ‘Christian, Religious and Life Stance Education’ (Innst. S. nr. 240 (2000–2001), p. 4). While still distinguishing between ‘Christian’ and ‘religious’, the name was intended to treat the different parts of the subject in a more equal manner.

### **The legal processes concerning KRL**

In 1998, another process that would come to influence RE in Norway began. Parents belonging to minority-rights organisations sued the Norwegian government for the right to full exemption from the KRL subject as it was in its first iteration in 1997. The core issue of the case was whether this iteration of the KRL subject was sufficiently neutral to deny parents the option of full exemption (Lied, 2009), in accordance with the European Charter of Human Rights and the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. After the government won the court case in the Norwegian Supreme Court in August 2001, parents who were members of the

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<sup>12</sup> The first KRL subject was also evaluated by Lied (2004) as part of the general evaluation of the curriculum reform of 1997.

<sup>13</sup> In grade 1 the national part of the curriculum covered about half the time in the subject, increasing up towards 70% in the final years of primary and lower secondary education (Lied, 2009, p. 273).

Norwegian Humanist Association took the case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

The UNHRC was first to give a ruling, publishing its position on 3 November 2004. It found that the KRL subject, especially due to its relationship to the objects clause, was of such a nature that it needed a system of exemption to be in accordance with the Covenant. Because the UNHRC found this system wanting, it ruled that there was ‘a violation of article 18, paragraph 4, of the Covenant’ (HRC, 2004).

Although decisions made by the UNHRC are not formally binding for Norway, both the centre-right government and a large majority of the Storting saw fit to change the sections in the Education Act regulating the KRL subject to comply with the ruling from the UNHRC (Innst. O. nr. 104 (2004–2005), p. 2; Ot.prp. nr. 91, (2004–2005), pp. 2–3). There were at least two possible courses of action available to the government when faced with this criticism. On the one hand, it could have maintained or even increased the confessional profile of the KRL subject and combined this with full exemption and an alternative subject, returning to the separative model of RE in Norway from 1974–1997. The other alternative, which was the option chosen by the government, was to revise the KRL subject in such a way that it would be sufficiently neutral to only allow partial exemption. All of the members of the Standing Committee<sup>14</sup> responsible for the issue in the Storting supported the latter strategy. They wanted integrative RE and stated that the RE subject had an important function with regard to diversity and social cohesion in Norway (Innst. O. nr. 104 (2004–2005), pp. 2–3).

These changes to the paragraph regulating RE in the Education Act also necessitated a new curriculum plan for KRL, which came in the fall of 2005, together with extensive information on the new system of exemption (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2005).

### **New education reform in 2006**

At the time when the curriculum plan for KRL of 2005 was produced, Norwegian education was entering a new era of reform. The current national curriculum, dating from 1997, was to be replaced, starting from the fall of 2006. As shown by Hovdenak and Stray (2015), this reform was influenced by global education policy, and more specifically by the educational program

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<sup>14</sup> All the MPs in the Norwegian Storting belong to one or more of the 12 different Standing Committees in the Storting. Whenever an issue is before the Storting, it is assigned to one of the Standing Committees for preparation. In practise, this is where most of the political negotiations and decisions in the Storting are made (Stortingets informasjonstjeneste, 2019).



of the OECD. One of the shifts in the new national curriculum concerned the role of content in school subjects. Formerly, the curriculum plans for each subject had specified content for the pupils to learn, but according to the new educational policy, influenced by the OECD, the sheer amount of existing knowledge is too vast for education to cover. Instead, more general goals were to be specified, and in the curriculum plans, these goals were referred to as competence aims.

As part of the reform, the distinction between locally and nationally prescribed curriculum was removed. This had consequences for RE because as mentioned above, there had been a norm for the allocation of classroom time spent on the various topics in the national part of the curriculum. This norm now determined the allocation of time between the topics for the entire subject (Lied, 2009, pp. 272–273). Thus, where before 55% of about half the time in grade 1 was allocated to teaching about Christianity, the same percentage was now applied to all lesson time. The effect was that a larger part of the teaching time in the subject was allocated to teaching about Christianity.

### **The legal process continues**

The process that had begun with the first court case against the Norwegian government in 1998 was not finished by the UNHRC decision in 2004. As mentioned above, some of the parents who had lost in the Norwegian Supreme Court in 2001 took their case to the ECtHR, and in 2007 this court ruled in their favour. The court stated that the denial of full exemption from the KRL subject of 1997 was a violation of the parents' rights to ensure 'their children an education in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions' (Lied, 2009, p. 263).

Thus, Norwegian politicians were once again faced with a legal judgement by a human rights institution, and again decided to revise the RE subject. This time, a majority centre-left coalition held power in Norway. This government proposed to increase the emphasis on giving parents adequate information about the content of the subject, to remove 'Christianity' from the name of the subject, and to add the phrase 'objective, critical, and pluralistic' to the paragraph regulating RE teaching in the Education Act (Ot.prp. nr. 54, (2007–2008), pp. 9–12). Furthermore, the government signalled that they intended to remove the specification that 55% of the classroom time in the subject should be allocated to teaching about Christianity (Ot.prp. nr. 54, (2007–2008), p. 11). With these changes, they sought to ensure that the RE subject would be neutral and objective enough that, even without the option of full exemption, there would be

‘no doubts as to whether the subject is in congruence with human right’ (Ot.prp. nr. 54, (2007–2008), p. 9).

The 2005 revision of the KRL subject was the result of a compromise and supported by a large majority in the Storting. In 2008, however, the talks aimed at achieving a similar compromise between the majority government and the opposition failed, and as a result, this revision of RE was only supported by the government parties. The opposition parties all characterised the proposals as going ‘much further’ than required by the verdict in Strasbourg (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)).

The debate on these revisions in the Storting revealed a sharp divide between the government parties and most of the opposition. However, as the government parties held the majority in the Storting, the proposed changes were passed. Thus, the name of the RE subject was changed from ‘Christian and other religious and ethical education’, with the initialism KRL in Norwegian, to ‘Religious and Ethical Education’, with the initialism RLE in Norwegian.

### **A new objects clause for Norwegian education in 2009**

Even though the educational reforms of the 1990s included replacing the acts regulating different parts of the education system with a new Education Act, the objects clause had retained most of the wording from 1969 (Innst. O. nr. 70 (1997–98), p. 36). As shown by Wingård (2011, pp. 186–188) the wording of the clause was widely supported and not up for debate at this point in time. In 2005, however, the new centre-left coalition included a revision of the objects clause on its agenda (Stoltenberg, Halvorsen, & Haga, 2005, p. 47). To prepare the revision, an Official Norwegian Report (NOU) was produced under the leadership of Bostad. The issue was debated in the Storting in 2008, and in November a unanimous Storting gave their support to the new objects clause, valid from January 2009 (Mathiesen, 2013). The support of the entire supreme legislature of Norway lent a strong democratic legitimacy to the new objects clause as the purpose of Norwegian public education. Stray (2011, p. 24) has pointed out that compared with previous iterations, the objects clause of 2009 represents an expansion of the purpose of education. Compared with the version from 1969 it is more than twice as long.<sup>15</sup>

A key phrase in the new objects clause is the composite reference to the ‘Christian and humanistic heritage and tradition’, which has become common in Norwegian policy debates

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<sup>15</sup> The full text of the objects clause from 2009 is quoted in appendix II

and documents. The phrase entered into Norwegian curriculum for primary education in 1987 (Hovdelien, 2013, p. 173). Since then, the phrase has been used repeatedly, for instance in the Core Curriculum of 1993. In 2012, it also entered the Norwegian Constitution, where it replaced the reference to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity from 1814 (Michalsen, 2014).

Michalsen (2014) has interpreted the phrase ‘Christian and humanistic heritage’ as part of his discussion of the new § 2 of the Norwegian Constitution enacted by the Storting as part of a general agreement on the future relationship between state and church in 2008 (Mathiesen, 2013; Michalsen, 2014, pp. 211–213), around the same time as the verdict from the ECtHR was debated in Norway. In the parliamentary debate on the matter, taking place in 2012, all the participants wanted Christianity to have significance in Norwegian society, but expressed this in a vague manner (Michalsen, 2014, pp. 213–214). Delving deeper, Michalsen (2014, p. 224) points out that ‘Christian’ is now used instead of the former ‘Evangelical Lutheran’. Consequently, the notion of Christian heritage has been decoupled from theology. It is no longer a reference to a specific form of Christianity, associated with certain historical documents. Instead, the reference is broader, and it is not given a theological content.

### **Reprisal of the 2008 debate in 2015**

The next, and at the time of writing latest, milestone in the history of RE in Norwegian politics came in 2015. Following the general election of 2013, the parties forming the opposition in 2008 now held a majority in the Storting. The Conservative Party and the Progress Party formed a new minority coalition government, with support from the Christian Democratic Party and the Liberal Party ensuring a parliamentary majority. As part of the agreement between the governing and supporting parties, the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, and the Christian Democrats decided to roll back some of the changes enacted in 2008 (Andreassen, 2017, pp. 40–43). The most visible reversal was reinstating the reference to Christianity in the name of the school subject, which now became ‘Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics’, resulting in the new initialism KRLE (Prop. 82 L, (2014–2015), p. 42). The three parties also agreed on a new stipulation that around half the classroom time in the subject should be allocated to Christianity, effectively reinstating the 55%-norm from 2005. In the general election of 2017, the non-socialist parties held on to their majority, and so the initialism for the RE subject in Norway is likely to remain ‘KRLE’ at least until 2021.

When considering which debate to analyse from the latter stages of this development, the choice fell on the 2008 debate concerning the government’s proposal of revisions to the KRL subject

following the judgement from the ECtHR in 2007. Even though some of the revisions were rolled back in 2015, following the election in 2013, the ideas involved were all expressed in the 2008 debate. This debate was also solely concerned with RE, which makes it easier to identify and describe the ideas that are relevant for my analysis.

After serving as Christian baptismal education for more than 200 years, the Norwegian RE subject developed in a new direction from 1969 and onwards. As will be shown from the analysis of the debate on Christiansen's proposal in 1995, the majority of the political environment was then still concerned with granting Christianity a special position. Twenty years later, a new consensus had formed concerning RE in public education. This will be shown in the analysis of the debate concerning the government's proposal of revisions to RE in 2008, when all the politicians argued for RE that was non-confessional, integrative and aimed at supporting the pupils' ability to live well together in an increasingly diverse nation.

Through an analysis of ideas about religion education, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, a spotlight will be placed on these two points in the recent history of Norwegian RE. The result is a better understanding of how ideas about these topics have been expressed, negotiated, and have developed in the political arena of the Storting, which has played a significant role in shaping Norwegian RE.

### **1.3 The structure of the dissertation**

In this section, Chapter 1 is finished with an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

In Chapter 2, an account is given of the methodology of the dissertation, which is a hermeneutic approach to descriptive idea analysis.

Chapter 3 is the theory chapter. There, theory concerning the three topics about which ideas will be analysed is presented and operationalised as an analytical tool, in line with the deductive strategy presented in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 is the first chapter of analysis. There, the analytical tools operationalised in Chapter 3 are used to describe ideas about the three topics in the debate in 1995 over Christiansen's proposal to replace the Christianity subject with a subject that was neutral with regard to religion.

Chapter 5 is the second chapter of analysis, in which the same tools as used in Chapter 4 are used to describe ideas about the three topics in the debate in 2008 over the government's

proposal for revisions to the KRL subject following the judgement against Norway in the European Court of Human Rights.

In Chapter 6 the ideas described about each of the three topics in Chapters 4 and 5 are compared. For each topic, the ideas expressed in 1995 are compared first, then the ideas expressed in 2008, and finally the ideas described in the two debates are compared.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the comparison in Chapter 6 is used to answer the research questions posed in the introduction, together with a discussion of how the findings in the analysis may be related to earlier research.

## 2 A hermeneutical approach to idea analysis

The research questions guiding this study concern political ideas about three topics, as expressed in two debates in the Norwegian Storting. In this chapter, I first present a reading of Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutics as an approach to the interpretation of texts that is necessary to answer such questions. Secondly, I present and give reasons for my version of idea analysis as a method for analysing policy text, including Mehta's (2011) conceptualisation of how ideas function in politics. The third and final part of the chapter presents and discusses the particularities involved in using proceedings from parliamentary debates as material.

### 2.1 Gadamer's hermeneutics as an approach to interpretation

When interpreting and analysing texts, it is necessary to have a language expressing what goes on in the interpretation and what is found in the analysis, or the relationship between the actor expressing language, the text where the language is put down, and the scholar who is reading the text. My understanding of these matters is based on a reading of Gadamer (2004), who has been a major contributor to understanding the complexities involved in reading a text.

According to Gadamer, 'A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 269). In other words, whenever a reader starts reading a new text, that reader is already making judgements about the meaning of the entire text. The reader always has an expectation of what the meaning of a text is before the reading has begun. The reader brings prejudgements<sup>16</sup> to the text.

The concept of prejudgements is a crucial component of how Gadamer (2004) understands interpretation. He has objected to seeing prejudgements as exclusively negative, and instead stressed that they can be both negative and positive. The point is that they are necessarily made before encountering the text, and so they are *prejudgements*, in a temporal sense (Gadamer, 2004, p. 273).

For Gadamer, understanding is the goal of interpretation and for a reader to understand a text, prejudgements are necessary. These prejudgements can be both true and false. The true ones

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<sup>16</sup> Gadamer's German word *Vorurteil* is often translated as 'prejudice' (e.g. by Crotty, 1998, pp. 102–103; and in Gadamer, 2004), but this translation seems to make the meaning less clear. As will be shown, Gadamer's point is temporal; using the construction 'prejudgement' conveys this temporality. Furthermore, this translation avoids some of the most common associations with the colloquial use of 'prejudice', which are predominantly negative (Palmer, 2002), a point that Gadamer himself discusses (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 273–278).

lead to understanding, whereas the false ones lead to misunderstanding (Gadamer, 2004, p. 298). The prejudgements must be tested to see if they are true or false. To conduct a test, they must be provoked, which is done by letting the prejudgements encounter the text (Gadamer, 2004, p. 298). This encounter initiates a process wherein the reader continually revises, rejects or restates the prejudgements, enabling the reader to hold several projections of what is thought to be the complete meaning of the text simultaneously (Gadamer, 2004, p. 270).

However, Gadamer's point is not that the reader eventually comes to replace the prejudgement with a correct judgement. Something else is intended to happen; to explain this, he draws on the metaphor of the horizon and the fusion of horizons. The starting point for the metaphor of horizons is the status of humans as beings that stand at a certain point in history. In doing so, we cannot have full knowledge of our situation and ourselves. Our view is determined and limited by the place we stand, and the horizon is that part of reality that a person sees from a specific vantage point (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 301–302).

In Gadamer's thinking, the text and the reader each 'has' a horizon, and the interesting question is how these horizons can interrelate, or become fused (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 301–306). Gadamer underlined the need for more than a description of the horizon of the text. It is not enough for understanding to happen to make a complete observation of the text's horizon. Instead, the horizons of the reader (the present horizon) and the horizon of the text (the past horizon) must encounter each other and become fused (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 305–306).

Horizons are not closed entities. They are made up of our prejudgements and are continually reshaped as these prejudgements are tested and revised, which happens when the reader and the text interact. By way of illustration, Gadamer used the conversation between two people as a metaphor (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 389–390). For two people to talk together about something, they need a common language. The establishment of this common language is not the content of the conversation; but when this commonality of language has been achieved, it becomes possible to understand one another, and thus also the content of the conversation.

The fusion of horizons may therefore be understood as a language event, wherein the text and the reader come to share the language necessary to understand the case at hand. In this process, the text and the reader need each other. Gadamer wrote of the 'reawakening' of the meaning of the text, and to wake up the meaning in the text, an interpreter depends upon his or her 'own thoughts' (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 389–390). In the 'hermeneutical conversation' that ensues, something arises that is common to both the reader and the text (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 389–390).

At this point, there is a risk of misunderstanding Gadamer in that this hermeneutical conversation can happen as an isolated event, only involving the reader and the text. That would be wrong. Instead, one must relate the fusion of horizons to what Gadamer calls ‘historically effected consciousness’. According to Krogh (2014, p. 63), this is the most important concept in Gadamer’s hermeneutics.

For Gadamer, it is through effective history<sup>17</sup> that the interpreter has received the prejudgements (that are necessary for understanding), and so the effective history makes it possible to approach horizons other than one’s own. The encounter between the horizon of the text and the reader is possible because they both exist in the same effective history (Krogh, 2014, pp. 62–64).

### **Applying Gadamer’s hermeneutics to idea analysis**

Interpretation as it is carried out in this dissertation is a matter of describing ideas identified in texts. When doing so, Gadamer’s hermeneutics show that the interpreter is not identifying or finding the exact ideas the actors expressed. Instead, something new happens with each interpretation, which could not have happened unless both the text and the interpreter had encountered each other.

Thus, when analysing ideas based on a reading of texts, the analysis will necessarily focus on an entity that belongs exclusively to neither the text nor the interpreter. Applied to the analysis of proceedings from debates in the Norwegian Storting, this means that the ideas identified in the analysis may not be assumed to be the thoughts of the politicians expressing them. But they are not invented by me either. Instead, there is always an element of continuity with the politicians expressing the ideas, and the horizon of the scholar who is analysing them.

Speaking of the horizon of the scholar also allows for an observation concerning the role of theory in this dissertation. As will be discussed in further detail in the next section, the analytical method used here is descriptive idea analysis, understood as a deductive form of qualitative document analysis. In this method, theory is used to set up an analytical tool before engaging with the material. Seen from the perspective of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, doing so may be understood as a conscious effort to engage with the effective history of scholarly work concerning the topics that are in question, with the aim of offering a more transparent horizon from which the text is encountered. In other words, the theory chapter sets up a horizon of

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the translation of the German word *Wirkungsgeschichte* as effective history, see Luz (2008, pp. 124–126).



prejudgments coming from the effective history of scholarly work, through which the texts are approached in the analysis. However, following Gadamer, it would be naïve to assume that horizon of the interpreter is replaced by the prejudices coming from theory. Instead, the aim is that engaging with effective history in the form of theory and expressing this in the form of an analytical tool, gives the interpreter access to a wider horizon from which the text may be encountered.

### **Gadamer's demands for good interpretation**

Finally, it is important to note that Gadamer has also given prescriptions for how to go about ensuring that this encounter between the reader and the text is fair. He demanded that the reader be open to the meaning of the text; and, for this to happen, the reader must relate the meaning of the text to the reader's own conception (Gadamer, 2004, p. 271). The goal is to become aware of your own prejudices, so that the text can be recognised as something different from you, and thus is allowed to take part in the conversation with you (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 271–272). According to Gadamer's thinking, this process is not simple and clear, but rather happens within the hermeneutical circle, which we cannot escape. Thus, even though a conscious struggle is likely to make interpretations less random and more coherent, they will always be lacking in some ways.

Translated into analytical practice, one may expect that part of the analysis will be to become aware of prejudices, whether coming from theory or personal experience, and then consciously let the text challenge these. Faced with this challenge, the scholar must always be ready to revise the prejudices. In this process, Gadamer expressed the expectation that a reader will experience confusion and a lack of understanding, and that these disturbances will lead to an increased awareness of prejudices. From the perspective of doing qualitative document analysis, this may be experienced when, for instance, a scholar finds that the analytical categories that have been prepared fail to explicate what seem to be the key elements of meaning in the text. In my case, it took at least three separate tries before I established an analytical tool that, in my opinion, survived the encounter with the text.

With Gadamer's hermeneutics in mind, I now move on to the next section, where I will present descriptive idea analysis as a deductive method for qualitative document analysis and explain how it has been carried out in this dissertation.

## **2.2 Idea analysis as method for analysing policy texts**

In this section, I give an account of my take on idea analysis as a method for analysing policy texts and explain how I have carried it out. I begin by giving a brief general introduction to idea analysis and what I mean when I speak of ‘ideas’. Secondly, I discuss descriptive idea analysis as a starting point for my approach to analysing ideas, including a comparison with two other recent Norwegian PhDs using idea analysis. Then, I present Mehta’s (2011) categories for how ideas may function in politics and how I have done my analysis. Finally, I offer some methodological caveats.

There is a long Swedish tradition for doing idea analysis of policy texts (Beckman & Ljungwald, 2009; Bergström & Boréus, 2012; Bratberg, 2017). In more recent years, the method has been both criticised (Esaiasson, 1993) and rethought (Beckman, 2005), and has been used in several Scandinavian PhD dissertations (e.g. Algotsson, 2001; Domellöf, 2001; Seland, 2011; Solhøy, 2016). Idea analysis is about analysing data, primarily texts, using an analytical tool based on theory to look for various ideas, often associated with actors such as politicians. At its best, idea analysis is a form of deductive qualitative document analysis where theory is used transparently to understand texts. At its worst, idea analysis only serves to confirm a scholar’s hypotheses, whether they are true, or not (Esaiasson, 1993, p. 213).

When speaking of ‘ideas’, I am referring to ‘thought constructions of a certain stability and continuity’ (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 140). Furthermore, in this dissertation I am dealing with political ideas, which may be understood as ‘political messages’ (Beckman, 2005, pp. 11–12). In the history of idea analysis, it has been common to distinguish between different kinds of ideas, for instance between ideas that are normative or descriptive (Parsons, 1938, p. 654; Rueschemeyer, 2006, p. 228). Recently, however, Mehta has argued that while it is possible to separate ideas who are overtly normative, expressing how something ought to be, and those that appear to describe the world as it is, this distinction may become blurred in political texts (Mehta, 2011, p. 33).

### **Descriptive idea analysis as a starting point**

Beckman (2005) distinguished between different kinds of idea analysis by looking at the purpose of the analysis, which may be to criticise, explain, or describe ideas. The idea analysis of this dissertation is the third kind – descriptive idea analysis. Here, the critical issue is to describe the ideas in such a way that the description brings forth new understanding of the analysed material (Beckman, 2005, p. 50).

As a deductive approach to analysing texts, the terminology and categories are based on theory and set up before engaging with the material. As a consequence, there is a constant challenge to avoid the analytical results to be governed by the theory instead of the data, or in which the theoretical background results in a biased analysis (Esaiasson, 1993).

A standard descriptive idea analysis is conducted by first using theory to construct an analytical tool, either in the form of ideal types or dimensions, and then using that tool to analyse the material. The analysis is then a matter of organizing the different politicians in relation to the dimensions or ideal types. Through this process, one finds what ideas are prevalent among the politicians, and for example how this has shifted over time. The literature on idea analysis indicates that it is common to associate ideal types with more clear-cut analyses, whereas dimensions are more suitable to analyse changes over time (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 167; Bratberg, 2017, p. 87).

Norway has recent examples of both strategies. Solhøy (2016) used ideal types in her analysis of political processes concerning the exceptions communities of faith have had from the act relating to gender equality. Seland (2011) used dimensions to analyse national identity and integration in the welfare state in the educational politics of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

One of the main differences between these two dissertations and the present study is the amount of material analysed. Solhøy (2016, p. 51) studied hearings, propositions, and other documents associated with the government, along with documents from the Church of Norway. Seland examined four Norwegian curriculum plans from 1974 to 2006. My material consists of the proceedings from two debates in the Storting, comprising a total of about 40 pages, a lot less than both Solhøy and Seland.

The reason for this difference lies in the research interest. Solhøy was interested in the ideas in the political process concerning her topic in its entirety, whereas Seland contributed with a comprehensive analysis of ideas about her topic in the period from 1974 to 2006. In this dissertation, the aim is to contribute to understanding ideas about RE, and their relationship to ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education. To do so, I have selected two points in time, at separate ends of the political controversy concerning the KRL subject in Norway.

This difference in both material and aim has consequences for the necessity and rewards of constructing strict analytical tools. The main reason for establishing ideal types or dimensions

in the first place is to create an organizing filter through the material is seen (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 151). In one sense, this is an operation of reduction, whereby the material is reduced or condensed by help of either the dimensions or ideal types.

With less material, there is also less need for such a reduction. To accomplish the aim of contributing to understanding the ideas expressed in these debates, I have decided to establish analytical tools that are more open exploring the complexity of the material, and take a more hermeneutical approach to idea analysis (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 169).

The analytical tools used in this dissertation have been set up differently for each of the three topics about which ideas were analysed. Concerning the ideas about RE, I used theory to operationalise what I mean by ‘ideas about RE’. This operationalisation happens in Section 3.1 of the theory chapter, where former research on RE is used to set up two dichotomies about RE: confessional/non-confessional (Kimanen, 2015), and integrative/separative (Alberts, 2007). In addition, I bring in the analytical categories Kjeldsen (2016) used to describe aims for RE. Together, the two dichotomies and the categories from Kjeldsen form the analytical tool for describing ideas about RE in the two debates.

With regard to ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, I take a different approach. Due to the complex and vague nature that signifies both the concept of ‘religion’ and ‘nation’, and any relationship between them, I decided to use a more clear-cut theoretical concept. In this case, I drew upon Taylor’s (2002, 2007, 2011) concept concerning the integration of religious and national identity and applied it to the Norwegian setting. Taylor’s concept is set up as ideal types, and this part of the analysis is therefore the closest to a standard descriptive idea analysis. This analytical tool is worked out in Section 3.2 of the theory chapter.

Finally, the ideas about the purpose of education are approached by means of an imagined tension between the Norwegian objects clauses of education and the influence of global education policy, set up in Section 3.3 of the theory chapter. This is the least clear-cut part of the analysis, for two reasons. Firstly, the growing influence of global education policy on Norwegian education since the turn of the millennium is a well-established fact (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Karlsen, 2014, 2015; Mausethagen, 2013; Prøitz, 2015; Sjøberg, 2014; Thuen, 2017; Volckmar, 2016). Therefore, it is not necessary to develop a clear-cut filter to discover if this development is the case or not. Secondly, the purpose of education has proven to be the most elusive of the three topics about which I analyse ideas because the politicians make fewer

direct statements concerning this topic than about the two others. The topic is, in a sense, further removed from the specific political issue on the agenda in the debates. Therefore, the most open analytical tool possible is required. However, this choice has two other consequences as well. The more open an analytical tool is, the more clear-cut argumentation is required to describe ideas in the material. In addition, setting up the analytical tool to be very open makes it harder to draw strong conclusions. For these reasons, analysis of ideas about the purpose of education must be more careful and tentative than the analysis of the two others.

For the analysis, in addition to using the analytical tools developed in the theory chapter and drawn upon to describe ideas about the three topics, I enlisted Mehta's (2011) explanation of how ideas function in politics.

### **Mehta's categories for how ideas function in politics**

Mehta has argued that there are three levels of how ideas function in politics (Mehta, 2011, p. 27) and by referring to these functions as 'levels', he also indicated that they should be seen as interrelated, and that they come in different 'heights'. The difference between the lowest and highest levels of his image is the degree of abstraction. The lowest level is the closest to political decisions, whereas the top level is the most abstract and general.

Mehta called the lowest level 'policy solutions' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). When functioning in this way, an idea is the answer to a specific political problem: How are we going to achieve goal X faced with problem Y? For instance, an idea functioning as a policy solution in the debate I analyse from 2008 is to change the name of the integrative RE subject in public education to make it clearer that the subject is acceptable from the perspective of human rights legislation (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). In this case, the politician expressing the idea takes the problem (the possibility of uncertainty concerning the human rights status of the RE subject) as a given and proposes a policy change that is intended to solve the problem.

The next level is called 'problem definitions,' which Mehta defined as 'a particular way of understanding a complex reality' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). Here, the idea informs the understanding of the problem to be solved. Following the example above, the politicians also express ideas concerning what the problem in the given situation really is. Politicians representing the governing parties argue that having an RE subject with Christianity as part of its name leads to uncertainty with regard to its compliance with human rights legislation, and several of the politicians from the opposition parties disagree (O.tid. (2007–2008), pp. 672, 683). Applying

Mehta's categories to this example allows for the observation that this is a disagreement concerning the problem definition, i.e. what is a problem in the given situation.

Here, one may also see how the two lowest of Mehta's levels interlink (Mehta, 2011, p. 43). Given a specific idea at the level of problem definitions, different ideas at the level of policy solution may come into play. In this sense, the level of problem definitions is 'above' the level of policy solutions. For instance, a policy solution for making the name of the RE subject more compliant with human rights legislation is required given the problem definition that the current name raises such doubts. Mehta has also pointed out that the effects of a policy solution, either positively or negatively, may influence future problem definitions, and so the relationship between them is potentially reciprocal (Mehta, 2011, p. 43).

The third and most abstract level of ideas put forward by Mehta is broader and twofold. He called these ideas both 'public philosophies' and 'zeitgeist' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). These two labels represent different ways ideas can function at this level. Public philosophies are more general ideas about something relating to the government or public policy, 'in light of a certain set of assumptions about the society and the market' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). Mehta's example of a public philosophy is the idea 'that the local government is more attuned to the needs of the people than the federal government' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). Zeitgeist, however, is defined by Mehta as 'a set of assumptions that are widely shared and not open to criticism in a particular historical moment. [It] includes a disparate set of cultural, social and economic assumptions' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). Thus, Mehta has suggested that public philosophies can become zeitgeist if they shift from being a disputed idea to being shared by all the relevant actors in a debate.

Mehta referred to the ideas at this third level as 'meta-ideas', indicating that he sees them in some metaphorical sense behind the other ideas (Mehta, 2011, p. 41). Public philosophies serve as 'meta-problem definitions' that influence several problem definitions (Mehta, 2011, p. 43). Reciprocally, public philosophies, or the zeitgeist, may shift due to perceptions of policy solutions and problem definitions; therefore, all three levels may interact (Mehta, 2011, p. 43).

In my material, ideas about both the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, primarily come into play as meta-ideas. For instance, in 1995, the idea that the state should be neutral in matters concerning religious beliefs is expressed by one politician (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414), while another argues that it should not (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410).

For both debates, my first analytical stage was to use Mehta's different ways of how ideas function to identify key ideas functioning at each of the three levels (cf. Sections 4.1 and 5.1). This effort served both to introduce the reader to the debate as a whole and to clarify relationships among ideas. Furthermore, the classification of ideas identified in the proceedings as policy solutions, problem definitions, or meta-ideas made it easier to ensure that ideas were compared and contrasted in a fitting way. For instance, when comparing ideas expressed by two politicians, it is relevant if the idea was offered as a problem definition or a meta-idea. Ideas should be compared and contrasted with other ideas functioning in the same way.

### **The analytical practice**

Moving on to discuss more practical terms, the analytical method used is to read. Proceedings from debates in the Norwegian Storting are available for download as pdf documents and are easily procured. These documents may then be converted to Word files, which allows for word searches and easier editing. I have read them a multitude of times and kept returning to them. However, I have also undertaken a structured process to identify and compare ideas expressed by groups of politicians.

First, I used the Recommendations to the Storting (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008); Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)) that preceded the debates to divide the politicians active in the debates into groups. For the 1995 debate I identified three separate groups of politicians; for the 2008 debate, I operate with two groups. The reasoning behind these divisions are given in the opening part of Chapters 4 and 5.

This division of politicians into groups has been the main technique for organising the material into smaller parts. However, within each group, I also distinguished between each individual politician. In practice, I read every speech, reply, and reply speech from each politician in both debates and marked out statements expressing ideas. I then copied these statements into an Excel sheet and marked them with the name and party affiliation of the politician making the statement, in addition to the page of the proceedings on which the statement appeared. Further, I considered the function of the statement, as policy solution, problem definition, or meta-idea. I then used the Excel sheet to identify key ideas at all the levels of function with which Mehta operates, forming the skeleton for Sections 4.1 and 5.1.

The next stage was the actual analysis of ideas concerning the three topics. These have been analysed in the order they appear in the dissertation, beginning with Section 4.2 and ending with Section 5.4. At the start of each part of the analysis, I used the Excel sheet to gather all

statements made by politicians belonging to the group I was analysing, and then organized them according to the analytical tool prepared in the theory chapter. Based on this organisation, I entered the statements into the word processor and considered how best to describe the ideas expressed in them. At this stage, the statements were translated into English. When translating, I chose to stay as close as possible to the Norwegian wording and structure. In some cases, I considered the translation to be so difficult that I have commented upon it; otherwise it stands on its own. In addition to the official resources for translation listed on page vii, I also used ordinary dictionaries frequently, from Norwegian to English, as well as English thesauruses. At other times, I tested my translations in online searches to see if they brought up relevant political material. That said, I am not a translator, and the English rendering of the Norwegian sources is a potential source of misunderstanding and mistakes. However, having to translate statements has also been a way of reading them very carefully. When translating, it often become apparent when one's understanding of a statement is lacking.

In the presentation of the analysis, I considered whether to provide the Norwegian text of the statements next to the English translation but decided not to do so. Doing so would have been a service to Norwegian readers, but at the same time, would have made the presentation less coherent and much longer. Instead, I have always provided page references to the Norwegian proceedings, so it should not be hard for a Norwegian reader to download a pdf version from the webpages of the Storting. Then, it should be quite easy to find the statements that I have translated into English.

Throughout the process of analysing, I often returned to the text of the proceedings as it appeared in the publications from the Storting, to see the statements in their original, local context. I did so both to reduce the likelihood of missing relevant material and to increase my chance of properly understanding the statements.

To answer the research questions, it was also necessary to compare the ideas expressed in the two debates, both internally in the two debates and with a view to the differences between the ideas expressed in each of them. I chose to separate the comparison of ideas from the first presentation of the analysis. Thus, in Chapters 4 and 5, only statements within the groups that structure the material are compared. In Chapter 6, however, ideas expressed by different groups in the same debate are compared, and the ideas described in 1995 and 2008 are also compared. These comparisons then serve as part of the material for answering and discussing the research questions in Chapter 7. However, to make the link between the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5,



and the comparison in Chapter 6, the end of each section of analysis has a summary of the main ideas expressed by each group of politicians in a table and a brief foreshadowing of elements that are discussed in the comparative chapter.

The comparison is structured in two ways. First, it follows the division of the analysis into three topics. Ideas about RE are compared first, then ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, and finally ideas about the purpose of education. Secondly, it is organised by different kinds of analysis. For each topic, I first compared the ideas expressed in each debate, before comparing the ideas expressed in both of them. Note that these two comparisons are quite different. When comparing ideas expressed within the same debate, the elements in the comparison are all within the enclosure of the debate I have analysed. The comparison of ideas from 1995 and 2008 is more complicated. On one hand, I believe it is fair to compare ideas in two debates at different times and observe what similarities and differences appear. On the other hand, there is clear danger of leaving the impression that, by doing so, I have in some way charted the development of these ideas. That work is beyond the scope of this study. By analysing only two debates, I am omitting a lot of material about how these ideas have developed over the years. In this way, there is a bias toward over-emphasising the role of the two debates I have chosen to analyse when describing the development. For this reason, comparisons of ideas from 1995 and 2008 are shorter and more concerned with main impressions.

Following the comparison in Chapter 6, I answer and discuss the research questions in Chapter 7, using the findings in the analysis and the comparison as data. Here, I begin by offering a response to the first research question—about the development of ideas about RE based on my analysis. This response is primarily based on the comparison of ideas about RE in the two debates in Section 6.1.3. The second research question asks about what relationships may be seen between the ideas about RE and the ideas about the two other topics. To answer this question, I first give a summary of what ideas the different groups of politicians have expressed concerning all the three topics, showing the ideas in combination, and then discuss, based on this presentation, what relationships among the ideas concerning the three topics are seen. Here, I again draw on Mehta's understanding of how ideas function in politics, and, crucially, the relationships among the three levels he operates with. Finally, I return to the claims from former research that have been presented both in Section 1.2 of the introduction and in the theory chapter to reconnect my contribution to the effective history of scholarship concerning these matters.

### **Some methodological caveats**

The qualitative nature of this analysis should be clear. The analysis reflects my understanding of the statements and its success rests on how consistent, thorough, and transparent I have managed to be. However, to avoid misunderstandings, I wish to make some methodological caveats clear. First, it is vital to note that the topics about which I analyse ideas are analytical inventions. In other words, there is no such thing as a relationship between religious and national identity, or a purpose of education, that exists in isolation. I find and describe the ideas that I do partly because of the questions that I ask. If I had set up the topics in another way, or had chosen different topics altogether, I would have described different ideas in the debates. This truth is particularly relevant for understanding my answer to the second research question, about relationships among ideas. Here, I first established three different topics, and then I asked about relationships among them. However, all the topics could have been imagined differently, and then the relationships would have appeared different as well.

Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that my analysis is descriptive, not critical, or explanatory (Beckman, 2005). In a critical idea analysis, the purpose is to test whether ideas are consistent, or even desirable in a normative sense. This study has no such intentions. It is an insistently descriptive study, in which the aim is to understand the ideas that have been expressed and the relationships among them in a better way, not to say anything about which ideas are better or worse. If my personal opinions have influenced the text of the dissertation to the point where it seems I am taking a stand in any direction, then that is against my conscious will and effort to avoid it. In a descriptive idea analysis, my personal opinions are of no interest, as they are not the ideas that are to be described.

Note, however, that the challenge to the distinction between normative and descriptive ideas mentioned at the opening of Section 2.2 applies here as well. In other words, although I did not aim to take a normative stance concerning the ideas I analysed, normative implications still appear in a descriptive idea analysis. For instance, I took the position that these ideas were worth describing, and that it was a good idea to look for relationships among these topics. In this sense, the dissertation also expresses a normative position (Henriksen, 2011).

An explanatory idea analysis aims to clarify the causes of policy outcomes by means of ideas. That is not an aim for this study. While there are good reasons to believe that ideas influence policy outcomes (Gofas & Hay, 2010), it would be simplistic to assume that such outcomes could be explained only by studying ideas expressed by politicians. In practical politics,

compromises, tactical concessions, and even personal dynamics form a web of power play that cannot be overlooked when trying to explain why something happened. This is not a study about why RE came to be what it was around 2008, but rather about how the ideas about RE developed and their relationship to ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education. Here, there is an implicit claim on my part that understanding the relationship between the ideas about RE and the two other topics is relevant for understanding the developments in RE, but I hold no illusions as to the extent of that relevance. The reasons for policy change are complex and potentially legion.

With these caveats in mind, I now move on to describing the particularities of the material chosen for the study, proceedings from debates in the Norwegian Storting.

### **2.3 Proceedings from parliamentary debates as material**

In this section, I first present how proceedings from the Norwegian Storting were produced at the time of the debates I analyse and then discuss their status as formal texts. Secondly, I discuss questions of interpretation concerning analysing statements from politicians, to further clarify the aim of my analysis.

From 1857 to 2009, proceedings from debates in the Norwegian Storting were based on stenographical notes taken by an official reporter sitting in the room where the debate was being held (Viggen, 2017). As both debates analysed in this dissertation are from before 2009, they were produced in the same way: the stenographers documenting the proceedings worked in shifts. After a shift of stenography, the official reporter would hurry back to his or her office and write proceedings based on the stenographical notes, aided by audio recordings of the debate (Borgersrud, 2014).

The official reporters of the Storting do not write exactly what is said in the debate. Instead, their goal is to write a grammatically correct version of what the politicians said, preferably in a way that makes it possible to recognise the idiosyncrasies of the different individuals (Borgersrud, 2014; Stortingets informasjonstjeneste, 2014). In other words, a certain amount of rewriting is being done, and the proceedings may not be used as evidence of the exact words in the debate. For this reason, one must keep in mind that there is a distance—however small—between what the politician said and the text of the debate proceedings.

The published version of the proceedings is organised chronologically. The different speeches by the politicians are introduced with the full name and party affiliation of the politician, and

the exact time the speech began. After most of the speeches, the Presidium allows for reply speeches, which are written in the same style as ordinary speeches. Therefore, the dynamic for most of the debate is that a politician will hold a speech, receive replies to that speech, and then reply to the reply speeches.

The debates open with a section in which a member of the Standing Committee from each party gives a speech presenting and arguing for the party's position in the recommendation. These speeches are followed by replies. The amount of time available to each MP is allocated beforehand, based on a proposal from the Presidium. In general, parties with more MPs receive more time than smaller parties, but all parties receive a minimum amount of time to express their views. Another reason MPs do not take part in the debates in equal measure may relate to tactical interest. Some parties are more interested in talking about and highlighting specific issues, as is especially evident in the second debate I analysed. There, only one MP from one of the parties on the governing coalition took part and appeared to do so in as brief a way as possible. The varying sizes of the different party groups' contribution to the debate is a potential source of bias in the analysis and is discussed when analysing that debate.

Tuastad (2006, pp. 8–9) has stated that when it comes to formality, parliamentary debates are somewhere between spontaneous utterances and formal utterances such as party programmes and White Papers. Many MPs prepare their speeches in written form beforehand, but replies are given more freely. Tuastad (2006, pp. 8–9) also pointed to Stenvoll (2003, p. 25), who has underlined the strong parliamentary tradition for giving reasons for one's position on a particular issue. This tradition influences the speeches made in the debates and is part of what makes them a useful resource for analysis. Stenvoll (2003, p. 25) also noted that speeches in the Storting are held 'on record', and that the politicians are aware that they are speaking to the public sphere, not simply to each other and the Presidium. He classified most of the speeches during the debates as 'self-conscious utterances', which emphasises the degree to which the MPs have prepared and thought through what they say in the Storting.

### **MPs as complex actors – where to aim the analysis?**

The politicians making these statements are themselves complex actors (Tuastad, 2006, p. 9). When they hold speeches in Parliament, they almost always do so as elected representatives of a party.<sup>18</sup> Thus, they are both representing their party and the voters who have voted for that

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<sup>18</sup> The only exception in this dissertation is the independent MP Ellen Chr. Christiansen.

party's list of candidates in their electoral district. A scholar must therefore choose what to 'aim' the analysis at. Is it intended to investigate the personal opinions of the individual MPs active in the debates? Or, is the analytical interest in the political position being presented? How big and relevant is the difference between these two options?

This dissertation took as its object of analysis the political language of individuals who represent a party. Thus, they were in focus primarily as representatives. This focus is also reflected in the language of the dissertation. I write about the ideas they expressed. I do not speculate about what may or may not have gone on in minds. Thus, the aim was not to discover what MPs meant concerning political issues. Instead, what they said as representatives is used as examples of utterances made in the formal political setting of the Storting. Following this approach, I did not attempt to trace the sources of inspiration for the speeches held by the MPs. Some MPs were clearly quoting other documents, but I do not discuss such matters. The point is that the statements were given in the debate; I do not attempt to explain their origin in Norwegian politics.

Furthermore, not all MPs take part in debates in equal measure. Since 2005, the Storting has had 169 representatives, while at the time of the debate in 1995, there were 165 representatives (Stortinget). All the MPs belong to at least one of 12 different Standing Committees and whenever an issue is before the Storting, it is assigned to one of the Standing Committees for preparation. In practice, decisions about what the majority supports are made in these committees and expressed in a written recommendation. The recommendations form the one exception to the rule—cited above—about not paying attention to the politicians' sources. The Recommendations to the Storting concerning the debates I analysed have been used to organise the politicians into groups. At points in the analysis, I also bring aspects of the recommendations in to explain and clarify my interpretations of some statements.

In this section, I have discussed the particularities involved in using proceedings from debates in the Norwegian Storting as material, including a discussion of MPs as complex actors. This brings my presentation of matters pertaining to method and material in this chapter to an end. In the next chapter, theoretical perspectives are brought in to prepare the analysis for each of the three topics about which ideas are to be analysed.

### **3 Approaching RE, religious and national identity and the purpose of education**

As explained in Section 2.2, the analytical strategy employed in this dissertation is deductive, as theory is used to set up an analytical tool for each of the three topics about which ideas are to be analysed. That is the purpose of this chapter. It has four sections, one for each of the three topics, and a final section summarising the analytical tools that have been established. The first section is on religion education, the second on the relationship between religious and national identity, and the third is on the purpose of education.

#### **3.1 Religion education**

Why should religion education (RE) be a part of education? What is the intended outcome of having it there, and what should be done in RE to ensure that outcome? In my understanding, these are questions that concern the purpose, aims, and tasks of RE. Together, they indicate what is meant by the phrase ‘ideas about RE’ as used in this dissertation. In this section, I engage with RE research to prepare the analysis of such ideas in the proceedings from the Norwegian Storting. The end result is an analytical tool combining the distinctions between confessional and non-confessional RE, and separative and integrative RE, with a framework for distinguishing between different aims for RE. The section opens, however, with some introductory remarks about different approaches to RE.

##### **Preliminary observations – differences in current European approaches to RE**

In a recent article about RE in Norway, Lippe and Undheim (2017, p. 24) contrast three different ways of seeing the subject, two of which are rejected. For them, RE is not about religious instruction, and the subject is not to provide a platform of information about religion upon which the pupils are to build their own worldviews. Instead, they argue for understanding the subject as a place for developing cultural competence, and qualifying pupils for democratic citizenship in a diverse society.

Andreassen (2014b, pp. 325–326) found similar ideas in his study of curriculum for RE in Norwegian teacher education. In the late 1990s, when integrative RE was new in Norway, RE teachers were to be experts on identity, and prepared to guide the pupils to existential maturity. In 2010, however, the teacher was cast as a bridge-builder in a diverse society. This development may be taken as an indication of a shift in the political aims for the subject.

For Skeie (2017a), having RE as a separate subject in the public curriculum is not a given. Indeed, as the human rights criticism and convictions against Norway discussed in Section 1.2 has shown, religious and non-religious beliefs as part of a school subject can be controversial and offending. According to Skeie, however, these difficulties are not only found in education, but are rather reflections of challenges diverse societies must face. He therefore sees the RE subject as a microcosm where pupils can experience diversity with the aim of contributing to the development of democratic citizenship.

Internationally, the role of RE in contemporary times has been the topic of several volumes (e.g. Berglund, Shanneik, & Bocking, 2016; Franken & Loobuyck, 2011; Grimmitt, 2010; Jödicke, 2013; Smyth, Lyons, & Darmody, 2013). In one of these, Jensen (2011) argues for non-confessional, integrative RE as a subject in the service of democratic society, where well worked out and critically assessed knowledge can replace ignorance. He is critical of what he finds to be the main reason for promoting RE, characterised by keywords such as tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Jensen does not disagree with the ambition that RE may contribute to these aims, but he sees three potential problems with setting them up as the subject's primary reason (Jensen, 2011, p. 138).

The first is the risk that these challenges may prove to be ephemeral. Jensen makes the point that few of the RE scholars who are advocating the subject as a solution to today's challenge of diversity were trained in that form of RE. Instead, he suggests that RE should provide a more general capability to face both current and future challenges.

Jensen's second worry is that through highlighting its own role in solving societal issues concerning diversity and religion, RE may contribute to over-emphasising the role of religion in these issues. If this leads to a downplaying of economic, educational, and political factors, RE may indeed hinder more effective ways of solving the issues.

Thirdly, Jensen observes that when RE is put forward as a way to promote tolerance and understanding across borders of religions and beliefs, as in the *Toledo Guiding Principles* from the OSCE (2007), this has consequences for the conceptualisation of religion. His analysis of *Toledo* indicates that through words such as 'respect' and 'sensitivity', religion and non-religious beliefs that support the democratic and pluralistic ideals of the guidelines are promoted. From Jensen's perspective, *Toledo* presents a form of RE that fails to be objective and impartial.

Writing in the same volume as Jensen, Schweitzer (2011) offers a different understanding of RE. Instead of the objective and impartial form that Jensen espouses, Schweitzer recommends denominational RE, expanded with a dialogical cooperation between different denominational programs. The idea is that separate programs for RE is set up with different denominations, such as various forms of protestant Christianity, and then participants from each program meet for dialogue (Schweitzer, 2011, p. 118).

For this kind of RE, the aim is twofold (Schweitzer, 2011, p. 126). On the one hand, the religious identity formation of the pupils is supported in groups belonging to the same denomination. On the other, pupils and teachers from different groups encounter each other with the aim of developing the dialogue skills needed in a diverse society.

The contributions from Jensen and Schweitzer exemplify different forms of conceptualizing RE. For Jensen, the ideal is for RE to be compulsory and integrative, in the sense that all pupils should take part in the same subject, which should be based on a study-of-religions approach (Alberts, 2007, pp. 355–360). For Schweitzer, pupils belonging to different denominations should attend separate groups in RE, receive support for their religious identity formation there, and then have encounters with other groups to learn dialogue.

Both of these approaches are put forward with the intention of replacing older, confessional, or catechetical versions of RE, and both relate to current societal challenges. Thus, they show that while there may be common agreement that RE has needed to change, different approaches may arise from that need.

### **Developing an analytical tool based on distinctions – beginning with confessionality**

Having used the contributions from Jensen and Schweitzer to show some of the breadth in ideas about RE, I will now move on to the establishment of the analytical tool that will be used to analyse such ideas in the two debates. I will begin by presenting the distinction between confessional and non-confessional RE, drawing on works by Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013) and Kimanen (2015). Subsequently, I continue with Alberts' (2007) distinction between integrative and separative forms of RE. Following that discussion, I will engage with an approach to distinguishing between different aims for RE, Grimmitt's distinction between learning about and learning from religion (Grimmitt, 1987). This has recently been reworked and used as an analytical framework for the aims of RE by Kjeldsen (2016). Taken together, the two distinctions and the framework for aims form the analytical tool used to describe ideas about RE.



Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013, p. 188) have suggested distinguishing between what they label ‘capital C’ Confessional RE’ and ‘small-c’ confessional RE. A ‘capital-C’ Confessional RE subject is characterised by an explicit confessional framework where the pupils are intended to receive instruction in said confession. Jensen and Kjeldsen point out that one might also imagine less explicit, small-c confessional subjects. An RE subject that is intended to be neutral with regard to which religion is true may still promote the sense that there is some truth in religion and thus be normative in a theological sense. To put it differently, if the framework for a neutral subject includes the idea that all children should develop a sense of spirituality, or that religion at its core is inherently good, such a framework could be referred to as small-c confessional RE. Thus, Jensen and Kjeldsen’s concept makes it possible to distinguish between various kinds of confessional RE.

Another approach to describing confessionality for RE has been offered by Kimanen (2015), who has proposed a tool consisting of four dimensions. These dimensions concern subject content, rituals, objectives, and identity assumptions (Kimanen, 2015). For each of them she has also worked out ideal types for the imagined fully confessional and non-confessional extreme points of the dimension.

Concerning the dimension of content, Kimanen imagines that a fully confessional RE subject would only include subject knowledge about one religious tradition. In addition, she proposes that in the presentation of this religious tradition, a large emphasis would be placed on standard and traditional representations, as provided by leading religious experts. In a completely non-confessional RE subject, however, the subject knowledge would be put together in accordance with principles of balance, seeking to maintain a neutral allocation of time and effort between different religious traditions. Furthermore, she adds that the teaching material in a completely non-confessional iteration of RE would have to be produced by academic scholars and experts.

Kimanen intends the dimension of rituals to describe religious practices as a potential part of RE. In a fully confessional RE classroom, she imagines that practices such as for instance prayer and the singing of religious songs may be common. In the non-confessional counterpart, there would be no room for practices considered religious.

The third dimension concerns the objectives of the subject. For the fully confessional subject, Kimanen imagines that the objective is to induce the desired values, norms, practices, and beliefs of a religious tradition. For the non-confessional subject, however, the objective is rather to transmit knowledge about religious traditions.

Finally, Kimanen includes a dimension intended to examine the imagined assumptions made about the relationships among a society, religious communities, and the pupils in the subject. Here, she observes that for a fully confessional subject, an assumption is made about the religious identity of the pupils. They are assumed to be members of the community, sometimes regardless of personal faith. Thus, one might imagine an argument saying that independently of the religious or non-religious identity of a specific pupil, they all need to know about ‘their’ religious tradition. In that way, an assumption is made about the religious belonging of the pupils in the subject. Again, in a completely non-confessional subject, Kimanen imagines that no such assumptions would be made. Instead, the religious or non-religious background of the pupils is a personal matter and may only become part of the agenda in the subject if a pupil brings it up.

Thus, according to Kimanen, a fully confessional subject is one where only one religious tradition is taught. The classroom activities may include religious practices and are enacted with the objective of inducing desired values, beliefs, norms, and practices in the pupils. Also, the pupils in the subject are assumed to be affiliated with the religious tradition in the subject. A non-confessional subject, however, is for Kimanen one where potentially all religious traditions and non-religious beliefs may be part of the content of the subject. No religious practices may be part of the activities in the subject, and the objective is the transmission of knowledge about religious traditions and non-religious beliefs. Furthermore, no assumptions are made about the religious/non-religious backgrounds or affiliations of the pupils.

Kimanen’s four dimensions are intended to be a tool for discussing the sense in which RE subjects are confessional. An RE subject may, for instance, be confessional along some of the dimensions even though it is non-confessional on another (Kimanen, 2015). In this way, the dimensions seem useful to tease out various ways in which a form of RE may be more or less confessional, similar to Jensen and Kjeldsen’s notion of small-c confessional RE.

In the analysis, these two contributions to understanding confessionality in RE is used to identify ideas about (non-)confessionality, and to show the variation in the ideas expressed by the politicians.

#### **Next distinction: Integrative vs separative RE**

The next distinction to be used in the analysis of ideas about RE is between integrative and separative RE (Alberts, 2007). When RE is realised in a separative model, the pupils are divided into groups in accordance with their or their parents’ religious/non-religious affiliation. In some

iterations, an ‘alternative’ subject is also offered to pupils who do not wish (or whose parents do not wish for them) to attend any of the confessional subjects offered (Alberts, 2008, pp. 303–304). In practice, a separative model will involve one or more confessional RE subjects, as in the denominational approach to RE (Schweitzer, 2011).

The concept of integrative RE has been worked out by Alberts (2007, 2008). In her dissertation, Alberts uses the label ‘integrative’ in two ways. Firstly, it is used to describe forms of RE, such as the ones found in England and Sweden, that are non-separative and non-confessional (Alberts, 2007, pp. 1–2). They are non-separative in the sense that there is only one school subject that all the pupils attend, and they are non-confessional in the sense that they are not what Jensen and Kjeldsen label ‘capital-C’ Confessional. That is, the subjects are not set up to instruct the pupils in one religious tradition, with the aim of socializing them into the desired norms, values, beliefs, and practices of that specific tradition.

Secondly, Alberts also speaks of integrative RE in a more specific sense. For instance, commenting upon the learning outcomes of the approach called ‘A Gift to the Child’ (Grimmitt, Hull, Grove, & Spencer, 1991), she notes the prevalence of beliefs ‘...which express a worldview that may not be shared by the pupils and which I think cannot really be desired learning outcomes of integrative RE’ (Alberts, 2007, p. 127). Here, Alberts is referring to integrative RE that is in line with the study-of-religions approach to RE, and when used in this sense, integrative RE has a more specific meaning. Alberts later explicates this, focusing on the name of the subject, the concept of religion, delineation of the subject matter, representation of religion in the subject, and matters of organisation. In the following, I will briefly recapitulate her discussion of these matters, which taken together presents a study-of-religions approach to RE, that is, an approach to RE that takes the study of religions as its starting point and main scholarly resource.

Alberts (2007, pp. 372–373) argues that for integrative RE following the study-of-religions approach, the name of the subject should not include references to specific religious traditions. This is for instance currently the case in Norway, where the name includes a reference to Christianity. From Alberts’ perspective, having such a reference in the name carries the risk of causing doubts as to the impartiality of the subject, which is a hallmark of this kind of integrative RE. Instead, she argues that names such as the Swedish *religionskunskap* and German *Religionskunde* are suitable.

The concept of religion is crucial for impartial, study-of-religions based integrative RE, and Alberts (2007, p. 374) puts forth six criteria that it must fulfil. Firstly, the concept of religion for integrative RE cannot itself be religious. For that reason, it must secondly also forego ideas about an imagined core essence of religion (cf. Hylén, 2012). Thirdly, it must not universalise any aspects from specific religious traditions. For example, it cannot assume that phenomena from one religious tradition must be a relevant feature of religion in general. The fourth criterion is that the concept of religion for integrative RE must not be set up in such a way that it over-emphasises specific aspects of religion. The fifth is that it must be broad enough to capture religion in its diversity, both amongst and within traditions. Finally, the concept of religion needs to be open to criticism of itself (Alberts, 2007, p. 374).

When it comes to the delineation of the subject matter in RE, Alberts (2007, p. 375) suggests combining expertise in the field of the study of religion with a focus on phenomena that have particular local or global relevance. The sheer multitude of religious phenomena in the world necessitates reduction, which raises questions of representation. When the complexity of religious traditions on the globe are to be delineated into a subject curriculum, which forms of religion are represented? Here, Alberts argues that for integrative RE, religion cannot only be represented in the traditional forms of elites but must include the diversity of the traditions as people enact them.

Furthermore, representation of religion in integrative RE must avoid assumptions about affiliations. This requires care in language, for instance avoiding pronouns such as ‘us’ and ‘our’, or ‘them’ and ‘their’, which signal attitudes that go against the impartial aims of integrative RE. Alberts also shows that methods used in the classroom convey ideas about representation, and argues that for the representation of religion to be in accordance with the principles of integrative RE, there must be balance in how relevant or exotic different religious traditions are presented (Alberts, 2007, pp. 376–377).

Finally, Alberts (2007, pp. 382–383) discusses matters pertaining to the organisation of integrative RE. She believes that it should be organised as a separate subject, and that it ought to be included from the first year of primary school. Furthermore, she argues against allowing exemption from the subject, in accordance with how integrative RE is practiced in Sweden. Alberts also argues that teachers in the subject should be professionally trained and have studied religion at an academic level. Another matter is that the curriculum plans for integrative RE should be produced by experts in this form of integrative RE. Alberts is also critical of having

specific percentages governing the allocation of classroom time devoted to specific religious traditions. From her perspective, this is not ideal, as having the classroom time in the subject allotted in a mathematical manner runs against the complex nature of teaching and learning (Alberts, 2007, p. 384).

Integrative RE may thus be used on the one hand to refer to a model of RE that is non-confessional and non-separative, and on the other, to refer to a specific study-of-religions approach to RE, characterised by the understanding of its name, concept of religion, delineation of the subject matter, critical consideration of the representation of religion, and aspects of its organisation as discussed above. In the analysis, I will look for ideas expressing both these possible meanings of the term, in addition to ideas about RE that go in the opposite, separative, direction.

### **Last part of the tool: categories for the aims of RE**

The final part of the analytical tool for analysing ideas about RE concerns the aims of the subject and takes the distinction between learning about and learning from religion as its starting point. This was first introduced to RE by Grimmitt and Read (1975). Later, Grimmitt (1987) developed the concept further as part of his educational rethinking of how learning about and from religion could serve the process of human development (Teece, 2010). In England, it has come to play a significant role in curriculum development, sometimes taking on different meanings in new policy contexts (Fancourt, 2015).

Grimmitt (1987, pp. 225–226) explicates the distinction between learning about and learning from religion as part of a proposed theory of RE that sees ‘humanisation’ as the goal of all education. It is furthermore ‘...the basis for establishing a relationship between personal development, education and religion’ (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 194). The link lies in how both religion and education is concerned with what it is and means to be human (Grimmitt, 1987, pp. 195, 198). When religious phenomena are part of the school curriculum, then, it is there because it may serve as an instrument by which the pupils may be supported in their process of humanisation, i.e. it has an instrumental role to play in education (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 141).

In Grimmitt’s explanation of the terms from 1987, the concepts of learning about and from religion are tied to an understanding of knowledge which distinguishes between on the one hand, ‘... an impersonal or public mode of understanding’ and on the other: ‘personal knowledge’ (Grimmitt, 1987, pp. 225–226). Learning about religion refers to the initiation of the pupils into the first, public, form, which includes knowing about ‘...beliefs, teachings, and

practices of the great religious traditions of the world' (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 225). In addition, this also includes learning about ultimate questions, what it means to be human, about core values and 'the shaping influences of religious beliefs and values on cultural history' (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 225).

Learning from religion, however, is tied to what Grimmitt calls 'personal knowledge' and is described as a process consisting of two forms of evaluation. First, the pupil is expected to make an impersonal evaluation of the '... truth claims, beliefs, and practices of different religious traditions and of religion itself' (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 226), drawing on resources such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and comparative approaches. Then, the pupils should move on to a personal evaluation, which Grimmitt illustrates by a list of several questions that may be asked, tying the subject matter in the impersonal evaluation to the personal existence of the pupil. The final question asks, 'Is there anything here which teaches me something about myself?' (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 226). In this way, the subject matter of RE is integrated with the humanisation project of education, and the interaction between learning about and learning from religion is made clear. The pupil begins by being initiated into the public mode of understanding phenomena and traditions, but through evaluating that which is encountered in the subject, the pupil ends up in a process of self-evaluation. Or as Grimmitt (1987, p. 226) puts it, 'This [...] interaction [...] permits the pupil's knowledge of religions to become formative in promoting knowledge of self.'

Kjeldsen (2016, pp. 28–33) has developed Grimmitt's concept into a framework for analysing the teaching of Christianity in the Danish RE subject. In her approach, the categories 'learning about' and 'learning from' serve as a superstructure, reflecting what she labels aims and knowledge that are inherent to the subject (Danish: *Faglige mål og viden*) and aims that are external (Danish: *Ekstra-faglige mål*). The aims and knowledge inherent to the RE subject are defined as 'learning about one or more religions or socio-cultural topics', whereas the aims that are external to the RE subject are split into four different subcategories: supporting social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, existential-religious development, and analytical-critical development.<sup>19</sup> Together, these four subcategories reflect different takes on Grimmitt's 'learning from religion'.

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<sup>19</sup> In Danish, Kjeldsen uses the word *dannelse*, which is associated with German *bildung*. However, as her concept is developed with a starting point in Grimmitt's terminology, I translate it with the English 'development', which was used by him.

Kjeldsen's analytical framework will be used as part of my analytical tool and to operationalise it further, it is useful to look at the examples Kjeldsen brings in from RE scholarship to better illustrate how the four different subcategories of the external aims may be worked out. Engaging with her presentation of the framework and adding some examples from Norwegian scholarship should make it easier to decide what ideas should be interpreted as closest to each subcategory. This also illustrates the breadth of ideas about the aims of RE that Kjeldsen's analytical framework encapsulates, as it allows for an organisation of very different conceptualisations of the subject. In the following, I will therefore point to scholars who have (sometimes very) different ideas about what RE ought to be, with the aim of exemplifying the four subcategories Kjeldsen has set up for how the external aims of RE may be understood. The point here is not that these perspectives may be combined or unified, but to use them to illustrate that Kjeldsen's categories are wide enough to encompass a variety of ideas about RE.

By the subcategory supporting social-ethical development, Kjeldsen (2016, p. 33) refers to developmental aims that concern the pupils as a part of society. Her examples are mores for close relations, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, citizenship education, and national-cultural (Christian) development. Kjeldsen finds aims of this kind in the interpretive approach associated with Jackson (1997) and especially in the guidelines and recommendations for RE given by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, 2007) and the Council of Europe (2008). In these sources, RE is envisioned as a key resource in the face of increased plurality in Europe and may be understood as an element in a strategy for enabling children to deal well with diversity in society (Council of Europe, 2008, appendix, section 5 and 6; OSCE, 2007, pp. 9–10, 13–14, 48–49). This is thus partly the kind of thinking about RE that Jensen (2011) has been critical of, as seen in the opening of this section. Furthermore, Kjeldsen notes that according to her empirical findings, one may also have social-ethical aims for RE that concern living in close relations, and as '... historical-cultural and/or national-cultural development tied to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity' (Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 31).

The social-ethical developmental aim may also be reflected in Andreassen's (2014b) findings concerning how teachers' expected role in Norwegian RE has changed. As mentioned at the beginning of Section 3.1, he found that teacher education plans from 2010 cast RE teachers as bridge-builders in a diverse society. Then, the aim of RE is also understood in terms of supporting social-ethical development, as a subject where pupils are to be qualified for life in a diverse society.

For his own part, Andreassen (2016) is critical of having any aims involving learning from religion as part of curriculum plans for RE, especially of the kind Kjeldsen associates with the two next subcategories: supporting existential-ethical and existential-religious development. Kjeldsen sees these two subcategories as two aspects of personal development (Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 29). She understands Grimmitt's 'learning from religion'-category to include both these aspects, whereas the corresponding feature of Jackson's interpretive approach, 'edification' (Jackson, 1997, pp. 130–134) only involves what she calls existential-ethical development.

In the interpretive approach, the aim is for pupils to understand 'the grammar of religions' and develop 'the interpretive skills necessary to gain that understanding' (Jackson, 1997, p. 133). Edification appears as a further aim, that may be encouraged by promoting reflection, but may also happen spontaneously (Jackson, 1997, p. 132). It refers to the potentially transformative effect of coming to know other cultures or worldviews than the one the pupil is most familiar with. By studying and interpreting other perspectives, the pupil's own position in the world may be reflected in a different way, and in this sense, a pupil may '... be taken out of one's own self' (Jackson, 1997, p. 130).

Concerning the existential-religious development, Kjeldsen (2016, pp. 28, 30) points both to Grimmitt's (1987, pp. 225–226) understanding of learning from religion and Heimbrock, Scheilke and Schreiner (2001, pp. 9–10), who presented a notion of religious competence that included being able to relate to one's own religiosity. A more recent example of seeing existential-religious development as part of the aim of RE may be Sagberg's holistic religious education, which seems to include a religious dimension (Sagberg, 2015, p. 148).

Thus, it becomes clear that these two subcategories of external aims for RE, supporting existential-ethical and existential-religious development, may refer to quite different ideas about the aims of RE, as for instance the distance between Jackson's and Heimbrock, Scheilke and Schreiner's approaches illustrates. In Kjeldsen's analytical framework, Jackson's ideas may be referred to as aiming to support existential-ethical development, whereas the latter group represents what she sees as supporting existential-religious development.

The final subcategory Kjeldsen (2016, pp. 31–32) places under aims that are external to the subject is called analytical-critical development, and is tied to ideas of religious literacy as understood by Moore (2007, pp. 56–57), and the alternative to existential development presented by Alberts (2008, p. 320). Like Jackson (1997, p. 133) used the concept of 'grammar' to express what pupils ought to learn in RE, Moore uses terminology drawn from reading and



writing to express the goal of RE as religious literacy. In her understanding, this has two components. An understanding of key aspects of important religious traditions in the world and the ‘... ability to discern and explore the religious dimension of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place’ (Moore, 2007, pp. 56–57). Thus, in addition to understanding aspects of religious traditions, the pupil is to become able to employ this knowledge to interpret phenomena in society. To stay with the metaphor of literacy, the pupil is to become adept at reading religion in the world.

Based on Alberts’ own analysis of forms of integrative education, she found that when an existential dimension was included in the conceptualisation of RE, it led to confessional or religious elements in the subject (Alberts, 2007, p. 359). Elsewhere she has noted that by having ‘learning from religion’ as an explicit aim of RE, one risks privileging religious perspectives over non-religious ones (Alberts, 2008, p. 320). Instead, any such existential dimension of integrative RE based on a study-of-religions approach must be carried out within its secular framework. One example of how this may be accomplished is found in Jackson’s concept of edification (Alberts, 2007, p. 359).

Alberts’ own alternative, however, is slightly different. She has suggested replacing the notion of learning from religion with the aim of learning from the study of religion (Alberts, 2008, p. 320). This avoids potential religious interpretations, and also highlights ‘... the general analytical skills which the study of religion fosters and [...] the reflexive aspect of the subject’ (Alberts, 2008, p. 320). This concept, learning from the study of religion, is another example of what Kjeldsen (2016, pp. 31–32) sees as supporting analytical-critical development.

This final subcategory completes the set of four different takes on how the external aim of RE may be understood, exemplified by the social-ethical development of the OSCE (2007), the existential-ethical concept of edification (Jackson, 1997), the religious-ethical aims of Heimbrock, Scheilke and Schreiner (2001), and the analytical-critical aims of religious literacy (Moore, 2007) and learning from the study of religion (Alberts, 2008). Together with the inherent aim for RE, learning about religion, these four different takes on the external aims of the subject completes the analytical tool for analysing ideas about RE, and should make it well suited to identifying and describing the ideas expressed by the politicians in the debates.

The complete analytical tool for analysing ideas about RE is summarised in Section 3.4.

## **3.2 The relationship between religious and national identity**

This section presents the analytical tool to be used for analysing ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity. After a brief introduction to my use of the terms religion, nation, and identity, the first part is set up to show more of the reasoning behind choosing this topic, by showing the relevance of this issue for RE. Secondly, Taylor's (2007, 2011) concept for understanding the configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity is brought in as a theoretical resource for analysing ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity.

### **Defining religion, nation, and identity**

Writing about relationships among religious and national identity invokes three concepts that all require explanation: 'religion', 'nation', and 'identity'. While it falls beyond the scope of this dissertation to do a theoretical exploration of any of them, it is still necessary to give a brief presentation of how these terms are understood and used in this dissertation. That is the purpose of the next few paragraphs. The term 'religion' is discussed first, then 'nation', and finally 'identity'.

Hylén (2012, p. 107) understands an essentialist conceptualisation of religion as one assuming that all religion is characterised by one or more specific elements. In such definitions, religion is assumed to have a core, a permanent essence, which will always be an identifiable feature.

This approach to understanding religion is not suited for use in RE, for two reasons (Hylén, 2012, pp. 109–110). Firstly, by claiming that all religion is characterised by certain specific elements, one draws a boundary between what is religion and what is not. Thus, essentialism carries the risk of a binary understanding of religion, where a phenomenon can only be labelled 'religion' or 'not religion'. Faced with the complex reality of phenomena associated with the term religion, this leads to an unacceptable reductionism. Furthermore, whenever claims about the essence of religion is made, there are someone making them. In doing so, they risk universalising their own understanding of religion, and enforcing it onto a global reality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A third reason such essentialist conceptualisations of religions are not suited for RE is the lack of support for them amongst scholars of religion (Gilhus, 2009, p. 23).

Instead of these essentialist accounts of religion, Hylén wants to introduce one that is open (Hylén, 2012, pp. 125–127). Here, he draws on the work of Saler (2000, 2009), who combines the Wittgensteinian idea of family resemblances with the cognitive concept of prototypes.

Saler starts with the idea that scholarly use of the term ‘religion’ should accept that the term is in everyday use and has been so for a long time. This use may be incoherent and even oppressive, but it still affects the reading of the word, by strongly associating it with certain phenomena, such as prayer, offerings, churches, temples, meditation et cetera. For this reason, religion may be understood as a folk category (Saler, 2000, pp. 22–23). When this concept is to be brought into scholarly practice, it must be transformed for analytical use, and the need for definitions arise. Saler argues against the binary definitions that are set up to establish borders between what religion is and what it is not. Instead, he recommends imagining religion as an open category, where phenomena may be more or less religious. In that way, the definition is oriented by a central concept, and not by a need to draw boundaries.

In managing such definitions, Saler draws on Wittgenstein’s example of the family resemblances within games. If one imagines all the phenomena associated with religion as a pool of possible aspects of religion, then singular examples, such as Protestant Christianity among members of the Church of Norway or Theravada Buddhism represented by a group of monks on Sri Lanka may share some of these phenomena and not others. In that way, they may resemble one another as family members, who share some features and not others. Thus, one avoids claiming that a certain aspect in this pool is essential for all religions.

However, one may ask where this pool comes from – what decides which phenomena goes into it or not, and so the problem of definitions returns. Saler’s solution draws on cognitive psychology and the concept of prototype theory. A prototype is the best and clearest example of the members in a category, and cognitive scientists have shown that such types play a key role in how humans think (Hylén, 2012, p. 127). Growing up, we acquire notions of key examples for categories, and when encountering new phenomena, these categories provide starting points for comparisons and labelling.

The folk category of religion may serve as such a prototype for an analytical model of religion (Hylén, 2012, pp. 127–128). In the West, religious traditions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam have informed the way many people imagine religion, and for Saler this may serve as a starting point for the open analytical category of religion as well.

Thus, ethnocentrism is built into the model, but along with it goes the insistence that all is not said (Hylén, 2012, p. 128). While it may be reasonable for a Western scholar of religion to have such monotheistic examples of religion as their prototype, this does not bind them to classify different phenomena as ‘not-religion’.

This distinguishes Saler’s way of conceptualising religion from Smart’s (Andreassen, 2010). Smart’s multidimensional model for approaching religion has been used with universal ambitions, while at the same time being shown to have an ethnocentric bias – favouring the large monotheistic traditions (Andreassen, 2010). For Saler, the ethnocentrism is part of the model to a higher degree than for Smart, but the universal ambitions are not. Instead, the model may serve as part of a hermeneutical process (cf. Section 2.1). Then, the prototype fills the function of the preunderstanding with which the scholar comes to the world. However, as the scholar is consciously aware that religion is an open category, the encounter is framed by an openness for revision. Thus, one must put away the ambition to give clear and final answers to the borders of what is religion and what is not but is instead more able to deal analytically with religious phenomena in their complexity.

Furthermore, by making the need for a prototype, or preunderstanding, explicit, one also increases transparency. Scholars from various parts of the world will have various aspects of religion in the pool of religious phenomena they have grown up with. Thus, instead of universalising their experience, they are here encouraged to consciously build the particularity of their own thinking into the model, with increased transparency as a result.

Hylén’s understanding of Saler’s concept of religions is well suited for my dissertation. It relates both to how the politicians may express ideas about religion based on the prototype(s) they are familiar with and how these prototypes may never be assumed to be universal. In the analytical language of the dissertation, I try to reflect the openness of the concept of religion by referring to them as traditions, for instance in a phrase such as ‘in the religious tradition of Christianity’. By referring to something as a tradition, I also wish to highlight the human aspect of this concept of religion. As used in the analytical language of this dissertation, religion and religious traditions are thought of as examples of human activity in the world, enacted and transmitted socially, linguistically, and materially. At the same time, the combination of Hylén’s criticism of essentialism and Saler’s alternative makes it possible to observe and identify variation in the ideas the politicians express about religion.

The next term to discuss here, 'nation', is also hard to define (Thorkildsen, 2006, p. 202). Historically, it has referred to several entities, based on various characteristics. Thorkildsen (2006, pp. 203–206) distinguishes between an essentialist and a constructivist approach to understanding the concept. An essentialist perspective says that modern nations are the current manifestations of entities that have a long history, whereas constructivists often point to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and say that they were invented at that time, and subsequently given a suitable history. For Thorkildsen, neither of these extremes appears plausible. Instead, he recommends caution when it comes to subscribing to a specific theory of nationalism (Thorkildsen, 2006, p. 206). He believes that while there definitely was a great shift in the understanding of the concept of the nation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was still an element of continuity between the new and the old. Therefore, the word 'nation', or 'national', will in this dissertation be used to refer to imagined entities associated with modernity and with their origin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while at the same time not ruling out that there may have been an element of historical continuity in parts of their imagery.

When the concepts of religion and nation are combined with identity it is a reflection of the assumption that it is meaningful to do so – to speak of both religious and national identity. In the final part of this opening section, Eriksen's (2004) understanding of the concept of identity is brought in to clarify what is meant when speaking of identity as 'religious and/or national identity'.

Colloquially, the word 'identity' is used as a way of referring to an individual or a group's sense of self, but further inquiries make it clear that the issue is not straightforward. For Eriksen (2004), identity is associated with both a personal and a group level. For the individual, he argues that we need to think of three dimensions of identity: a biological one, transmitted genetically, a cultural one, transmitted socially, and finally, freedom. Eriksen's final aspect is inspired by existentialist philosophy and emphasises that if we speak of people's identities as determined either by biology or their cultural surroundings, we are at risk of denying them any influence over themselves. We therefore need to include an aspect of freedom in the sources to a person's identity (Eriksen, 2004, p. 25). These three sources do not operate in isolation and are not additive layers by which one builds identity. Instead, they interact in complex dynamics, and are always found together.

At the group level, Eriksen observes the key function of distinguishing between insiders and outsiders. For him, that is one of the three universal group distinctions. Together with the

dualities of the sexes, and the difference between old and young, there is always amongst humans a sense of ‘us and them’ (Eriksen, 2004, p. 60).

The sense of belonging to a group, and not some ‘other’ may be weaker and stronger. For Eriksen (2004, p. 63), the internal identification in the group becomes more powerful if it is bound up in a shared language or a shared (sense of) history. He also lists many other such potential sources of power for group belonging, but the main one, finally, is the sense of a common outsider, someone who does not belong to the group.

When ‘religious and/or national identity’ is used in this dissertation, it is with reference to such a sense of group identity, where part of the source for belonging to the group is tied to ideas of shared religion and/or nation. To discuss a relationship between religious and national identity then, is to discuss the sense in which the ideas concerning nation and the ideas concerning religion are related to one another in their function as support of a group identity.

### **3.2.1 Why discuss religious and national identity together with ideas about RE?**

Since choosing the topics about which to analyse ideas together with RE is among the significant choices made in this dissertation, I wish to show more of the reason for doing so. In this section, a selection of cases showing the relevance of discussing the relationship between RE and religious and national identity is presented. After discussing examples of a potential link between religious and national identity, I will present a few examples of the opposite. The following discussion is not a comprehensive review of all the instances where a potential relationship between religious and national identity is observed in ideas about RE. Instead, examples where the relationship seems particularly clear have been selected. The point is to show that it is relevant to discuss relationships between this topic and ideas about RE.

#### **Examples of RE in which religious and national identity appears integrated**

As mentioned in Section 1.2, Wingård (2011) has argued that the KRL subject from 1997 was designed to play a part in the upholding of the Norwegian nation (Wingård, 2011, pp. 120–121). There, all Norwegian pupils were to gain access to a ‘common cultural foundation’ (Wingård, 2011, p. 121), and Christianity was a key part of this. Thus, the Christian tradition in Norway was seen as an important resource for maintaining national social cohesion at a time politicians found changing and challenging (Wingård, 2011, pp. 94–95), with RE playing the part of mediator.

This link is found in other European countries as well. Writing about RE in Switzerland, Schlag (2016, pp. 288–289) mentions a statement by a teacher union that called for Christian values in education. One of the reasons for this was their desire to preserve the ‘*Willensnation Schweiz*’, which Schlag translates as the ‘Swiss nation of the will’, conveying the idea that ‘the Swiss state was based on a common political will’ (Schlag, 2016, p. 288). Here, there was also a relationship between religious and national identity. Through the teaching of Christian values, the will at the heart of the Swiss nation was strengthened.

The former RE subject in Iceland illustrates another possible relationship between religious and national identity. Gunnarsson (2014, p. 137) presents the Curriculum Guides for RE of 1999 and 2007, which included the notions that ‘Every society is built on certain basic values’ and that ‘... in Icelandic society these values have Christian roots’. The first notion conveys an idea about value-founded cohesion in society, and in the second, this cohesion is tied to the religious tradition of Christianity through the image of roots. This image describes a link between the basic values of contemporary Icelandic society and the history of Christianity on the island that may signal both a deep connection and a certain distance.

The image of ‘roots’ appears in other conceptions of RE as well (e.g. Rothgangel & Ziebertz, 2013), and seems to be one of the key images used to express the role of Christianity or other important historical traditions. Saying that basic values have their ‘roots in Christianity’ is different from saying that they ‘are Christian’. The image of roots opens up a room for interpretation, where the basic values are not identical to Christianity, but somehow have grown out of a culture where Christianity was the main religious influence. Thus, Christianity as a religious tradition was tied to the cohesion of contemporary Icelandic society, and the promulgation of such values in an RE subject appear to have been a way of expressing or strengthening this cohesion.

In the example from Norway, the social cohesion of the nation was thought to be strengthened by ensuring that all pupils learned about Christianity. In Switzerland, having Christian values as part of education was thought to strengthen an imagined element of the nation. On Iceland, values were seen as something society was based on, and then tied to a notion of Christian roots. These examples therefore show different ways in which RE subjects have integrated religious and national identity.

### **Examples of RE that does not appear to integrate religious and national identity**

In their presentation of RE in Austria, Jäggle and Klutz (2013, p. 49) draw attention to the Islamic RE subject from 2011, which has identity at its centre. There, the identity of the pupil is to be oriented by two nodes: Austria and Islam. The first serves as one's homeland, and the second as a belief system. Thus, it is not deemed sufficient for RE to support the religious identity development of the pupil. Instead, it is presupposed that the pupil also should develop an attachment to Austria as a homeland, and that this national attachment is a matter of concern for Islamic RE. According to Jäggle and Klutz (2013, p. 49), the reasoning behind this purpose is that such a national identity is necessary for the peaceful co-existence of people belonging to diverse groups. Here, the point is not that Islam is something all Austrians have in common, or something that indicates belonging to Austrian society. Instead, it is presented as a separate node that the pupil may connect its identity to, in addition to being Austrian.

If other Austrian RE subjects were set up in the same way, then pupils of other religious and non-religious beliefs may also be encouraged to develop an attachment to the Austrian nation, in addition to their preferred system of beliefs. In such a model for RE, belonging to a nation would be separated from belonging to a specific religious tradition, as all the diverse groups could potentially develop an equal attachment to Austria as a homeland.

Another example of avoiding integrating religious and national identity in RE may be found in the Recommendation concerning RE as part of intercultural education from the Council of Europe (2008). The text of the recommendation speaks of 'moderation in expressing one's identity', and 'accepting' that religious and non-religious convictions play a part in individual identity (Council of Europe, 2008, appendix, section 5). By pointing to individual identity here, it seems that the recommendation primarily ties religious identity to individuals, and not groups.

Finally, in a speech on countermeasures against terrorism in 2007, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown, also looked to RE. He did not, however, draw on the potential link between Great Britain and Christianity that Copley (2008) has described in British political debates from the 1940s and 1980s. Instead, RE was tied to diversity, contemporary Britain and learning about 'all faiths' (Copley, 2008, p. 201).

The Austrian Islamic RE subject, and the two examples from the field of policy and politics, show that RE may avoid integrations of religious and national identity, and also separate them clearly. Together with the examples of integration seen above, this shows that when analysing ideas about RE, it is relevant to pay attention to ideas about this potential relationship. As will



be seen when the theoretical resource for understanding such relationships is presented in the next section, developments in recent history are also relevant here – as new times have brought new ways of understanding the relationship between religious and national identity, partly replacing the old.

### **3.2.2 Taylor on configurations of religious and national identities**

Shifting relationships between religious and national identity may be understood as part of the historical development we refer to as secularisation (Fisher-Høyrem, 2016). The Canadian philosopher Taylor has been one of the major participants in the ongoing conversation about this development, especially through his grand narrative, *A Secular Age* (Taylor, 2007).

As part of his attempt to understand the time in which he lives, Taylor introduces a concept for understanding shifts in the relationship between religious and national identity. He proposes that the potential links between belonging to a state and belonging to a religion can and has been configured in three separate ways: an ancient way of linking them, a new way of linking them appearing around the time of the Enlightenment, and finally, since the 1960s, ways of imagining identity and belonging wherein belonging to the state and a religion is separated (Taylor, 2011, pp. 215–243). The latter two of these three form the analytical tool I use to analyse ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity and will be presented in the following.

I refer to these two ways of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity as the integrated (Taylor, 2011, pp. 229–231) and separated configuration (Taylor, 2011, pp. 242–243).<sup>21</sup> ‘Integrated’ indicates that in this configuration, belonging to a state is fused with belonging to a religion, whereas in the separated configuration they are not. Note also that Taylor sets these configurations up as theoretical ideal types (Taylor, 2002, p. 75; 2011, pp. 242–243), signalling that they are constructions he has made. They are rarely, if ever, complete descriptions of actual conditions, but rather theoretical abstractions intended to clarify and highlight aspects of reality.

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<sup>21</sup> This is different from the label Taylor uses, and the reason is that his label, ‘Durkheimian dispensations’ complicates the matter more than necessary by bringing in a reference to Durkheim (2001) that is left mostly unexplored.

## **Integrated configurations in The United States and France**

At its most basic level, Taylor's point is that belonging to a state has been fused with belonging to a religion, or to put it differently, being a member of society also means being a member of the religious tradition associated with the state, and vice versa. Around the time of the Enlightenment a new form of this integration appeared. Taylor's clearest example of this new form of integration are the ideas concerning state and religion expressed in Abraham Lincoln's speech at his second inauguration as President of the United States, just as the American civil war was coming to an end in 1865 (Taylor, 2011, p. 229). While people in earlier times could imagine themselves as part of the true god's (or gods') people through their access to holy places and attachment to divine kings (Taylor, 2011, pp. 148–149), the Americans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century believed themselves to be so for different reasons.

According to Taylor's grand narrative, people at some point stopped seeing the world as 'enchanted' (Taylor, 2007, pp. 143–145), and concepts such as the physical presence of deities or astral bodies of kings no longer made sense. However, people continued to associate their belonging to a state with their religious identity, albeit in a different manner. The idea of 'design' is crucial here. The universe was no longer thought to be filled with items and places carrying divine presence, but it could still be thought of as following divine design. Similarly, the country was not a god's country because he lived there, through the king. However, the American founding fathers could still believe they had established 'God's society', because the design of the state followed divine design (Taylor, 2011, pp. 228–229).

In his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln (1865) talked about his Christian belief in the providence of God, and how God could not answer the prayer of both the warring parties, even though both the North and the South read the same Bible and prayed to the same God. Towards the end of the speech, he left it for God to decide whether the civil war actually would come to an end. In doing so, Lincoln conveyed the idea that a divine force is active in the events unfolding in the United States, and in a certain sense was controlling these events. However, there is no imagery linking this divine force to the President as a person, or to the White House as a sacred building, as one could have seen in the old European kingdoms in previous centuries. This illustrates that for him, matters of state were also religious matters, but in a different way than before. Furthermore, the identification of the American people was bound up in religious language. When saying that both the North and the South '... read the same Bible, and pray to the same God;' (Lincoln, 1865), Lincoln described the entire American people, even divided into warring factions.

However, this does not imply that every individual had to believe in the same way as the President. Instead, Taylor describes the system as denominationalist, where a certain amount of individual leeway is granted, if it is realised within the same framework (Taylor, 2011, pp. 232–233). Thus, individuals could belong to different Christian denominations and still be a part of Lincoln’s American people, but the over-arching framework was not optional.

The integration of belonging to a religion and belonging to a state as found in Lincoln’s America was a way of understanding society as designed in accordance with divine will, here drawing on Christian tradition. Thus, the country was thought of as ‘God’s nation’, and it was natural to imagine divine forces behind events taking place. Furthermore, the people are referred to as carrying out religious practices such as praying or reading the Bible, and through a system of denominationalism individuals chose their preference within the framework. However, it is important to note that for Taylor, the integration of religious and national identity does not necessarily have to be religious in nature. In addition to the examples from America, he also mentions France and *laïcité* as an example. There, instead of integrating belonging to a state and belonging to a religion, it is through belonging to a specific philosophical stance that the French can be defined (Taylor, 2011, p. 157).

In France, *laïcité* is associated with the separation of state and church in 1905. Since then, it has become a way of understanding the relation between state, citizen, and religion. In *laïcité*, the state has no position in matters of spirituality, and in principle, there should not be any religion in the public sphere. Instead, these matters are to be dealt with in the private sphere (Robert & Peña-Ruiz, 2010). According to Robert and Peña-Ruiz, *laïcité* follows from the principle of equal treatment, since it is only by not having a position that the state can treat all of its citizens in an equal manner. If, for instance, some form of religion is given a special treatment by the state, then this amounts to discrimination of citizens who do not adhere to this religion (Robert & Peña-Ruiz, 2010). Concerning education, Robert and Peña-Ruiz explain that *laïcité* implies that to cultivate an ‘enlightened citizenship’, education must be ‘free from religious interference’ (Robert & Peña-Ruiz, 2010, p. 128). They also underline that *laïcité* does not amount to relativism, and instead associates *laïcité* strongly with what they see as the neutral universal values of the French revolution, summed up in the three words liberty, equality, and fraternity (Robert & Peña-Ruiz, 2010, pp. 128–129).

According to Taylor (2011, p. 157), this reference to values associated with the events of the French revolution, may serve as a philosophical framework, which then serves as a common

denominator for members of society. In other words, these ideas may be thought of as a ‘belief’ integrated with the notion of belonging to the French nation. This illustrates that any way of imagining the design and membership in a nation in association with a particular form of belief, be it religious or not, can be classified as ‘integrated’ in Taylor’s concept.

Furthermore, Taylor writes that when belonging to a group and belonging to a belief is fused, the issue of morality is often expressed in language coming from the unifying belief (Taylor, 2011, p. 231). One may therefore expect politicians who imagine their religious and national belonging to be integrated to express matters of morality through a religious language.

### **The appearance of separated configurations**

The way Taylor tells the story, the integration of the two kinds of belonging was the dominant way of imagining society in the Western<sup>22</sup> world from roughly the Enlightenment until around the 1960s, when for some, belonging to the state and belonging to a religion could no longer be kept together. In Taylor’s Grand Narrative terminology, what happened was the coming of an Age of Authenticity (Taylor, 2007, pp. 473–504). With that term, he is referring to a cultural current in the West, since roughly the 1960s, where individual authenticity becomes a strong ideal.

Compared with the denominationalism of Lincoln’s America, where individual choice was part of the setup, the Age of Authenticity takes everything a step further. Now, it is no longer sufficient that one has chosen a religious affiliation. Instead, the ideal is that everyone should find an experience of meaning through one’s own spirituality (Taylor, 2011, p. 241). As this development continues, the relationship between an individual’s beliefs and belonging to society becomes weaker and weaker, and for Taylor, a society characterised completely by the separated configuration, would be one where religious belonging is separated from national identity (Taylor, 2011, p. 256).

In 2015, Tajik, an MP for the Norwegian Labour Party, wrote an opinion piece where she discussed ideas about personal belief and political belonging. The heading was a quote from Alastair Campbell, who used to be part of the former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s political team, saying ‘We don’t do God’ (Tajik, 2015). Tajik states that ‘There are no good reasons to be made for having religion as the foundational element of a political system’ (Tajik, 2015, pp.

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor applies his theories to what he refers to as ‘the Western world’ or the area formerly thought of as ‘Latin Christendom’ (Taylor, 2011, pp. 214–215).

2–3). At the same time, Tajik makes it clear that politicians who happen to have religious beliefs should not have to keep them from the public. Instead, she says that ‘the public, political discussion will become poorer if this is something [they] must hide’ (Tajik, 2015, p. 3). In her conclusion, she combines the two ideas, ‘The political system has to be godless. The politicians themselves do not’ (Tajik, 2015, p. 3). Thus, Tajik rejects both an integrated configuration where Norway is associated with Christianity and where the religion may be said to play a part as a foundational element, and the alternative of *laïcité*, where religious beliefs are firmly placed in the private sphere. As I understand her opinion piece, it is therefore an example of political ideas where religious beliefs and politics have become separated. For Tajik, politicians may well be religious without the political system having to be so. That may be taken as a reflection of a separated way of imagining the relationship between religious and national identity.

### **Setting up Taylor’s concept as an analytical tool**

After presenting the integrated and separated configuration, the task now is to operationalise them as a preparation for describing ideas about religious and national identity in the analysis of the proceedings from the two debates. Taylor did not present his concept with use as an analytical tool for idea analysis in mind, and it is therefore necessary to work out more specifically how the ideas described in the analysis may be related to the two configurations.

This will be done by pointing to four aspects that each configuration may be said to consist of, based on the presentations above. For each of these aspects, I will list what may be associated with the two configurations. In the analysis, it is through a discussion of these aspects that the different party groups are tied to either the integrated or separated configuration.

The four aspects are the design of the state/society, the role of the individual, moral language, and religious identity. Table 1 shows how the two configurations may be associated with different positions concerning each aspect.

*Table 1 Aspects of the configurations of the relationship between religious and national identity*

<b>Aspect/Configuration</b>	<b>Integrated</b>	<b>Separated</b>
Design of the state/society	Tied to the religion/philosophy integrated with belonging	Not tied to a specific belief.
Role of the individual	Independent, before establishment of society	(imagined) sovereign
Moral language	Based on the religion/philosophy integrated with belonging	Relative/subjective
Religious identity	Mandatory choice.	Experienced authentic meaning

To explicate this operationalisation, I will now give a brief explanation of the keywords in the table, which serves as a summary of this section and a preparation of the analysis of ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity.

The first aspect, the design of the state or society, refers to where Taylor believes the seat of religiosity is in the different configurations. In the integrated configuration it lies in the notion that the universe, or society, follows a divine design and fulfils a divine purpose, as was described with reference to Lincoln’s speech from 1865. In that way, the design of a state or a society is tied to the religion or philosophy integrated with belonging to the nation. For the separated configuration, there is no fusion between belonging to the group and belonging to a specific belief, and so no specific belief plays such a part in the design of the state or society.

The role of the individual is also different. In the integrated configuration, the individual is imagined as independent before the construction of society. However, given that society has been established, the individual is now a member and part of its framework. Then, society may be thought of as the seat of authority under which the individual should obey (Taylor, 2011, p. 247). Under the separated configuration, however, the individual is imagined as its own sovereign. Here, taking moral rules simply on authority is harder, and individuals rather looks for guidance that makes sense for them personally.

Thus, it is not surprising that the moral language of the two configurations also differs. In the integrated configuration, the moral language is based on the religion or philosophy that is integrated with belonging to the group, for instance forms of Christianity in Lincoln’s America. In the separated configuration, however, the moral language varies, and is relative and subjective, which follows from its need to make sense for the individual.

The next aspect of the configurations is ‘religious identity’. Here, the concept of denominationalism lies behind the term ‘mandatory choice’. In contrast to the older form of integration, individuals get to choose their religious affiliation, but one must still make such a choice, and the options are confined by the framework of the accepted denominations. In the separated configuration, the options are legion. Here, whatever makes the individual experience meaning that speaks to oneself can serve as one’s religious identity.

Finally, one last comment must be added to the presentation of Taylor’s concept. While it is true that for some, the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity came to replace the integrated one, this is not a universal development.

Taylor repeatedly stresses that different versions of the integrated configuration still plays a part in our age (Taylor, 2011, pp. 254–255). Not everyone experiences the separation between religious and national identity, and for some, it is worth a struggle to try to maintain it. However, the fact that such a struggle exists is enough for Taylor to say that the time of the integrated configuration has shifted into a time where such matters are open for debate, and where some find themselves in a world where religion and matters of belonging to the nation are separated. The fact that these two configurations may appear next to one another in society is crucial for the relevance of Taylor’s concept for this dissertation. A consequence of Taylor’s point is that it may be expected that both kinds of thinking may appear in the debate proceedings.

Having operationalised Taylor’s concept for understanding relationships among religious and national identity as an analytical tool, this part of the theory chapter is complete. In Section 3.4, the operationalisation is briefly repeated, but before that, the tool for analysing ideas about the purpose of education must be presented.

### **3.3 The purpose of education**

In this final section of the chapter, I lay the foundation for analysing ideas about the purpose of education through the lens of the tension between the Norwegian objects clauses and the ideas of economic utility associated with global education policy. This is done in two stages. First, I draw on educational research to establish ideas associated with global education policy and give a brief account of how these ideas came to be influential in Norwegian education policy. Then, I consider the objects clauses of education and indicate how they may be seen to be in tension with global education policy.

As explained in Section 2.2, the analytical tool established in this section is looser and more open than the ones established about the two other topics in the analysis. There, I gave two reasons for this choice. The first is that there exists a significant body of research showing the influence of global education policy in Norway since the turn of the millennium (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Karlsen, 2014, 2015; Mausethagen, 2013; Prøitz, 2015; Sjøberg, 2014; Thuen, 2017; Volckmar, 2016). Therefore, it is not necessary to use my analysis to decide if this has happened or not. Instead, there are good reasons to take it as a given. Furthermore, I explained that the purpose of education is the most elusive of the three topics to analyse, since it is further removed from the specific political issue on the agenda. This has required a very open analytical tool, leaving more to interpreting the statements from the politicians.

### **3.3.1 The OECD and global education policy in Norway**

In recent years, education across the globe has increasingly come to be influenced by intergovernmental actors aiming to support economic growth (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 9). In Norway, the main intergovernmental actor has been the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Karlsen, 2014; Sjøberg, 2014), together with the EU (Karlsen, 2015). The OECD was founded in 1961, with headquarters in Paris (OECD). Its purpose was to help member countries attain the highest sustainable economic growth over time (OECD, 1960). To achieve this aim, education came to be part of the OECD agenda (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006).

#### **The educational program of the OECD – education for the knowledge-based economy**

In the 1990s, the OECD's educational policy took a turn in the direction of more neo-liberal ideas, as evidenced by the publications presenting the ideas of the knowledge economy and lifelong learning (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006, pp. 252–253). Hovdenak and Stray (2015) has used one of the key publications from this era, 'The Knowledge-Based Economy' (OECD, 1996) as a resource for describing the organisation's educational program (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 65). Already in the foreword to the report, two central concepts are introduced, 'the knowledge-based economy' and 'new growth theory' (OECD, 1996, p. 3). The first of these concepts is intended to convey the insight that knowledge is now what drives growth in productivity and economy, whereas the latter concerns understanding the relation between knowledge and economic growth.



The goal with the report was to help countries develop their educational systems in a way that gave the best opportunities for continued growth in the knowledge economy. Hovdenak and Stray sums up the political recommendations from the report in the following bullet points:

... to increase the dissemination of knowledge through increased cooperation between business and education/research.

... to upgrade and strengthen the human capital of the population.

... to change the educational system in such a way that it becomes easier to strengthen human capital (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 67).

The concept of 'human capital' is important in this line of thinking and is a way of expressing that each individual in the population of a country represents an economic value, or an economic resource, through his or her competence, or in the way he or she is capable of facing challenges (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, pp. 59–61, 100–102). When this concept is established, it becomes possible to write about education using economic terminology, as the OECD did in the report from 1996. One can recommend investing in education in a way that strengthens the human capital of a country.

Another main concept the OECD has applied to education is 'accountability'. The principle of accountability as a way of governing in the public sector entails that for the educational system to be at its best, one should make the right parts of it accountable. In the educational thinking of the OECD, it is important to first put down goals, or targets, and then give someone the direct responsibility to achieve these goals. That is to make them accountable, and once a suitable amount of time has gone by, one can perform tests to check if the targets have been reached (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, pp. 87–89).

Thus, the educational program of the OECD is to organize education in such a way that it contributes to sustaining a high economic growth, through increasing human capital. To accomplish this, systems of accountability ought to be an important part of the governing of educational systems. These ideas have become influential in Norway (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Thuen, 2017; Volckmar, 2016), and in the following paragraphs, I will present research showing how this came to be.

### **The influence of global education policy in Norway**

In line with the international political trends, Norwegian politics saw a shift to the right in the early 1980s (Thuen, 2017, pp. 181–182). As part of the shift, politicians wanted to reform

education to make it more suitable for a growing market economy. However, in Norway, it was not until Gudmund Hernes became Minister of Education in 1990 that the reforms came into being (Thuen, 2017, pp. 182–183).

Hernes had a background in sociology, and in 1988, he had chaired a Green paper committee who drew on ideas about human capital and associated education with economic growth (Volckmar, 2016, p. 94). The reforms he instigated in the first half of the 1990s was intended to raise the level of competency in the Norwegian population, to face the challenge of the new knowledge economy (Volckmar, 2016, pp. 106–107). However, while Hernes was inclined to reform education to increase the nation's potential for success in the global economic competition, the policies he promoted also deviated somewhat from the OECD norm, in particular, his reluctance concerning the use of measuring and accountability (Volckmar, 2016, pp. 96, 111).

In the next reform of Norwegian education, the influence of the OECD came to be greater, as can be seen in the Green Papers from the Committee on Quality that prepared it. Hovdenak and Stray (2015, pp. 84–85) analysed these publications, and found that they introduced OECD-terminology to the Norwegian political discussion. The committee suggested an increased focus on results and wanted to establish systems for the evaluation of quality in line with accountability thinking (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, pp. 85–92), precisely the point where the reforms in the 1990s deviated. The study of the two Green papers also shows how the PISA-results published in December 2001 affected the Norwegian educational system, especially through the national tests that were modelled on PISA (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 91), which is a very influential policy instrument for the OECD (Ball, 2013, p. 39).

The publication of the first PISA-results was a big media event in Norway (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, pp. 92–93). Norwegian education was portrayed as mediocre, and the ground was prepared for sweeping changes to educational policy. The Committee on Quality built the findings from PISA into their report (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 93), and presented an economical rhetoric of education, with keywords such as 'lifelong learning', 'competency' and 'result quality'. In this way, they emphasised the economic utility of education (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, pp. 93, 103).

Thuen has underlined that it was not a new idea to say that society was to benefit from education (Thuen, 2017, p. 187). However, concerning the educational reforms after the turn of the millennium, he observes a shift in the understanding of the dynamic between how education

benefits both the individual and society. In the current era, this benefit is to a larger degree tied to material values.

The Norwegian curriculum reform prepared by the Committee on Quality was completed in 2006 and labelled ‘the Knowledge Promotion Reform’. Once again, the Minister of Education took an active part in developing the educational policy of the ministry. This time, it was Kristin Clemet of the Conservative Party (Stray, 2010, pp. 193–205). In the White paper that prepared the reform, it was argued that Norwegian society had changed in ways that made it necessary to change Norwegian education. The changes related particularly to two aspects of society, both the increased importance knowledge had for economic growth, and the increasing degree with which Norway was becoming a more complex and plural country (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 105). According to the White Paper, the work force in a knowledge-based economy had to be more flexible than in the industrial age, and this had consequences for education, especially concerning the concept of ‘life-long learning’ (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 105). The similarity to the educational policy of the OECD is obvious, and a comparison of the language used in the White paper with the educational language of the OECD proves the point (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 112).

Faced with the new and dominating role of knowledge in the economy, the ministry writes that education no longer may aspire to cover everything. The sheer amount of knowledge is too large. Therefore, they propose specifying more general goals, and not specific pieces of knowledge or a theoretical curriculum (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 107). This signalled a lessened emphasis on the content of education, and an increased emphasis on teaching pupils how to learn and how to solve new challenges (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 110). This approach was prepared in the Green papers from the Committee on Quality, where it says that ‘the most important purpose of education is that the pupils learn’ (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015, p. 90; NOU 2002:10, p. 27). Volckmar (2016, p. 114) summarises the effect of this reform by saying that it delivered a systemic shift in Norway, in the direction of a more neo-liberal educational policy, involving increased privatisation and accountability.

In 2005, however, the non-socialist coalition lost the election, and Clemet was ousted from her position as Minister. The new government was a centre-left coalition, and the Minister of Education was from the Socialist Left Party. Still, the curriculum reform prepared by Clemet and the Conservatives was enacted almost without any changes by the new government (Volckmar, 2016, pp. 115–116). This level of consensus concerning educational policy, where

the Socialist Left Party may enact a reform prepared by the Conservatives, has been understood as a signal of the level of influence of the OECD and other IGOs (Volckmar, 2016, p. 126). When the ideas and premises come from the international level, national differences appear to matter less, even if the differences between the nations often remain (Wiborg, 2016).

The educational program of the OECD has come to wield a great influence over educational policy in Norway, especially since the early 2000s. In the next section, I will point to two articles that indicate that this influence may be approached as in tension with the Norwegian objects clauses of education. This tension is then to serve as the analytical tool for analysing ideas about the purpose of education.

### **3.3.2 Ideas about the purpose of education in tension – between objects clauses and the OECD**

As briefly touched upon in Section 1.2, acts regulating Norwegian education has included an objects clause since 1848, expressing the purpose of education (Thuen, 2017, p. 61). In the following paragraphs, I will briefly present four versions of Norwegian objects clauses and argue for why they are relevant for my analysis.

#### **The Christian objects clause from 1969 – and in 1998**

The objects clause for primary and lower secondary education from 1969, quoted in full in appendix II, was the current objects clause at the time of the debate in 1995. Due to its aim of helping homes with giving the pupils ‘a Christian and moral upbringing’ (see appendix II), it was often referred to as ‘the Christian objects clause’ (Bostad, 2008, p. 141).

In 1998, a new and comprehensive Education Act, regulating both primary and secondary education was introduced, replacing the previous separate acts, including the one from 1969 (Innst. O. nr. 70 (1997–98)). Making significant changes to the objects clause was not on the political agenda then (Wingård, 2011, pp. 186–188). However, as the new act replaced several previous acts, each with their own, slightly different, objects clauses, a new comprehensive version was made, using the text of the existing objects clauses. The intention was to maintain the ideas in the previous acts, but the politicians also added a clause on how education was to support a common foundation of knowledge, culture, and values (Innst. O. nr. 70 (1997–98), pp. 8–9, 36; Ot.prp. nr. 46, (1997–98), pp. 28–30). The 1998-iteration of the objects clause was the current clause at the time of the debate I analyse in 2008, however, the section on the purpose of primary and lower secondary education was identical to the phrasing used in 1969, and it was still referred to as the Christian objects clause.

### **A new objects clause from 2009 – debated and passed in 2008**

As mentioned in Section 1.2, the new centre-left coalition that won a majority in the general election of 2005 had revising the objects clause on its political agenda (Stoltenberg et al., 2005). The result was a Green Paper, headed by Bostad (NOU 2007:6), which proposed a new objects clause. In the spring of 2008, the government took this proposal to the Storting (Ot.prp. nr. 46, (2007–2008)), and in December 2008, a new objects clause was passed by a unanimous Storting (O.tid. (2008–2009), p. 167), to be valid from January 1 2019. This objects clause is also quoted in full in Appendix II.

The Storting did not, however, pass the exact objects clause proposed by the Bostad committee. The final version seems very similar but, as noticed by several scholars (e.g. Hovdelien, 2013, pp. 178–179; L. L. Iversen, 2014, p. 119; Sagberg, 2012, p. 54), the subtle changes to the structure of the text opened up very different possibilities of interpretation. In the version that was proposed by the Bostad committee, education was intended to build on a list of values, which was then said to be expressed in Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, and also in different religious and non-religious traditions and beliefs. This left the reasons for the values open and gave space for each citizen to express one's own justification (Bostad, 2008, p. 147). In the final version, however, education is meant to build on 'values in Christian and humanist heritage and traditions', and then a list of values very similar to those proposed by the Bostad committee is used as examples of the values drawn from this heritage and traditions. These values are then said to also be found elsewhere, but they have been primarily defined as 'Christian and humanistic values'. Thus, the reasons or justifications for the values are tied to this tradition and citizens have less room for giving their own. Iversen (2014, p. 119) interprets this shift as an indication of the value rhetoric of the Storting, in which the values no longer primarily signal what is the best course forwards but are instead a reflection of the myth of the origins of Norwegian society (L. L. Iversen, 2014, pp. 127–128).

Thus, when I speak of four version of the objects clause as relevant for the debates I analyse, I mean the one from 1969, as the one valid at the time of the debate in 1995, the one from 1998 (keeping the 1969-phrasing), as the one valid at the time of the debate in 2008, and both the proposed and the passed version of the new objects clause decided on in 2008. The version proposed by the Bostad committee was known from the summer of 2007, and at the time of the debate I analyse in 2008, the majority government had sent this proposal to the Storting for discussion. The version that the Storting eventually decided on, in November 2008, was a result of negotiations involving all the parties at the Storting including several MPs active in the

debate I analyse (Mathiesen, 2013). Thus, it may be assumed that negotiations about the objects clause, or at least talks about negotiations, were ongoing at the time of the debate I analyse from 2008.

### **Identifying the tension between the objects clause and global education policy**

As already indicated, I approach the ideas about the purpose of education as a tension between the Norwegian objects clause and the ideas associated with global education policy, in Norway primarily manifested by the OECD.

Bostad, the leader of the Green Paper committee behind the proposal of a new objects clause published in 2007 (NOU 2007:6), has discussed the reasoning behind their proposal in an article (Bostad, 2008). She writes that the new objects clause was to help education be a counterculture at a time when economic utility took on an ever-increasing importance in Norwegian educational thinking (Bostad, 2008, p. 157). This was not a given, as the phrasing of the mandate given to the committee opened for a descriptive clarification of values that were providing social cohesion in Norway (Bostad, 2008, pp. 153–154). For Bostad, such a descriptive approach could have resulted in a further emphasis on the ‘glorification of materialism and consumption’ that she argues characterises Norwegian society (Bostad, 2008, p. 154). Instead, she believes that the committee made a wise move in asking themselves about values in a normative sense.

For the establishment of a tension between the educational purpose enshrined in the objects clauses and global education policy, it is relevant to note that according to Bostad, the term ‘knowledge society’ functions as an obfuscating device (Bostad, 2008, p. 154). She argues that along with ideas about ‘the knowledge society’ there is an economical-instrumental understanding of what education is (Bostad, 2008, p. 154). Furthermore, she argues that the increasing emphasis on accountability and utility in education goes together with a narrow understanding of knowledge as a tool for power over the world (Bostad, 2008, p. 156). In this way, Bostad targets specific ideas known to be associated with global education policy, as presented in the previous section. In the article, she offers the new objects clause as a platform upon which education may fulfil its role as a counterculture to the one-sided emphasis on materialism, consumerism, and economic utility (Bostad, 2008, p. 157).

The tension between the objects clause and global education policy is also identified by Stray (2011), who has shown how a discourse of values, represented by the objects clause, and a

discourse of quality, associated with global education policy is reflected in a Report to the Storting from 2008 (St.meld. nr. 31, (2007–2008)), concerning quality in education.

Stray looked at the degree with which the language of the new objects clause influenced the report as a whole. Her finding was that for many of the words of the proposed objects clause, the result was zero, and democracy was the only word to be used more than ten times (Stray, 2011, p. 27). In a subsequent analysis, Stray searched for language belonging to the instrumental discourse on quality, which is associated with an emphasis on economic utility in education. The difference is striking (Stray, 2011, p. 27). Words such as ‘quality’, ‘results’ and ‘competency’ are used hundreds of times in the report. Thus, the language of the new objects clause does not seem to have played a large part when the government laid out their educational program. Instead, the dominating influence was the understanding of education coming from global education policy.

The analysis of ideas about the purpose of education takes this tension as its starting point and will be set up to look for ideas associated with the objects clauses that were either current or in the process of becoming law at the time of the debates, and correspondingly, ideas associated with global education policy, as presented in section 3.3.1. In this way, it will be possible to look for political ideas about the purpose of education in the debates.

### **3.4 Overview of the analytical tools**

#### **For analysing ideas about religion education**

The analytical tool for analysing ideas about religion education has three separate parts.

The first part is the distinction between confessional and non-confessional RE. Here, I use both the distinction between ‘Capital-C’ Confessional and ‘small-c’ confessional (Jensen & Kjeldsen, 2013) and Kimanen’s (2015) four dimensions of confessionalism.

The second part concerns the organisation of RE as either separative or integrative (Alberts, 2007, 2008). Here, I both consider integrative in the first meaning of the term, as non-separative and non-confessional, and in the second meaning, as tied to the study-of-religions approach to RE. Note, however, that I am not expecting to find a completely worked out study-of-religion approach to RE in the proceedings from a debate in the Storting. Instead, this section of the analysis is either about seeing if the ideas expressed by the politicians would be taking RE in a direction further towards or further away from the study-of-religions approach, and

comparatively, if the ideas expressed by some politicians are closer to the study-of-religions approach than those expressed by others.

The third part of the analytical tool is set up to describe ideas about the aims the politicians have for RE. To do this, I use Kjeldsen's (2016) categories. This means that I first consider ideas about the aims that are internal to the subject ('learning about') and then the four subcategories of possible external aims ('learning from'). These four subcategories are: social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, existential-religious development, and analytical critical development.

### **For analysing ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity**

The analytical tool for analysing ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity is set up as an operationalised version of Taylor's two ideal types for the configuration of this relationship: the integrated and the separated configuration.

In table 1, page 61, these configurations were operationalised by pointing to four aspects: the design of the state/society, the role of the individual, moral language, and religious identity. For each of these four aspects, suggestions were given in the table for what kind of ideas could be expected. In the analysis, I will describe the ideas expressed in the debate and compare them with the ideal types to see which one they are the closest to. At the end, I will consider the impression given by the analysis of the four aspects as a whole to say if the ideas that have been described are closer to the integrated or the separated configuration.

Since the two configurations are ideal types, it is not to be expected that the politicians' ideas will match them completely. Instead, the analysis is concerned with asking which one they are the closest to, or if they are hard to associate with any of them.

### **For analysing ideas about the purpose of education**

Of the three analytical tools used in this dissertation, the tool used to analyse ideas about the purpose of education is the least strictly worked out. Instead of clear distinctions, dimensions, or ideal types, this analytical tool is set up as a tension between ideas associated with the objects clauses of Norwegian education and global education policy. Furthermore, the analysis of ideas about this topic is different because earlier research, as presented in Section 3.3.1, has already established that the ideas associated with global education policy became influential in Norway after the turn of the millennium. It may therefore be assumed that the 1995 debate will have few of those ideas, and that there will be more of them in 2008.



## **4 Ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education in 1995**

This chapter is the first of the two chapters of analysis. Here, I analyse ideas about religion education, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, as expressed in the proceedings from the debate concerning Christiansen's proposal of replacing the Christianity subject with a subject that was neutral with regard to religion.

Before starting the analysis, I will give a brief introduction to the cultural and political situation in Norway at the time of the debate. Then, as an introduction to the debate itself, I present the key ideas functioning as policy solutions, problem definitions, and meta-ideas in the debate, using the terminology of Mehta (2011). The rest of the chapter is divided according to the three topics about which I analyse ideas. Ideas about RE are analysed in Section 4.2, ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity are analysed in Section 4.3, and ideas about the purpose of education are analysed in Section 4.4.

### **Norway in the mid-1990s**

In 1994, The Winter Olympics were held in the town of Lillehammer (Olstad, 2017, p. 233). For Norwegian society it took on a wider significance, symbolising a sense of national identity and success. The economy, boosted by increasing oil revenue, was back in shape after a dip in the late 1980s (Olstad, 2017, p. 288), and through its role as peace negotiator in the Middle East, an image was created of the nation as a moral powerhouse in the world (Olstad, 2017, pp. 320–321). Later that year, a majority of Norwegians once again said 'no' to full membership in the European Union (Olstad, 2017, p. 258). One of the reasons for rejecting membership was the importance of national self-governance, and an unwillingness to cede power to supranational institutions (Olstad, 2017, p. 259).

In the parliamentary term from 1993 to 1997, Norway was governed by a minority Labour government, headed by Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (1939 –). With 67 of 165 MPs in the Storting, they needed the support of an additional 16 MPs to achieve a simple majority (Torp, 1994, p. 193). The former non-socialist government coalition of the Centre Party (32 MPs), the Conservative Party (28 MPs), and the Christian Democratic Party (13 MPs) had a total of 73 MPs, potentially securing a majority with the votes from the Progress Party (10 MPs). However, the issue of Norwegian EU membership had split the former partners, especially ruling out any coalition between the Centre Party and the Conservatives. As a result,

there were no viable alternatives to the Labour government, and it remained in power during the entire four-year term.

### **Christiansen's proposal as the background for the debate**

In 1993, Ellen Chr. Christiansen was elected to the Norwegian Storting as an MP for the Progress Party. She was part of the liberalist wing who would leave the party, following a conflict culminating in the spring of 1994 (J. M. Iversen, 1998, pp. 137–138). From then on, until the end of the parliamentary term in 1997, Christiansen was registered as an independent MP in the parliamentary proceedings (Tuastad, 2006, p. 261).

Shortly after leaving the Progress Party, Christiansen proposed a Private Member's Bill replacing the current Christianity subject with 'an instruction in culture, values and philosophies of life that is neutral with regard to religion' (Dokument nr. 8:51 (1993–94)). The Storting received the bill in May 1994, but the Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs did not give a Recommendation on the matter until February 1995 (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)), apparently because of the debate and referendum on Norwegian membership in the EU in 1994 (Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007, p. 90; S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411).

The curriculum plans for the Christianity subject that Christiansen proposed replacing had last been revised in the 1980s. It combined an anchoring in the Evangelical Lutheran doctrine of the Church of Norway with a demarcation against preaching as a method in the subject (Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007, pp. 44–45).

On 7 March 1995, Christiansen's proposal was debated and rejected by the Storting. In the Standing Committee, only the MP from the Socialist Left Party, Øystein Djupedal, supported Christiansen, while the rest of the parties, forming a large majority, rejected the proposal (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)).

The MPs from the Labour Party, however, protested at the timing of the issue. In the spring of 1995, the Green Paper committee working on a new proposal for RE in Norway was finishing their work. It was expected that the government would propose changes to the Primary Education Act in the wake of the Green Paper, and thus RE would have to be debated again soon after the debate on the Private Member's Bill. The MPs from Labour argued for postponing the debate on Christiansen's proposal, and then dealing with the issues together (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2).

In the debate, the MP serving as spokesperson<sup>23</sup> for this issue on the Standing Committee, the Christian Democrat Jon Lilletun, commented upon the timing, saying that while he understood the point made by the Labour MPs, the crucial matter for him ‘... and I hope for the entire majority – was to get a clear rejection of the proposal of a subject neutral with regard to religion’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). What Lilletun says here may be taken as an indication that the reason he, and a majority of the Standing Committee, wanted to have the debate on Christiansen’s proposal before engaging with the expected proposal from the government was to lay down a marker for future debates on RE. By having a large parliamentary majority reject Christiansen’s proposal, a signal was sent that when it came to RE in Norwegian public education, neutrality with regard to religion was not to be an option.

The debate on Christiansen’s proposal thus came to be a prelude to the many debates on the KRL subject proposed by the government following the recommendation from the Green Paper committee. It touched especially on two key matters of contention in Norwegian educational politics: the extent of public education and the role of Christianity in education (Bakke-Lorentzen, 2007, p. 35).

### **Threats to Norwegian culture and scepticism of separative RE as further background**

As will be shown in the presentation of key ideas in the debate, it was framed by a concern that the current, separative model of RE was unsuited to a situation where the country was becoming more diverse (Tuastad, 2006, p. 255; Wingård, 2011, p. 174). At the time, while most pupils attended the compulsory Christianity subject, those with at least one parent who were not a member of the state church could be exempted. For these pupils, the alternative philosophy of life subject was an option, but not compulsory, and some pupils were left without any form of RE (Hindahl, 1995, p. 6). As a result, the pupils were in principle divided into groups according to their religious belonging, or that of their parents, and from the perspective of many politicians, this ran counter to aims of tolerance and peaceful co-existence in a country increasingly characterised by diversity.

As mentioned in Section 1.2, Wingård has shown how in the early 1990s, politicians saw their current time as a time of change, and a time when Norwegian culture was threatened (Wingård,

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<sup>23</sup> For each item of business sent to a Standing Committee in the Norwegian Storting, one of the MPs in the Committee is appointed spokesperson. This MP has a particular responsibility for taking this item of business through the legislative process, presenting it to the committee, drafting the Recommendation and opening the debate in the Storting with an account of the matter.

2011, pp. 56, 70). For a majority of the Norwegian Storting through most of the 1990s, consisting of the Labour Party, the Centre Party, the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats, an imagined Christian cultural heritage was seen as a valuable resource for facing these threats (Wingård, 2011, p. 80).

Thus, the debate came at a time when Norwegian politicians were interested in revising RE to make it more suitable for a diverse nation. However, there was no consensus on what ought to be done, and as a result, the debate contains quite different ideas concerning RE, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education.

### **About the debate and the proceedings**

There were 12 politicians who took part in the debate, including Minister of Education, Gudmund Hernes.<sup>24</sup> All in all, the debate consisted of 12 speeches and 24 replies, covering just over 17 pages in the published version of the proceedings (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2402–2420). In the first and longest stage of the debate, the parties received time allotments according to their size. The Labour MPs had twice as much time as the MPs from the Centre Party and the Conservatives, who had twice as much time as the smaller parties.

The analysis of the debate is divided into sections. In the first, I introduce the ideas in the debate by presenting the key policy solutions, problem definitions, and meta-ideas in the debate, according to Mehta's (2011) understanding of how ideas may function in politics (cf. Section 2.2). Subsequently, I analyse the debate with a view to ideas about RE (Section 4.2), the relationship between religious and national identity (Section 4.3), and the purpose of education (Section 4.4).

In each of the sections analysing ideas about a topic, the politicians who contributed to the debate are organised in groups based on what policy solutions they supported and remarks made in the Recommendation to the Storting that preceded the debate (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)). The first group is formed by the supporters of Christiansen's proposal, Christiansen herself and the two MPs from the Socialist Left Party. The second group consists of the MPs belonging to the non-socialist parties, the Centre Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democratic Party. They all rejected Christiansen's proposal, and made a joint remark in the Recommendation in which they emphasise the Christian objects clause (from 1969) and its role

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<sup>24</sup> For biographical information about the politicians in the debate, see appendix I.

in the value promotion of Norwegian education. Finally, the Labour MPs form the third group. A majority of them joined the non-socialist parties in rejecting Christiansen's proposal, but none of them supported the non-socialist parties' remark concerning the objects clause.

If support for policy solutions had been the only criterion for organising the politicians into groups, it could perhaps be argued that the Centre Party MPs are closer to the Labour MPs than the two other non-socialist parties. However, I believe the joint remark in the Recommendation, and the ideas expressed in the debate, indicate that they are closer to the non-socialists, and that the analysis is best served by including them there.

Before getting into the analysis of ideas about the three topics, however, I will now give an introduction to the key ideas expressed in the debate, using Mehta's (2011) way of separating between different ways ideas may function in politics.

## **4.1 Key ideas in the debate**

As presented in Section 2.2, Mehta (2011) has proposed that ideas may serve three different functions in politics. To recap, Mehta argues that ideas may function as policy solutions, problem definitions and meta-ideas (Mehta, 2011, pp. 27, 33, 40–41). Policy solutions are political solutions to known problems. Ideas serving as problem definitions lay out the challenges and aims in a situation, and meta-ideas may, for instance, express the ideological principles of a party, or both spoken and unspoken notions held to be true by everyone in a group, sometimes referred to as *zeitgeist*.

In this section, I will present the key ideas functioning at the three different levels in the debate on Christiansen's proposal. I start with the ideas serving as problem definitions, continue with the proposed policy solutions, and end with a discussion of some important meta-ideas expressed by the politicians in the debate. The reason for starting with the problem definitions is that they also serve to frame the debate, by expressing what the current challenges are. The policy solutions then present different strategies for facing the challenges, while discussing the meta-ideas allow for a broader picture of the differences between the politicians. Together, this is intended to serve as an introduction to the key ideas in the debate before going into the analysis concerning the three topics that are the research interest of this dissertation.

### **4.1.1 Problem definitions**

In some ways, this debate may be seen as a debate about problem definitions, because MPs from different parties seem to have understood different aspects of the current situation as a

challenge or as a resource. At the same time, there was also a consensus about parts of the problem definition.

### **Increasing diversity challenges the current, separative, model of RE**

Nearly all the politicians taking part in the debate expressed or related to the idea that as Norway was becoming a more diverse country, the Christianity subject should be revised. For instance, the Labour MP Marit Nybakk spoke of ‘children with a multicultural background’ as a challenge for Norwegian politicians (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416), and Conservative MP Jan Tore Sanner refers to ‘... the challenge that the multicultural society presents to our school’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

More specifically, politicians from several parties speak of the system of exemption from the Christianity subject as a problem. However, they express ideas that indicate that they find different aspects of the situation problematic. For some, the main problem is that pupils are divided into separate groups in matters of belief and ethics, while others lament that some pupils leave the Norwegian public education system without ever having been taught about Christianity, due to the fact that the current system leaves some pupils without any RE.

Øystein Djupedal, MP for the Socialist Left Party expressed the first of these ideas, saying that the current situation, where a large majority of pupils followed the Christianity subject, a small minority attended the Philosophy of Life subject, and some pupils were without RE, ... ‘is unfortunate, and contributes to the formation of prejudice against other people’s faith and philosophy of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Thus, for Djupedal, an important part of the problem seems to be the division of pupils into separate groups when these matters are on the agenda.

The second perspective was taken by Jon Lilletun, MP for the Christian Democratic Party. In his main speech he said, ‘It should not be possible to complete Norwegian education without receiving teaching in Christianity, as the system allows today’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). To some extent, this view seems to have been seconded by MPs from all the other parties, as they appear to agree that some knowledge about Christianity is desirable for all pupils.

A third problematic aspect of the system of exemption was associated with the standing of the unitary school system, which, briefly put, refers to the idea that as many Norwegian pupils as possible ought to attend the same school, regardless of their social background (Thuen, 2017, p. 14). Again, Djupedal may serve as an example, saying ‘The unitary school system should be

strengthened by replacing the Christianity subject with a subject that does not require the option of exemption' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). In this quote, Djupedal seems to imply that the current situation, where increasing diversity is leading to an increased number of parents exercising the option of exemption for their children, may lead to a weakening of the unitary school system. Understood from the perspective of ideas functioning as problem definitions, the quote signals that part of the problem with the current situation is that the model with a confessional Christianity subject weakens the unitary school system by dividing the pupils into groups when religions and beliefs are on the agenda.

### **Christiansen's own reasons and a concern about bullying**

Christiansen, however, states that her proposal was not intended as a response to increasing diversity in Norway. For her, the main problem definition seems to have been associated with a matter of principle concerning the role of the government in matters of religion. In her speech, she says, '... that choice of faith or philosophy of life is a matter of personal conviction, and [...] it should be parents and family who decide what religion the children are to be brought up in' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). She then appears to contrast this principle with her understanding of the current Christianity subject, which she seems to interpret as a situation with '... the public authorities signalling to small children which faith is the right one, and which faith is wrong' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). Furthermore, it seems that from her perspective the system of exemption amounts to '...discriminatory treatment of pupils ... with regard to the teaching they receive in public schools according to which religion they profess' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2405).

When looking at this as a problem definition, it indicates that for Christiansen, the main problem is not that the Christianity subject is an inadequate form of RE when faced with increasing diversity. Rather, the crucial problem is that by having a confessional Christianity subject as part of the public education system, the government is giving one religious tradition preferential treatment.

Finally, several politicians in the debate express another idea that seems to contribute to the problem definition in the debate, concerning an increase in violence and bullying in Norwegian education (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2403, 2409). This impression is expressed and referred to by politicians of nearly all parties and may thus be understood as a shared problem definition.

Throughout the debate, the main ideas serving as problem definitions thus concern the need to do something about the Christianity subject in light of the increasingly diverse nature of

Norwegian society, principles associated with government and religion, and the impression the politicians have of an increasing amount of bullying in Norwegian schools.

#### **4.1.2 Policy solutions**

The policy solutions offered in the debate relate to all of these issues, yet at the most specific level, the debate contains few ideas proposing new solutions. The minority, consisting of Christiansen and Djupedal from the Socialist Left Party, wanted to replace the Christianity subject with a philosophy of life subject that was neutral with regard to religion. The majority, all the other parties, rejected that proposal.

#### **The majority's alternative solutions**

While being united in their rejection of the proposal from Christiansen, the majority expressed different ideas about what ought to be done instead. The MPs from the Centre Party, the Conservative Party and the Christian Democrats made a joint remark in the Recommendation to the Storting, in which they expressed their support for the objects clause of education from 1969 and emphasised the role of a renewed Christianity subject as part of the promotion of values in Norwegian education (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2). In the debate, the MPs from these parties seem to agree that the Christianity subject should be maintained in a form quite close to the current situation. In addition, two of them, Sanner and Lilletun, mention a concept where a confessional Christianity subject is combined with a new 'meeting place' where pupils may encounter each other across religious and non-religious divides (e.g. S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402).

The proposal of such a meeting place seems to be a response to the challenge of increased diversity that also allows for upholding a confessional Christianity subject. In the debate, it seems that the MPs from the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats agree that the current system has a weakness in that it separates pupils according to beliefs, but that the solution is to create a new meeting place in addition to the subjects, and not to change the Christianity subject in such a way that there is no longer a need for exemption. Holte, the main MP from the Centre Party instead seems to speak of revising the Christianity subject in such a way that there may be less need for exemption.

For the MPs representing the Labour Party, the ideas expressing policy solutions appear to be different from those of the non-socialist MPs, while at the same time supporting the rejection of Christiansen's proposal. In the first speech presenting the party's position in the debate, Trond Mathisen says 'The Labour Party supports the Christianity teaching until we get a



renewed, reworked Christianity subject' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). In this way, he seems to refer to the timing of the debate. Remembering that the Labour Party wanted to postpone the debate until the report from the Green Paper committee working on a proposal for a new RE curriculum had finished, Mathisen's use of 'until' may be interpreted to refer to the period before that report is ready. At the same time, he speaks of a 'renewed, reworked *Christianity subject*', and so he seems to expect the new proposal to remain a Christianity subject, in some sense.

At the time, there were six members from the Labour Party in the Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, and they were split in the Recommendation to the Storting. Four of them voted with the non-socialist parties and rejected Christiansen's proposal, while the remaining two only took part in the remark where the Labour MPs expressed their negative opinion on the decision to hold the debate before the publishing of the report from the Green Paper committee. In the debate, one of these two, Oddbjørg Ausdal Starrfelt said that she and Tomas Norvoll sympathised with Christiansen's proposal of a subject that is neutral with regard to religion, but that they regarded it as a politically unviable option (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2417). Instead, they looked to the Green Paper committee and hoped that it would lead to a subject 'that may include all pupils, or at least a lot more in schools than today' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2417). As a potential policy solution, this seems to suggest that at least some in the Labour Party wanted to revise the Christianity subject in such a way that there would be less need for exemption.

If that is a correct interpretation of the Labour Party position on the matter, the debate contained at least three different policy solutions. One is the proposal from Christiansen, supported by the Socialist Left Party, of replacing the Christianity subject with a subject that is neutral with regard to religion. Another is the idea that the Christianity subject should be kept pretty much as it is, and that a meeting place should be established in addition to the subject, to comply with the demands from a more diverse society. Thirdly, Labour, and perhaps Holte of the Centre Party, seems to have wanted to revise the Christianity subject in such a way that there would be much less need for exemption. This solution appears to be a middle position between the other two, with a greater degree of continuity with the Christianity subject than proposed by Christiansen, yet with more changes than what the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats support.

### **4.1.3 Meta-ideas**

When it comes to the ideas functioning as meta-ideas in the debate, some have already been mentioned, such as Djupedal's high regard for the unitary school system and Christiansen's support for the notion that a government should be neutral in matters of religion. This shows how the same ideas may function in different ways simultaneously. In Christiansen's reasoning, quoted above, her espousal of the meta-idea that governments should be neutral serves as a problem definition when applied to the current situation.

Several other meta-ideas were also expressed in the debate. It falls beyond the scope of this introduction to provide a broad description of them, but I will bring up a few that are expressed several times. The first of these are ideas about the role of Christianity in shaping Norwegian culture, the second concerns the understanding of and possibility of neutrality and confessionality, and the third is the already mentioned notion of the unitary school system.

#### **The importance of Christianity for the shaping of Norwegian culture**

One of the labels given to the meta-ideas by Mehta (2011, p. 40) is 'zeitgeist'. By this he refers to ideas that are shared by all the relevant actors at a given time, and in the debate on Christiansen's proposal, the idea that Christianity has played an important role in the shaping of Norwegian culture and values seems to function in this way. Representatives from every party express this idea in the debate, sometimes also adding that this is not a matter of contention (cf. Wingård, 2011, pp. 101–106). For instance, Christiansen opens her reply to Lilletun's speech by saying that 'There is nobody here [...] who wants to question the fact that Christianity has had a great importance for Norwegian society... This is not a point of disagreement either' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2403). Thus, she seems to classify the idea about the significance of Christianity in Norway as zeitgeist, in the sense that it is marked as not being a point of disagreement.

However, after making it clear that there was a consensus about the fact that Christianity has had a significant impact, Christiansen went on to signal what she does disagree with. In the same paragraph, she continued, 'I have to say that some speakers here draw the importance of Christianity so far that I perhaps think one ought to think the matter over once more' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). Thus, while agreeing that Christianity is important, Christiansen argued that some of the speakers in the debate were overstating that significance and brought up 'Western philosophy' as another important tradition for the development of Norwegian culture and society.

In the debate, both Christiansen and Djupedal, who were in favour of replacing the Christianity subject with a subject that is neutral with regard to religion, express this combination of a recognition that Christianity is important with the idea that other traditions have played a part too. Most of the politicians rejecting Christiansen's proposal, however, only speak of Christianity as the source of Norwegian culture and values.

Understood as meta-ideas, this difference may be reflected by classifying the idea that Christianity is significant for the development of Norwegian culture and society as *zeitgeist*, while to speak of Christianity as the only source is a reflection of a meta-idea that is not *zeitgeist*. Mehta (2011, p. 43) calls these 'public philosophies', and perhaps this may be understood as a public philosophy about the role of Christianity in the development of Norwegian culture and society. On the other hand, none of the politicians rejecting the proposal respond to the critique from Christiansen, about drawing the importance too far, and while this may serve as an indication of what they are interested in expressing in the debate, it cannot be taken as evidence that they believe that Christianity is the only significant tradition for Norwegian culture and society. For instance, it seems quite likely that they could have granted Christiansen her point about the significance of Western philosophy, while still maintaining that Christianity was the most important tradition – a point that Christiansen might also have agreed with.

This illustrates that when it comes to the meta-ideas, it is hard to reach strong conclusions. The politicians are not having a debate about the significance of Christianity in the history of Norway but are drawing on ideas about it as part of their reasoning concerning the matter at hand, which is a proposal of a new RE subject. The nuances in the meta-ideas they express may serve as indications of how they understand important aspects of the situation, but the data do not support strong conclusions.

### **What is meant by neutrality and confessionality?**

The second topic appearing to serve as a meta-idea that I wish to bring up here is the ideas the politicians express about neutrality and confessionality. Both of these concepts are contested in the debate, as the politicians interpret them differently, and include them in their reasoning in different ways.

In her Private Member's Bill, Christiansen proposed a subject with 'teaching in culture, values, and philosophies of life that is neutral with regard to religion' (Dokument nr. 8:51 (1993–94)). In the introduction to the Bill, it says that 'Norway is the only country in Scandinavia with

confessionally bound teaching of Christianity in the public education system' (Dokument nr. 8:51 (1993–94)). In the debate, both of the understandings of neutrality and confessionality are brought up by different politicians.

With regard to neutrality, Lisbeth Holand, MP for the Socialist Left Party, replied to the Conservative MP Sanner's speech by expressing her sadness at seeing those who oppose Christiansen's proposal '... fighting an enemy that does not exist' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). Thus, Holand seems to express a common frustration among the minority in the debate over the tendency among the majority to argue against RE that is neutral with regard to values instead of neutral with regard to religion. The impression, for instance expressed by Christiansen, seems to be that the majority does this consciously because it is an easier idea to argue against (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413).

Both Mathisen and Sanner express the idea that teaching cannot be neutral with regard to values as part of their reasoning for rejecting Christiansen's proposal (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2404, 2407). From their perspective, it seems that having an RE subject that is neutral with regard to religion, amounts to a situation where there is no value foundation for the subject, thereby making the subject neutral with regard to values. Mathisen also seems to indicate that if the confessional link to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity was removed, the orientation of the subject would be decided by the personal position of the teacher (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404).

The extent to which the current Christianity subject is confessional is also contested. From the perspective of the minority, the current situation may be described as education that '... teaches and confirms Evangelical Lutheran childhood faith' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410) and as '... public authorities signalling to small children which faith is correct and which faith is wrong' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). In other words, it seems that they interpret the confessional nature of the Christianity subject to the effect that the subject promotes specific Christian beliefs.

Among the majority, however, there are different ideas about what the confessional link entails. In the Recommendation to the Storting, the majority points to the fact that the Christianity subject '... is not the baptismal education of the Church and that the confessional anchoring of the subject does not imply preaching' (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 1). Furthermore, the subject is referred to as 'open with regard to culture' (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2), in the sense that learning about religions other than Christianity is also part of the subject.

In the debate, different members of the parties forming the majority seem to interpret the confessional nature of the Christianity subject in different ways. The Minister of Education, Hernes, said that the minority position rested on a misunderstanding of the confessional link, and interprets it instead as a signal that ‘... the Christianity the pupils are to learn about is not e.g. Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Anglican, but oriented by Christianity as it has appeared in Norway in historical time, since 1536 and in the present circumstances’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). From this quote, it seems that for Hernes, the confessional nature of the Christianity subject is only a matter of deciding which denomination of Christianity the pupils are to learn about. It does not say anything about what is to be presented as more or less true, or which religious position is the preferred one.

Contrary to Hernes’ position, Conservative MP Sanner enters into a discussion with Christiansen, who replied to his speech by asking what the confessional link entailed. Sanner replies by saying that ‘I mean that education is to give a preference with regard to religions and philosophies of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Thus, it seems that for Sanner, the confessional link had wider consequences than it did for Hernes. He does not elaborate what he means by ‘preference’, but at the very least, it seems to involve taking some kind of stance as to which religious beliefs are to be held in regard. At the same time, Sanner supported the remark noting that the subject is not to be a vehicle for preaching, which indicates that he does not believe that pupils should be encouraged to become Christians.

### **The value of having a unitary school system**

The third and final meta-idea to be discussed here concerns the notion of a unitary school system. In the debate, this concept is brought up by MPs from the Labour Party, Djupedal from the Socialist Left Party, and Minister Hernes, also from Labour. Thus, it is different from the two previous meta-ideas in that only some of the politicians in the debate relate directly to it, but seeing as it seems to have such a significant role for these participants in the debate, it must be explained further here.

Historically, the notion of the unitary school system became a part of the Norwegian educational debate in the early 1900s, referring to the idea that all children should attend the same school, regardless of their social background (Thuen, 2017, p. 14). In the 1930s, the first Norwegian Labour government expanded the range of the unitary school system to encompass the first seven years of Norwegian education (Volckmar, 2016, p. 42). The idea was that having a unitary school system that would gather all pupils in the same classrooms and give them the

same teaching would support the sense of togetherness in the nation, while also promoting social equality (Volckmar, 2016, p. 47). In the years following the Second World War, majority Labour governments expanded the unitary school system further, ensuring that all Norwegian pupils would have the right to nine years of free education.

As mentioned, when discussing problem definitions, politicians belonging to the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party saw the practical effects of having separate, confessional RE as a weakening of the unitary school system. Seen as a meta-idea, this is an expression of the public philosophy that Norway is well served by having a unitary school system, where all pupils attend the same classes and receive the same teaching during primary and lower secondary education.

#### **4.1.4 Summary of the key ideas in the debate**

Before moving on to the analysis of ideas about the three topics, religion education, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, I will here briefly summarise the key ideas in the debate according to their function.

This section has presented the key ideas in the 1995 debate. The key ideas functioning as problem definitions were:

- ‘As Norway is becoming a more diverse country, the Christianity subject must be revised.’
- ‘The system of exemption from the Christianity subject is a problem because it...
  - ... divides pupils into groups (causing prejudice)
  - ... causes pupils to complete education without learning about Christianity
  - ... weakens the unitary school system
- ‘By having a confessional Christianity subject as part of the public education system, the government is giving one religious tradition preferential treatment.’

The key ideas functioning as policy solutions were:

- ‘The Christianity subject should be replaced with a philosophy of life subject that is neutral with regard to religion.’

- ‘The Christianity subject should be revised and maintained, keeping the right to exemption. In addition, a new meeting place for pupils attending different RE subjects should be established.’
- ‘The Christianity subject should be revised and reworked in such a way that there is less need for exemption than today.’

Key meta-ideas in the debate include the extent of Christianity’s role in the shaping of Norwegian culture and society, understandings of neutrality and confessionality with a view to RE, and a perspective on the unitary school system as a valuable institution in Norwegian society. All of these ideas were more or less contested in the debate, but here is one example for each of them:

- ‘Christianity has played a significant role in the development of Norwegian culture and society.’
- ‘Having RE that is neutral with regard to religion is the same as having RE that is neutral with regard to values.’
- ‘Norway is well served by having a unitary school system, where all pupils attend the same subject and receive the same teaching, regardless of their background.’

## **4.2 Religion education**

In this section, I describe and discuss the ideas about RE found in the debate about Christiansen’s Private Member’s Bill. As explained at the end of the introduction to this chapter, I first analyse the contributions from the independent MP Christiansen together with the MPs from the Socialist Left Party (Section 4.2.1). Then, I analyse the contributions from the three non-socialist parties (Section 4.2.2). The final group to be analysed is the Labour politicians (Section 4.2.3).

The analysis of ideas about religion education follows the strategy established in Section 3.1 and repeated in Section 3.4. There, I presented three key distinctions as my operationalisation of ideas about RE. First, there is the distinction between confessional and non-confessional RE, as understood by Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013) and Kimanen (2015). Then, I discuss the distinction between integrative and separative RE as worked out by Alberts (2007, 2008). Finally, I discuss the aims of RE, using Grimmitt’s (1987) distinction between learning about and learning from religion, as it has been reworked by Kjeldsen (2016). As presented in Section

3.1, Kjeldsen distinguishes between one aim that is inherent to the RE subject (learning about) and four that are external (learning from). The inherent aim is learning about one or more religions or socio-cultural topics, and the four external aims are social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, existential-religious development, and analytical-critical development.

#### **4.2.1 Independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party**

In the following, I discuss the contribution to the debate from Christiansen and the MPs from the Socialist Left Party. As Holand only contributes with one reply to the debate, I will primarily refer to Djupedal as a representative of the Socialist Left Party. I first discuss this contribution to the debate with a view to the distinction between confessional and non-confessional RE, then between separative and integrative, and finally between aims that are internal and external to the subject.

Both Djupedal and Christiansen make it clear that they are against having confessional RE as part of public education, but they express their ideas in different ways. Djupedal speaks of the ‘confessional binding’ of the current Christianity subject, and argues that it has several negative consequences (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411). One of these is that it ‘... contributes to confirming the myth that one faith is more correct, or superior to other religions’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411).

#### **Support for the unitary school system as a reason for wanting non-confessional RE**

However, the main reason for Djupedal’s opposition to having confessional RE seems to be associated with the issue of exemption rights. In his contribution to the debate, he repeatedly speaks of and stresses the importance of ‘the unitary school system’ (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2406, 2410). With this expression he refers to the idea that as many of the pupils in Norway as possible should attend state schools, and that it is a good thing for society that pupils take part in the same education, including the same RE subject. For him, this appears to be a key public philosophy, functioning as a meta-idea.

For Djupedal, then, it is desirable to have an RE subject without exemption rights, as this would ensure that more pupils attend the same subject (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406), and this has consequences for the sense in which RE may be confessional. For instance, in a reply to the Labour MP Mathisen, Djupedal reasons that if one supports the idea of the unitary school system, one has to remove the confessional binding (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). This would have strengthened the unitary school system, because it would have meant an end to the



situation where different pupils receive different (or no) teaching in RE. Thus, for him, having confessional RE means that parents will have the option to exempt their children from the subject, and this will necessarily lead to a situation where pupils attend different subjects or in some cases go without RE (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). Instead, Djupedal wants to ‘dissolve the confessional binding’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406).

However, he is also clear that he believes education should have a value foundation. A Lutheran form of Christianity ought to be part of such a foundation, according to Djupedal (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410), but it should be based on ‘the founding values of the Declaration of Human Rights’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). This, Djupedal argues, would lead to ‘... a better ethical foundation for our coming generations’ than a subject that is just based on Christianity (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2412).

### **Government neutrality as a reason for wanting non-confessional RE**

For Christiansen, it seems to be an important public philosophy that the government should not interfere with children’s identity when it comes to matters of faith or philosophy of life (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). For this reason, the RE subject should be neutral with regard to religion. As an example, she says that ‘... the teaching [in RE] does not have to take a specific faith as its basis’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413).

In her contribution, Christiansen dwells on the distinction between having RE that is neutral with regard to values and neutral with regard to religion. The former is neither desirable nor possible, while the latter is both (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2405, 2413). In this way, she signals that from her perspective, the RE subject ought to have a value foundation, but not be associated with a specific religious tradition.

Thus, in different ways, Christiansen and Djupedal argue for non-confessional RE. They also speak of how the subject ought to promote certain values, but do not mention religion as a primary source of these values. Therefore, they do not seem to promote what Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013, p. 2013) call small-c confessionality either, where religion is presented as something beneficial for all pupils (cf. Section 3.1).

### **Support for integrative RE**

Subsequently, they are both also in favour of integrative RE, proposing a single, compulsory subject from which there would not be an option of exemption (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2411–2412). Djupedal is especially clear about his reservations regarding the separative model for

RE, saying ‘As it is today, the pupils in some schools are split into three [...]. This is very unfortunate ...’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Instead, he argues that a common subject would ‘... give the children a better opportunity to face ... a multicultural and multireligious world’ (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2410–2411). Christiansen, too, speaks of a subject ‘... conveying values and knowledge about religions without taking a stance as to whether that or another religion is the so-called right [religion]’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2405), and in her final remark in the Recommendation to the Storting she notes how a non-confessional subject could include all pupils (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)). As regards the second, more specific, meaning of integrative RE in Alberts’ (2007, pp. 372–385) usage, some of the ideas put forth by the proponents of this policy solution are also similar. They are both interested in having an RE subject with a name that does not refer to specific religious traditions, and they also support having RE that does not necessitate exemption.

### **Aiming for knowledge, values, and living better together**

Concerning the aims Djupedal and Christiansen see for what the pupils ought to learn about in RE, Christiansen mentions ‘knowledge about religions’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2405), ‘Western philosophy’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413) and ‘the content of Christianity (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Djupedal emphasises ‘historical heritage’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2412) and ‘understanding and knowledge of other religions’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411), and mentions ‘Islam’ especially (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411). Taken together, this indicates that they imagine a subject where knowledge about different religions plays a key part. They both also signal that knowledge about Christianity would be a large part of the curriculum in the subject, due to the historical significance of Christianity in Norway, but Christiansen in particular emphasises that Western philosophy has also been significant (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2412, 2413).

When it comes to the aims that are external to the subject (learning from), both Christiansen and Djupedal emphasises advocating values that are important in Norwegian society. This seems to play a role in terms of both pupils’ existential-ethical development and their social-ethical development. Christiansen speaks of how ‘[t]he consequences of the different choices that any human makes through life often raise ethical and moral questions’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413) and argues that all children need to receive a foundation for dealing with such questions as part of their education. Thus, she seems to be imagining the RE subject as a place for equipping pupils with the skills and knowledge needed to face ethical and moral questions in their individual lives.

Furthermore, she also speaks of the task education has in ‘... passing on fundamental norms and rules in the Norwegian society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413) and says that this task is ‘... more important than ever’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). In this sense, it seems that the RE subject is also contributing to the social-ethical development of pupils by familiarising them with such fundamental Norwegian norms and rules, and in that way preparing them for life in this society. Similarly, Djupedal also speaks of how it would be ‘... of great benefit for society’ if all pupils were to receive ‘... instruction in the same philosophy of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Thus, it seems fair to say that they both imagine a societal benefit coming from all pupils attending the same RE subject and thereby coming to know fundamental Norwegian norms and values.

For both these aims, the existential-ethical and the social-ethical, it seems relevant that Christiansen and Djupedal speak of the RE subject they are proposing as a ‘value subject’, which may have slightly different connotations than for instance a ‘knowledge subject’. In that way, they indicate that it is an important part of the aim of RE to promote certain values, and perhaps emphasise this aim at least as much as the aim of learning about religions.

Another social-ethical aspect of the aim they seem to envisage for RE is phrased by the other Socialist Left Party MP in the debate, Holand. She speaks of ‘... common values from different philosophies of life: to respect each other’s different starting points, to train the ability to live together, show tolerance for just the different reasons one has for one’s ethical choices and the different philosophies of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). Djupedal seems to be expressing the same idea when he says that the subject he is supporting would be ‘... the right way to face a multicultural and multireligious society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2403).

For both the MPs from the Socialist Left Party it seems important that through the RE subject, the pupils are to learn and acquire skills that enable them to live well together, based on the premise that they are different and represent different religions and philosophies of life. The RE subject is then a place for developing skills for living well together in an increasingly diverse society.

Speaking of existential-religious development, both Djupedal and Christiansen make it clear that they do not see this as part of the aim for RE. Christiansen says that deciding which religion children are to be raised in is the domain of parents (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413), and for Djupedal, ‘... faith is a private matter that we do not want the state, parliament, or government to interfere in’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). Thus, neither of them seems to include an existential-religious development as part of the directly stated aim of RE.

The final aspect of aims that are external to the subject (learning from) in Kjeldsen's framework is called analytical-critical development and is exemplified by notions such as religious literacy and the critical skills coming from being adept at the study of religions.

Neither of the supporters of Christiansen's proposal uses such terms as 'critical thinking', 'religious literacy' or other words referring directly to an analytical-critical development, but Djupedal seems to be assuming ideas along these lines when he speaks of how the subject he supports could '... contribute to an increase in the understanding of and knowledge about other religions [than Christianity]' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411). As discussed above, both Christiansen and Djupedal see knowledge about religions as an important part of the aim inherent to the subject (learning about), and by using the word 'understanding' here, Djupedal may be interpreted as speaking of an effect the attainment of this knowledge may have on the pupils – that they may gain a better understanding of religion. Indirectly, at least, this seems to reflect analytical-critical development as part of the external aim of the RE subject.

Summarising the aims for RE for these politicians, they seem to be that pupils in RE are to learn about Christianity, Western philosophy, and religious traditions other than Christianity, where Islam in particular is mentioned. When it comes to the aims that are external to the subject, they emphasise existential-ethical development. Pupils are to be trained in ethical and moral reasoning, and the subject is to play a part in passing on values and norms that are fundamental in Norwegian society. Furthermore, they also emphasise the social-ethical development of the pupils, underlining desirable attitudes such as tolerance and the ability to live well together in an increasingly diverse society. They both actively reject existential-religious development as part of the aim for RE.

#### **A new vision for RE – in contrast to the current Christianity subject**

The ideas about RE expressed by these politicians has been found to be characterised by non-confessionality, of being integrative, of learning about different religious traditions (with an emphasis on knowledge about Christianity) and philosophy, and of supporting pupils' existential-ethical and social-ethical development.

#### **4.2.2 The non-socialist parties**

In the debate, the MPs from the Christian Democratic Party and Sanner from the Conservative Party argue for keeping the current Christianity subject and adding a new meeting place for pupils who participate in different, parallel RE subjects. The MPs from the Centre Party seem to be in favour of keeping the current model with a confessional Christianity subject, but do not

mention the addition of a new meeting place. At the same time, there are statements indicating that at least the main speaker from the Centre Party may support revising the subject in such a way that there is less need for exemption. Still, they partake in a joint remark with the Conservatives and Christian Democrats in emphasising the role of the objects clause of education from 1969 in the Recommendation to the Storting (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)).

All the politicians from the non-socialist parties appear to support some form of confessional RE. Or perhaps more precisely, they all reject having non-confessional RE in Norwegian state schools. Therefore, the interesting point here is to look for different nuances in how they seem to understand the notion of confessionality. As shown when discussing the key ideas in the debate (Section 4.1), it contains different ideas about what the confessionality of the Christianity subject entailed.

### **Value transmission must be tied to Christianity**

The main MPs representing the Centre Party and the Conservatives both respond to Christiansen's proposal of a subject that is neutral with regard to religion by pointing to the role the then current Christianity subject played as part of the value transmission in Norwegian education. For them, this value transmission takes the objects clause of education as its point of departure and is especially realised in the Christianity subject. As an example, the MP for the Conservative Party, Sanner, says that '... the teaching in the Christianity subject has played and is to play a key role [in the transmission of values]' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2409).

For Sanner, this value transmission must be tied to Christianity, since '[t]he European liberal tradition that constitutes the foundation for modern human rights is inextricable from Christianity's great influence on European culture' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). This tradition seems for Sanner to form a heritage that provides roots for the important values of today (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407), and from his perspective removing the confessional link between the RE subject and Christianity seems to amount to '... tearing these values from their roots' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

Holte, the main speaker from the Centre Party in the debate, instead emphasises national culture, and the link between Norwegian culture and beliefs (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). When discussing Christiansen's proposed neutral subject, he asks 'What is one to hold on to when one is to teach about national tradition, culture, and values?' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). Later in his speech he points to the current objects clause of education (from 1969), saying that '[t]he Centre Party will not change the objects clause of education in such a way that the Christianity

subject is weakened' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). According to Holte's perspective, '[t]he objects clause of education binds us as a society to the public doctrine of the Constitution, and it binds the parents in their responsibility for upbringing' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). Thus, for Holte, there seems to be a line going from the status given to Christianity in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, through the objects clause of education from 1969 to the confessional profile of the Christianity subject.

The main MP from the Christian Democrats, Lilletun, uses different words to describe how the Christianity subject ought to be. According to him, it should remain '... open with regard to culture, while at the same time having a clear commitment to the doctrine of the Church of Norway' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). The phrase 'open with regard to culture' was also used in the Recommendation to the Storting that prepared the debate (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)), and in his speech, Lilletun seems to interpret it in the sense that '... other religions and philosophies of life have a natural place in the subject' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402).

By speaking of 'a clear commitment', Lilletun is among the participants in the debate who use the strongest language concerning the confessionality of the RE subject in Norwegian public education. At the same time, he, together with the rest of the politicians supporting this policy solution, is clear that there is to be no preaching in the subject. Throughout his speech he keeps coming back to the tension between, on the one hand, having a commitment to a specific Christian doctrine, and at the same time having a subject where religions and philosophies of life other than Christianity 'have a natural place' and where there is to be no preaching (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402).

### **What kind of confessionality is this?**

In Jensen and Kjeldsen's (2013) distinction between capital and small-c confessional, they understand a 'capital-C' Confessional RE subject to be characterised by an explicit confessional framework, and that the pupils are to receive instruction in this confession. Comparing Lilletun, Holte and Sanner's statements to this definition, it seems likely that their ideas about the confessionality of the subject could be interpreted as 'capital-C' Confessionality. Both Lilletun and Holte of the Centre Party refer to Lutheran Christianity as a doctrine to which education is either bound or committed to, thereby serving as an explicit confessional framework.

The second criterion offered by Jensen and Kjeldsen is that pupils are to receive instruction in this confessional framework. When Lilletun is speaking about his aims for the subject, he uses the Norwegian phrase *kjennskap til kristendommen* to describe what the pupils are to receive.

This could be translated as ‘knowledge about Christianity’, but it also carries a sense of becoming familiar with something, which may be more personal in nature than simply having knowledge about something. It therefore seems fair to interpret Lilletun in such a way that instruction in Christianity may be an important part of the subject for him, thereby understanding him to be close to a ‘capital-C’ Confessional understanding of RE.

Sanner of the Conservative Party is challenged by Christiansen to explain what the purpose of the confessional nature of the Christianity subject entails and responds by saying that his position is that ‘... education ought to grant preference in the matter of religion and philosophy of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). This seems to be less of an emphasis on the confessional nature than Lilletun and Holte’s talk of being committed to a doctrine, but there can be no doubt that Sanner too assumes that the religion granted preference is Lutheran Christianity. For instance, he says that ‘... public education must take our own cultural heritage as its point of departure’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407), having just before spoken about how Christianity is an irreplaceable part of that heritage.

However, looking at the contributions from the key politicians from the parties supporting this policy solution from the perspective of Kimanen’s (2015) fully confessional ideal type, it also becomes clear that they are not in complete congruence with such a position. In Kimanen’s concept, a fully confessional subject would only involve instruction in one religion, and part of the objective would be for the pupils to make the confession of the subject their own. That is not what these politicians seem to be saying. As quoted above, Lilletun mentions the natural place of other religions and non-religious beliefs in the subject, and by ruling out preaching in the subject, directly influencing the faith of the pupils seems to fall outside its aims.

On the other hand, Kimanen’s fully confessional ideal type also involves the dimension of identity assumption, and here there is more similarity. Kimanen’s point is that in a fully confessional RE subject, an assumption is made about the religious identity of the pupils, and that is similar to parts of the reasoning of several of these politicians.

Ravnåsen, for instance, another Christian Democrat taking part in the debate, applies the following reasoning to the issue at hand: ‘... around 90% of those who live here in this country belong to one or another form of Lutheran religious community’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2418). In the same way, other MPs speak of how Christianity is ‘our’ religion, or the religion of the country, as will be discussed in the next section of the analysis (Section 4.3). Thus, it seems

that the politicians supporting this policy solution are closer to Kimanen's fully confessional ideal type.

Summarising the ideas about confessionality, I have found that the politicians supporting this policy solution are all in favour of having confessional RE. However, they are also against there being preaching in the subject, and there are indications that they also want the subject to include content about religious traditions and philosophies of life other than Christianity. There is a strong emphasis on the notion of values, which from the perspective of these politicians need to be associated with a specific, historical, and cultural heritage, which in their understanding must be Christianity.

### **Full exemption will be needed in the future as well – but perhaps not for all?**

Given that these politicians support confessional RE, it is not surprising that they are inclined to maintain rights of exemption and thus in effect a separative model of RE. At the same time, as discussed when presenting the key problem definitions in the debate (Section 4.1), they do see challenges with the current model.

The main MPs from the Centre Party, Conservatives and Christian Democrats all express concern over the fact that as the situation currently is for RE in Norwegian public education, some pupils are not learning anything about Christianity (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2402, 2407, 2410). Still, as shown above, they do not consider removing the confessional link between the subject and Christianity as a viable option to solve the problem, and so they must find remedies within the separative model.

Thus, as found when presenting the key policy solutions in the debate (Section 4.1), these politicians want to keep the Christianity subject. However, they differ slightly when it comes to what else they want to do to compensate for the challenges with the current model.

Holte of the Centre Party speaks of the need to '... develop the [Christianity] subject in such a way that all pupils may receive an introduction to the values of life and culture on which we build our society, whether their parents are Christians or not' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407), and later in his speech he states that '... the Christianity subject should have a strengthened compulsory place, but in such a way that allowances are made for pupils with parents who want exemption from the faith aspect of Christianity' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

Taken together, this seems to indicate that for Holte, the way forward includes a confessional Christianity subject that is more compulsory than the current subject, since he speaks of a



strengthened compulsory place. This could be interpreted as a way of signalling a reduction of the rights to exemption, and by speaking of ‘the faith aspect’ as something parents want exemption from, he may be expressing the idea of partial exemption here.

If that is correct, then Holte may be thinking along integrative lines, at least in matters of organisation, in the form of a continued Christianity subject, where pupils may only be exempted from parts of the teaching, and not the complete subject as the situation was in 1995.

Lilletun, on the other hand, says that ‘...exemption from the subject should be possible’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402), which indicates that for him, a separative model with full exemption is to be kept. This interpretation is also supported by him saying that ‘... the pupils who are exempted must be offered teaching in philosophies of life, where knowledge about Christianity as an important part of Norwegian culture and tradition is a key element, and here one should not allow exemptions’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). Thus, it seems that Lilletun wants to strengthen the Christianity part of the content of the Philosophy of Life subject, and not allow exemptions from learning about Christianity as part of Norwegian culture and tradition. In addition, Lilletun says that the Christian Democrats are in favour of establishing ‘... a meeting place where all pupils may discuss ethics and culture in order to increase the knowledge about each other through personal encounters and give tolerance a practical content’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402).

As discussed in the section on the policy solutions, this seems to be a solution for the problem the politicians ascribe to the separative model, that it divides pupils in matters of religion and ethics, and that this division is undesirable in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse. For Lilletun and the Christian Democrats it is not an option to give up the confessional nature of the Christianity subject to accommodate the reduction of exemption rights, and so this other meeting place is proposed. Sanner from the Conservative Party also mentions ‘... different kinds of meeting places between different religions and philosophies of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410), and thus seems positively inclined to the proposition from the Christian Democrats.

### **Differences in the non-socialist approach to separative vs integrative RE**

The analysis of the contributions from these politicians has shown that while the Centre Party supports maintaining a clear reference to Christianity in the objects clause of education, they may be open to revising the Christianity subject in such a way that only partial exemption is necessary to comply with human rights legislation. As mentioned in Section 1.2, the human rights legislation on education and parents’ rights to decide the moral and religious upbringing

of their children demand that states either provide neutral RE or allow exemptions. The idea of partial exemption was part of the mind-set that later in 1995 was to produce the first KRL subject, and it seems fairly likely that Holte may have been familiar with this option. If that is correct, then he may be said to argue for a more integrative form of RE, yet his strong emphasis on a confessional Christianity subject and equally strong rejection of Christiansen's proposal indicate that it is not similar to the ideas of integrative RE based on the Philosophy of Life subject as espoused by Christiansen and Djupedal. Subsequently, it also seems further removed from integrative RE in the sense of Alberts' study-of-religion approach.

The Conservatives and the Christian Democrats, however, appear to be in favour of maintaining the separative model with a confessional subject, and then adding new meeting places to accommodate the need to encourage tolerance and greater understanding of diversity among pupils. They are therefore not in favour of integrative RE in any sense.

### **Learning about Christianity**

In the final part of the analysis of the ideas offered by MPs from these three parties, Kjeldsen's (2016) framework for the aims of RE will be used to explicate how they appear to understand this aspect of the ideas about RE. As with the contributions from the supporters of the previous policy solutions, I will again follow Kjeldsen's outline, first discussing the aims inherent to the subject (learning about), and then the four subcategories of the aims external to the subject (learning from). The four subcategories are social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, existential-religious development, and analytical-critical development.

When talking about the content of RE, what the pupils are to learn about, the politicians supporting this policy solution speak almost exclusively about Christianity. Sanner, for instance, mentions the necessity of 'knowing the content of Christianity' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407) and speaks of how the reference to Christianity in the objects clause of education must imply a commitment to more than cultural history: 'The Christian view of human life, the idea of loving one's neighbour, and the Ten Commandments must be at the centre' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). Thus, it seems that for him, the key element that pupils are to learn about in this subject is the content of Evangelical Lutheran Christianity.

Similarly, Lilletun returns several times to the necessity of learning about Christianity in Norwegian education (e.g. S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402), but in addition, he articulates that '... other religions and philosophies of life [than Christianity] have a natural place in the subject' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). It therefore seems fair to say that for him, pupils are mainly to learn

about Christianity in the subject, but they are also to learn about other religious traditions and philosophies of life.

### **Christian heritage as a resource for dealing with diversity**

As regards the aims external to the subject, these politicians seem to express ideas that includes aspects of both what Kjeldsen calls social-ethical and existential-ethical development. As discussed in Section 4.1, one of the key problem definitions in the debate concerned the increasing diversity of Norwegian society, and the suitability of the Christianity subject for preparing pupils for life in a more diverse society. For these politicians, it seems that the best way to face this challenge is to encourage good existential-ethical development in RE, drawing especially on Christian heritage in Norway. Thus, the social-ethical aim of supporting pupils in developing skills and attitudes that enable them to live well together in a more diverse society is effectively combined with the existential-ethical aim of supporting pupils in developing their identities in association with a particular idea of Norwegian tradition and heritage.

One of the MPs from the Christian Democrats, Ravnåsen, puts it like this: ‘It is important in a pluralistic society that children and young people receive a “standpoint”<sup>25</sup> in the encounter with other religions and cultures. The Christianity subject will be able to make children and young people safer in such an encounter because the subject leads to an increased level of consciousness concerning one’s own cultural roots and one’s own identity’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2418).

Here, Ravnåsen seems to be expressing a combination of several ideas: first of all, that Norway is becoming more pluralistic in matters of religion and culture, and that this will lead to more encounters between people who are different in these matters, and secondly, that increasing a child’s consciousness about its own background will strengthen that child’s identity, and that a cultural background may then serve as a child’s roots, in a metaphorical sense. Thirdly, he assumes that for the pupils in Norwegian education, Christianity is a vital part of their background, and a religious tradition that they may take as their standpoint, or personal point of reference in matters of religion and culture. If this is correct, and he supports these ideas, the external aim for the Christianity subject seems to be to make pupils familiar with Christianity

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<sup>25</sup> The word is written with quotation marks in the original parliamentary proceedings, which may suggest that Ravnåsen made an air quotes gesture while saying the word, or that he indicated something through emphasis and tone that the official reporter chose to reflect in this way.

in such a way that it may serve as their standpoint, which again will enable them to safely take part in an increasingly diverse Norwegian society.

Holte, MP for the Centre Party, seems to be reasoning along the same lines when, starting with the commitment to Lutheran Christianity as found in the Constitution and objects clause for education, he says that ‘... this is a useful and necessary foundation when one is to work out answers to the needs of our time. [...] From the perspective of the children, it is important that they receive knowledge about religion, philosophies of life and ethics, and an identity concerning this. A foundation in a philosophy of life counteracts rootlessness and lack of identity. Anchoring and identity make children and grown-ups safe’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

Unlike Ravnåsen, Holte does not mention Christianity directly, but indirectly his references to the Norwegian Constitution and the objects clause for education make it clear that he is referring to Lutheran Christianity as part of the foundation for education. He then goes on to say that knowledge about religion, philosophies of life and ethics is important, and adds the phrase ‘an identity concerning this’. Here, he seems to be close to Ravnåsen’s idea of children receiving a standpoint. Such an identity for Holte seems to serve as a foundation, which may then counteract rootlessness and lack of identity, which he appears to see as threats as Norway is becoming more diverse. The external aim of RE could therefore for Holte be understood as providing pupils with both knowledge and identity, in such a way that they are equipped to live well in a more diverse Norway.

Holte also adds a reflection on what is needed in Norway at the time of the debate, saying ‘According to my view, our society and our time are more in need of identity values than freedom and tolerance values. Respect for borders and boundary setting should in consideration of individuals in a multicultural society have a greater place, both in education and among people in daily life.’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). I take this as an indication that for Holte, the situation where Norway is becoming more diverse is a time where freedom and tolerance may be taken too far, with the consequence that individuals lose their identity. To counteract this challenge, he seems to argue that education, and in particular the Christianity subject, should look to provide pupils with identities that are associated with what he appears to see as the common cultural and religious heritage in Norway – Lutheran Christianity.

Sanner of the Conservative Party uses different expressions to Holte and Ravnåsen but may be arguing something along the same lines in his main speech. After mentioning increasing cultural and value-related diversity in Norway, he talks about the need for providing children

from different backgrounds with a common foundation, to make it easier to encounter each other in mutual understanding (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). He then goes on to observe that these questions ‘... strengthen rather than weaken the need for confessionally bound teaching in the Christianity subject’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). The first part of his reasoning seems to be slightly different to Holte and Ravnåsen’s. In supporting the identity development of pupils by drawing on the Christian heritage, Sanner is talking about giving pupils who he assumes have different backgrounds a common foundation on which to meet. However, when he concludes this section of the speech by saying that the need for confessionally bound teaching in the Christianity subject is strengthened, he too seems to be assuming that for the large majority of pupils in Norway, this common foundation has to do with knowing Christianity.

Earlier in his speech, Sanner spoke about a different aim that may be understood as social-ethical development. There, he first mentions ‘rootlessness’ as an issue, and then goes on to mention ‘racist attitudes and xenophobia’ as negative consequences of ‘lacking familiarity’ with cultural heritage (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). The cultural heritage Sanner is speaking of here is something he refers to as ‘the European liberal tradition’, which is ‘inextricably tied to Christianity’s great influence on European culture’. Thus, Sanner seems to be justifying teaching about Christianity in education by the pupils needing to understand and be familiar with this European tradition. From this perspective, the Christianity subject is a matter of ‘... defeating prejudice through knowledge’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

Comparing Sanner’s position with that of Holte and Ravnåsen, the main difference is the reference to a common European heritage which differs from Holte and Ravnåsen’s emphasis on Norwegian heritage. This is not very surprising, given their different ideas about the relationship between Norway and Europe as illustrated by their positions concerning Norwegian membership in the EU, where in particular the Centre Party and the Conservatives are diametrically opposed.

Furthermore, it also seems that Sanner is more concerned about the knowledge element of the subject, in the sense that it is through learning about Christianity that the pupils are to come to know and understand a heritage, and through this understanding establish a common ground on which to meet, regardless of religious or cultural differences. For Holte and Ravnåsen it seems more important that pupils’ individual identity development is tied more closely to Christianity as it has been in Norway historically. However, this difference should perhaps not be exaggerated, as they are all supporting a continued confessional Christianity subject.

### **Do the Christian Democrats want RE to support existential-religious development?**

Kjeldsen's subcategories for the external aims for RE also include existential-religious development, which involves supporting pupil's development in a religious sense. Looking at the contributions from the politicians supporting this policy solution, the only MP who seems to discuss pupils' religious development is Lilletun from the Christian Democrats. In his opening speech, he spends some time dwelling on the purpose of the subject, and why it is so important, and in this context, he speaks of how the pupils in this subject '... encounter thoughts and answers that do something to us humans. We find help to place ourselves in the cosmos' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). Later he quotes the author Edvard Hoem to the effect that Christianity has to be something living, and that such a perspective is necessary in the Christianity subject as well. He then adds 'Preaching is not something that education is to do, but rather to create curious pupils who are motivated to keep working with the subject matter. And then they will understand more' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402).

Lilletun's language may be quite compact and have a poetic quality that makes it hard to interpret with certainty. However, it seems that in his musings he is negotiating a desire to encourage a personal investment in Christianity on behalf of the pupils, yet without saying that they all ought to become Christians. In this sense, it may be that Lilletun is primarily speaking of the same ideas as Ravnåsen was quoted as saying above, that people need a place to stand in matters of identity, and that the teaching in Christianity is supposed to provide such a standpoint. If that is correct, then Lilletun is perhaps best understood as not strictly speaking of religious development, but rather of personal, existential development through engaging with the traditional content of Christianity.

Kjeldsen's final subcategory is the analytical-critical development, and understood as ideas about supporting critical thinking and analysis, there are no direct statements in the contributions from these politicians that indicate that this is an aim for RE. Instead of letting the knowledge about religions and philosophies of life become a foundation for critical thinking and analysis of such phenomena in society, the politicians primarily seem to understand this knowledge as a resource for existential-ethical development as part of a strategy for social-ethical development.

### **Supporters of the status quo – wanting to keep the Christianity subject**

The contributions from the MPs representing the Centre Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats indicate that they support confessional, separative RE. They emphasise

knowledge about Christianity as a vital part of the content of the subject. Furthermore, they stress the importance of existential-ethical development tied to Christianity as a vital part of social-ethical development.

### **4.2.3 The Labour Party**

The majority of the Labour politicians in the debate appear to support the third and final policy solution presented in this debate, which was to revise the Christianity subject to remove or reduce the need for exemption. This was not put forth as a proposition, but the MPs from Labour indicate that while they agree with the non-socialist parties in rejecting Christiansen's proposal, they also look forward to the proposition from the Green Paper committee working on new ideas about RE in Norway. When talking about this, they also signal their support for a revision of the Christianity subject that would remove or reduce the need for exemption. Thus, they distinguish themselves from the non-socialist parties discussed previously. In analysing the ideas about RE expressed in the contributions from these politicians, I will follow the same structure as with the previous two groups. First, I discuss the ideas they express about confessionality, then whether they intend for the subject to be realised in a separative or integrative model, and finally I use Kjeldsen's categories for analysing the aims they express for RE.

#### **No upbringing may be neutral**

Mathisen delivered the main speech from the group of Labour MPs, and his contribution contains several ideas concerning confessionality. His starting point seems to be that 'no upbringing or value transmission can be neutral' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). He then draws a line from the fact that Norway has a state church, and says that 'for that reason, the teaching in the Christianity subject must orient itself from this reality' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). Thus, he appears to be indicating that as long as Norway has a state church, it is reasonable to have confessional RE teaching, in the sense that the RE subject is associated with the confession of this church.

However, it is perhaps noteworthy that Mathisen uses the phrase 'associated with a confession' (Norwegian: *konfesjonstilknyttet*), which is different, for instance, to the Conservative MP Sanner, who speaks of how the subject ought to be 'confessionally bound' (Norwegian: *konfesjonsbundet*) (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Djupedal and Christiansen, who are critical of having confessional RE, also use the phrase 'confessionally bound', and it seems that in the debate these different word choices may have been intended to convey ideas about what this

confessionality entailed. Speaking of something as being ‘associated’ is perhaps a way of signalling a lesser degree of influence from the confession upon the teaching in the subject. Mathisen is the only participant in the debate using these terms, but as it is the first speech from the Labour MPs, it may well have been carefully prepared. Later in the debate, Nybakk, another Labour MP, speaks of ‘confessional anchoring’ and underlines that it is ‘not binding’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416), which I take as another indication that the Labour group had a common understanding of not using the phrase ‘confessionally bound’. At least, the use of ‘associated’ may be taken as an indication that even though Mathisen here expresses support for there being a relation between the state church and the teaching in the Christianity subject, he may be open to having a weaker, or more distant, relation than those who are in favour of ‘confessionally bound’ teaching.

Mathisen also expresses his opinion that ‘it should not be the teachers’ own faith that decides what one is to orient oneself from in the teaching’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). Here, he seems to be assuming that if the confessional association with Christianity is removed, it would amount to a situation where teachers would teach in accordance with their personal views. Furthermore, he joins most of the other MPs in the debate by emphasising that there should not be any preaching in the subject.

### **The proposal from Christiansen rests on a misunderstanding**

Labour’s Minister of Education, Hernes, who participated in the debate as the minister responsible for the matter at hand, appears to have taken a somewhat different approach to the matter than Mathisen. He claims that Christiansen’s proposal rests on a misunderstanding: ‘... that the Christianity subject is confessionally bound’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). According to him, the confessional nature of the Christianity subject does not mean that ‘... one is to preach a particular belief’, but rather that it is a matter of deciding which form of Christianity is meant in the curriculum plans and laws (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). Instead of Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox Christianity, the Norwegian Christianity subject is to take its orientation from Evangelical Lutheran Christianity due to its historical significance in Norway (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). When expressing his own opinion on the matter, Hernes first emphasises that the subject should ‘... elucidate different views [...], that there [...] are good rationales for different beliefs and philosophies of life, and that these rationales are something one through the teaching in school is to come to know, and which also is worth discussing’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). Thus, he presents an image of a subject that seems closer to non-confessional than confessional,



by highlighting the diversity in the field of beliefs and philosophies of life instead of holding up one confessional framework as the content of the subject.

However, he also continues, ‘... in our country it is obvious that such a subject must draw its main content from that which more than any other creed has shaped this country, while simultaneously keeping the subject open towards and give room and generosity for other views’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). Here he appears to argue for upholding an RE subject that has a predominantly Christian content, while still insisting on its openness.

### **What kind of confessionality is this – a question of identity assumptions?**

As regards these contributions, it is not a straightforward matter to label them as either confessional or non-confessional, or ‘small-c’/‘capital-C’ Confessional for that matter. Both Hernes and Mathisen seem to assume a certain confessionality for the RE subject, and in the sense that both appear to mean that the subject should include instruction in the confessional framework of the state church, it does fit Jensen and Kjeldsen’s (2013) description of ‘capital-C’ Confessionality. However, looking at their contribution from the perspective of Kimanen’s four dimensions of confessionality, it is less clear.

Hernes, for instance, says that ‘[r]espect ... must be shown towards other beliefs in the Christianity subject’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414), and that ‘the subject must provide knowledge about other religions and world views’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). In this sense, he is quite different from Kimanen’s fully confessional ideal type, which involves teaching only about one belief and the aim that pupils are to identify personally with the beliefs of the confession. Furthermore, the contributions from these two Labour politicians appear to be different in the matter of identity assumptions. In Kimanen’s (2015) model, a fully confessional subject has an assumption built into its design that the pupils attending it belong to the confession. In a non-confessional subject, no emphasis is placed on the background, religious or non-religious, of the pupils.

In his opening speech, Mathisen discusses reasons for keeping the Christianity subject as a compulsory subject, and as a conclusion to a long section on the need for learning about Christianity, he says, ‘To be able to understand other religions one must know one’s own’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). When this statement is used as a reason to have compulsory teaching about Christianity for all pupils in Norway, it implies that for these pupils, Christianity is their own religion. This is the kind of identity assumption that Kimanen has argued goes along with a confessional RE subject.

As quoted above, Hernes also speaks of how it is obvious that in Norway, the main content of RE should be Christianity, but he appears to avoid the identity assumption that Mathisen makes. In the quote above, the reason was that Christianity has ‘shaped this country’, which is a matter of history. Another reason Hernes brings up is that knowledge about Christianity is ‘constitutive knowledge – what you must know to be able to interpret and to choose’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). Here, Hernes brings up the implications of his view that Christianity has shaped Norway. Because of its historical significance, he seems to believe that it is interwoven with everything that is Norwegian, and therefore every pupil in Norway should learn about Christianity to be able to understand Norwegian society today. Yet, still, these ideas do not seem to involve the same identity assumptions as Mathisen seems to make. Hernes’ wish that all pupils receive this constitutive knowledge may be realised independently of their identities and beliefs, and so it may still fit with a non-confessional realisation of RE.

However, Hernes also adds yet another reason for all pupils to have ‘a thorough education in biblical history and church history’, and that is ‘... because it ties every individual’s identity to the great flood that has deposited itself in all corners of our minds’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). Here, Hernes brings up the identity of the pupils, but once again he does so without necessarily assuming that Christianity is ‘their’ religion. Instead, he seems to argue that it is beneficial for all of them to include a worked-out relationship with Christianity as part of their identity, leaving open what kind of relationship that is to be.

In comparing Hernes’ and Mathisen’s ways of making identity assumptions concerning Norwegian pupils and Christianity, it must be said that they do have different rhetorical styles. Hernes appears to be more given to detailed and nuanced statements, whereas Mathisen’s style is more direct. It is conceivable, and perhaps likely, that Mathisen would agree with Hernes’ way of describing the relationship, even if he himself expresses it differently. Furthermore, it does not seem likely that Mathisen believes that all Norwegian pupils are Christians in the sense of a strong, personal religious identity. Instead, he may be getting at just what Hernes is talking about when he implies that for Norwegian pupils, Christianity is ‘their own’ religion.

This caveat notwithstanding, it does seem relevant for analysing this group of politicians’ ideas about confessionality that it was possible for Mathisen to put it as bluntly as he does, as it is perhaps the clearest incident of a confessional way of understanding RE coming from the Labour politicians’ contributions to the debate.

Taken together, the Labour politicians in the debate appear to support having confessional RE, but in a way that is mostly concerned with deciding which form of Christianity is to form the content of the subject, and that Christianity is to be the main part of the subject. They also underline the necessity of keeping the subject open to other beliefs and philosophies of life, and do not encourage a strong interpretation of the subject's confessional nature.

### **Separative RE is not the way forward for the unitary school system**

The next distinction to be discussed here is what ideas about separative and integrative RE are found in the Labour politicians' contribution to the debate. As a group, it seems their starting point is a critique of the then current separative model. For instance, Hernes puts it like this: '... it is unfortunate if the classes are divided in this subject, in such a way that everyone goes each to his own ... instead of meeting in what may be the most exciting subject in education' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). Here, Hernes seems to be arguing for an end to the separative model, where pupils attend separate, parallel subjects, and suggesting an integrative model instead.

For him and the other Labour politicians, this seems to be tied to their support for a unitary school system, where as many of the pupils as possible take part in public education. This may be understood as a meta-idea functioning as a public philosophy for them. Given their support for this meta-idea, a separative model for RE is undesirable, as it lessens the degree to which pupils have a share in the same, equal education. As an example of how the idea of the unitary school system is tied together with their understanding of RE, the MP Nybakk's comments may be examined. She says, 'For the Labour Party it is important that all children may come together in the unitary school system, where ... a common tradition and common values are emphasised' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416), and later on in the same speech she speaks of the aim '... to make the Christianity subject inclusive, so that all pupils in addition to Christianity receive an introduction to other philosophies of life and religions' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2417). The aim to make the Christianity subject inclusive, followed up by speaking of 'all pupils' seems to indicate that Nybakk supports revising the subject towards an integrative model of RE.

Therefore, it seems clear that the Labour MPs are in favour of revising the Christianity subject as part of a move from a separative to an integrative form of RE, where all pupils attend the same subject. This is in line with what I have called 'the first meaning of integrative RE', as Alberts (2007, pp. 1–2) has used it. The second meaning amounts to having integrative RE that is also in line with the study-of-religions approach to RE, and by looking at the contributions

from the Labour politicians from that perspective, further nuances of their conceptualisation of their ideas about RE may be gleaned.

### **Integrative in a study-of-religions sense?**

In Alberts' (2007, pp. 372–385) discussion of the study-of-religions approach to integrative RE, she touches on aspects such as the subject name, concept of religion, delineation of the subject matter and organisation of the subject. With regard to the first of these, the Labour politicians for the most part speak of a Christianity subject, including when speaking of the subject after their desired revision. For instance, Nybakk speaks of making the Christianity subject more inclusive. However, she does not rule out changing its name, and so it could be one of the elements of the subjects that she is open to making more inclusive. In a study-of-religions approach to RE, the name of the subject should not include references to specific religious traditions, and so keeping 'Christianity' as part of the name would not be acceptable from that point of view.

The contributions from the Labour politicians do not shed much light on what concept of religion they imagine for a future, revised RE subject. In their speeches they speak of 'Christianity' and 'other religions' together with 'philosophies of life', without discussing how they understand these terms. Given that this is a political debate and not a scholarly setting, it is perhaps most likely that they have a concept of religion closer to a folk category, as discussed in Section 3.2.

The study-of-religions approach to RE is characterised by a desire to have the delineation of the subject matter decided by professional, academically trained specialists. Here, the Labour politicians make it clear that the main content of integrative RE in Norwegian public education would have to be Christianity according to the creed of the state church (cf. the quote from Hernes above). While it is quite possible that a group of scholars could come to the same conclusion concerning RE in Norway, it does seem like there is a difference here. The Labour politicians for the most part speak of Christianity as a given, whereas for the study-of-religions approach, no specific religious tradition may be granted such an exclusive status.

Finally, on the matter of the organisation of the school subject, it seems likely that the Labour politicians would be in agreement with the demands of the study-of-religions approach. Alberts (2007, p. 382) argues that the subject should be organised as a separate subject from the first years of primary education, and there are no indications that the Labour politicians want it differently. Furthermore, Alberts argues that the subject should be set up in such a way that no

exemptions from the subject are necessary, and that, too, seems to be in line with the expressed will of the Labour politicians in this debate. They do not directly speak out against exemption, but by speaking of making the subject more inclusive, and referring to ‘all’ the pupils, they seem to signal that a reduction in exemption is a clear goal for the revision of the subject that is to come.

The study-of-religions approach to RE, as worked out, for example by Alberts (2007), was not around at the time of this debate, and it would therefore not be reasonable to expect the politicians to express ideas that match it completely. Still, the similarities shown above serve as another indication that for the Labour politicians’ ideas about RE, the idea of an integrative subject is an important feature.

### **Learning about Christianity, ‘other religions’, and philosophy**

The last part of this analysis is to describe the Labour politicians’ ideas about the aim of RE, using Kjeldsen’s (2016) categories as before. She divides between aims that are inherent to the subject (learning about) and aims that are external (learning from). The external aims are divided into four subcategories. As discussed in Section 3.1, these are social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, existential-religious development, and analytical-critical development.

The contributions to the debate from the Labour politicians contain several references to what pupils ought to learn in a revised Christianity subject, and how important it is that they learn about such topics. As the first speaker, Mathisen underlines two aspects of this content: firstly, that as Norway has a state church, it is only fitting that ‘... children who grow up in Norway learn what the state church stands for, and furthermore learn about the Christian faith and cultural heritage’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406), and secondly, he adds that ‘... children with a Norwegian background are to learn about all the other religions they meet amongst their friends and otherwise out there in Norwegian society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). Thus, he draws up two main aspects of the content of RE: learning about Christianity and learning about other religious traditions. The first is motivated by the state church, and the second by the prevalence of religious traditions other than Christianity in Norwegian society.

Hernes, too, mentions these two parts of RE content, but also adds another, underlining that ‘... the subject must show that there in different cultures and eras have been given different answers to the same questions of life: if there is a God, if there is a life after death, if one has the right to take life, if one always acts rightly by saying the truth’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). In this

way he seems to highlight a philosophical or ethical curriculum, which for him may be referred to as ‘questions of life’.

### **Removing the fear of the foreign**

With regard to the aims that are external to the subject, quotes from both Nybakk and Mathisen may illustrate that social-ethical development is part of their aim for RE. Mathisen says, ‘By giving children encounters with foreign cultures on children’s own terms, and with a view to the society that they are to encounter, we remove the fear of the foreign’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). Here, Mathisen is speaking of reasons for keeping the Christianity subject as a compulsory part of Norwegian public education, and one of them appears to be removing the fear of the foreign. Later, as quoted above, Mathisen speaks of how ‘other religions’ are present in Norwegian society and among the friends of children with a ‘Norwegian background’. For that reason, it seems that part of his aim for the RE subject is that it may serve as a place where pupils may encounter religions and philosophies of life that are foreign to them, and, through meeting them on their ‘own terms’ there, have their fear of the foreign removed.

Mathisen does not elaborate on this assumption of ‘fear of the foreign’, but as discussed in Section 4.1, on the key ideas in the debate, an important idea serving as a problem definition was how to deal with the fact that Norway was becoming a more diverse country. Thus, it seems that for Mathisen, a part of this problem is an assumption that children may be predisposed to fear what is foreign, and that RE may aim to remove such fear.

### **RE to qualify pupils for interpreting and understanding Norwegian society**

Another aspect of social-ethical development found in the contributions from the Labour politicians concerns how knowledge about both Christianity and other religious traditions and philosophies of life serves to qualify pupils to interpret, understand and take part in Norwegian society. Nybakk, for instance, speaks of how ‘... growing up in Norway, whether one has a Pakistani, Norwegian or [...] North-African background, without having knowledge about or familiarity with Christian faith and culture, equals becoming culturally poor and losing crucial elements of Norwegian public life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411). This is similar to Hernes’ way of referring to knowledge about Christianity as ‘constitutive knowledge’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). The idea seems to be that for a child situated in Norway, knowledge about Christianity serves as a gateway to understanding and taking part in public life, and as such, a vital aim of RE is to prepare pupils of all backgrounds for taking on such roles.

At the same time, Nybakk also speaks of the need for knowledge about religions other than Christianity, and ties it to increasing diversity, saying that ‘... concerning children from Norwegian cultures who grow up in a society where an ever-increasing number of classes contains children from other cultures, [this] leads to us having an increased need for receiving knowledge about other religions, other societal cultures and other philosophies of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2411). This quote, which follows the previous one, seems to signal that another part of preparing pupils for life in Norwegian society is to have them learn about religious traditions and philosophies of life other than Christianity.

Mathisen also speaks of the need for pupils to come to ‘understand others’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404), but in his speech this is not used as a rationale for learning about religions other than Christianity, but rather as a reason for maintaining a strong emphasis on Christianity in the RE subject. For him, this seems to follow from the idea that ‘[w]hen one attends Norwegian education, one has to learn what is important for our culture. Only then will one receive the ability to listen to others’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). Thus, Mathisen appears to be reasoning along the lines that for Norwegian pupils to be able to encounter and live well in an increasingly diverse society, they must first become familiar with Christianity, as discussed above. Here, the point is that for Mathisen, this also appears to be part of a social-ethical aim for RE, that the subject prepares pupils for life in society.

### **The existential in RE – reflecting on the big questions from the great traditions**

The next subcategory of the external aims for RE is supporting existential-ethical development, understood as personal development that does not have religious aims. Here, Hernes’ statements about identity and questions of life become relevant again. There, as quoted above, he speaks of how it is important that pupils encounter different answers to questions that have been raised repeatedly in human history. He continues, ‘... all pupils, independently of their origins, are faced with the same questions – about what one ought to believe, and how one should live – and education should ensure that all pupils get an opportunity to reflect on such questions of faith, morals and ethics’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). A bit further on in his speech, when he talks about how the subject may be interesting for pupils, he says that one of the ways it achieves that is ‘by the pupils getting an opportunity to phrase and discuss moral and religious questions’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415).

By including ‘questions of faith’ as one of the items that pupils are to reflect upon, it may seem that Hernes also imagines an existential-religious aim for the RE subject, but he seems careful

to keep all options open for how the pupils may answer the questions. Another indication that points to an idea of supporting existential-religious development is how Hernes quotes from a former curriculum plan from 1939: ‘One must beware treating the subject in such a way that the pupils’ desire to learn succumbs to slumber, and that the religious and ethical effect is weakened’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415).

If the quotation is to be interpreted as a literal statement of Hernes’ intentions for RE, it seems that he wishes for it to have both a religious and an ethical effect. Yet, he does not underline elsewhere the importance or value of taking a religious perspective on reality and does not otherwise seem to encourage influencing the pupils religiously. Instead, his choice to quote from the old curriculum plan may perhaps be understood as partly a rhetorical ploy to show how outdated and wrong Christiansen and Djupedal’s critique of the Christianity subject is. He does not elaborate, but it seems at least that for Hernes, an important aim for RE is to be a place where pupils reflect on questions from tradition and ponder their own answers to them, which I interpret as evidence of having the aim of supporting existential-ethical development.

### **RE for Christian literacy?**

The final subcategory of Kjeldsen’s external aims for RE is supporting analytical-critical development. This refers to ideas of religious literacy, as, for instance, expressed by Moore (2007), and the critical potential to analyse religious phenomena in the world one may acquire through having knowledge about religion (Alberts, 2008, p. 320).

As discussed in Section 3.1, being religiously literate may be understood as having the ability to interpret and understand religious aspects of society and culture. Looking for ideas of this kind in the contributions from the Labour politicians, quotes from both Nybakk and Hernes seem quite close. As quoted above, Nybakk speaks of how ‘Christianity permeates language, literature, behaviour, lifestyle and societal development in our part of the world, indeed, far beyond the borders of the European cultural heritage. [...] Is it possible to catch the essence of Ibsen’s *Brand*, [...] without having a minimum of knowledge about Christianity and the Christian faith?’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416). Here, she argues that to be able to interpret and understand significant Norwegian literary works, knowledge of Christianity is a key component, in a way that is reminiscent of the idea of being religiously literate. This again is similar to how Hernes spoke of knowledge about Christianity as ‘constitutive knowledge’ in Norway, as quoted and discussed above.



However, it is also worth noting that Christianity is the only religion mentioned along these lines, and so it seems that instead of aiming for general religious literacy among Norwegian pupils, the Labour politicians aim for these pupils having Christian literacy.

The idea of cultivating a capacity for critical analysis through RE does not appear to be part of these politicians' ideas about RE. At least, there are no statements supporting such a conclusion in their contributions to the parliamentary proceedings.

Looking at Kjeldsen's categories as a whole, it may first be noted that the Labour politicians appear to see the inherent aim of the subject (learning about) as learning about Christianity, other religious traditions, and philosophical and ethical matters. Furthermore, they stress the aim of social-ethical development, in addition to existential-ethical development. Finally, their ideas about knowledge about Christianity as something required for interpreting Norwegian society seems to reflect the aim of achieving Christian literacy among the pupils.

#### **A balancing act – wanting change and continuity at the same time**

The politicians from the Labour Party speak of RE as confessional in the sense that a specific kind of Christianity is to be the main part of the subject. Furthermore, they argue for having integrative RE, with the primary aims being social-ethical and existential-ethical development, along with a kind of Christian literacy.

#### **4.2.4 Summary of ideas about the RE in the 1995 debate**

As explained in Section 2.2, each section of analysis is summed up in a table with keywords describing the politicians' ideas. For the ideas about RE, this table lists their ideas about whether RE ought to be confessional or non-confessional, integrative or separative, and summarise their aims for RE.

*Table 2 Ideas about religion education in 1995*

	<b>Christiansen &amp; Djupedal</b>	<b>Non-socialists</b>	<b>Labour</b>
<b>Confessional/non-confessional</b>	Non-confessional	Confessionally bound	Confessionally anchored/associated
<b>Integrative/separative</b>	Integrative	Separative	Integrative
<b>Aims for RE</b>	<p>Learning about different religious traditions (emphasis on Christianity) and philosophy.</p> <p>Supporting the pupils existential-ethical and social-ethical development.</p>	<p>Learning primarily about Christianity.</p> <p>Supporting existential-ethical development tied to Christianity as part of social-ethical development.</p>	<p>Learning about Christianity, other religious traditions, and philosophy and ethics.</p> <p>Supporting social-ethical development and existential-ethical development, together with Christian literacy.</p>

In the comparison of ideas about religion education in the 1995 debate, which happens in Section 6.1.1, I will discuss the finding that while these politicians expressed different, and sometimes opposing, ideas about the confessionality and organisation of the RE subject, their ideas about the external aims of RE are more similar. At least, all the groups analysed expressed ideas that were described as wanting to support both social-ethical and existential-ethical development.

### **4.3 The relationship between religious and national identity**

This section presents the analysis of ideas concerning the relationship between religious and national identity expressed in the parliamentary debate from 1995. The analysis uses the same division of the politicians into groups as presented at the end of the introduction to the chapter. I begin by describing the ideas put forward by the independent MP Christiansen and Djupedal of the Socialist Left Party. Secondly, I analyse the contributions from the three non-socialist parties, the Centre Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats. Finally, I analyse the contributions from the Labour MPs, together with the contribution from the Minister of Education, Hernes, who represented the Labour government.

The analysis is based on the theoretical groundwork laid down in Section 3.2 of the theory chapter, where Taylor's concept of different ways of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity was presented and applied to the Norwegian situation. The main

distinction is between the integrated and the separated configuration. In the integrated configuration, belonging to the nation is imagined in association with a particular form of belief, and religion is seen as a unifying factor in society. In the separated configuration, religious belonging is uncoupled from national identity. The differences between the two configurations were summarised in table 1, page 61.

The analysis, then, will for each group be a discussion of which of Taylor's configurations best fits with the ideas they express about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the different nuances in how these configurations are understood. The structure of the analysis will be based on the aspects of the two configurations as laid out in table 1. I first look for data that support conclusions concerning the design of the state/society, go on to discuss ideas about the role of the individual, continue with the moral language, and finish by discussing ideas about religious identity and bringing it together in a consideration of the ideas about the relationship between religious identity and belonging to the nation.

#### **4.3.1 Independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party**

Both Christiansen and Djupedal, the main contributor to the debate from the Socialist Left Party, support replacing the Christianity subject with a subject that is neutral with regard to religion. In doing so, they are supporting a shift away from a situation where the RE subject in Norwegian public education is a confessional Christianity subject, towards a model where no religion is to be given preferential treatment in RE. By wanting to remove the strong link to a specific religious tradition, Christianity, from the RE subject in state schools, they indicate that they are interested in reducing the link between the state and a specific religious tradition. Therefore, their support for this policy solution indicates that they are more inclined towards the separative than the integrated way of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity.

From this starting point, the analysis is both a test of how fitting it is to label their understanding of this relationship as 'separated' and an effort to look for nuances in the different ideas they express on the matter. Furthermore, it is interesting to look for other beliefs/philosophies that are meant to function as a unifying factor in society, instead of religion. This will now be done through an analysis of their ideas concerning the four aspects of the two configurations, as given by table 1.

### **Values are foundational for society, but not necessarily Christian**

The first aspect to be discussed is called the ‘design of the state or society’. For a politician with an integrated configuration of the relationship between national and religious identity, it may be expected that the belief at the core of the configuration is spoken of as informing the design or purpose of the nation. For politicians with a separated configuration of this relationship, it is not to be expected that they are concerned with such ideas of design.

In her main speech, Christiansen declares that there is no disagreement concerning the fact that ‘Christianity plays a key role – for Norwegian culture, for the development of Norwegian society...’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). At first glance, this may be seen as an indication that, contrary to the expectation that she would express ideas similar to the separated configuration, Christiansen follows the integrated configuration in associating the development of Norwegian society with Christianity. However, she continues this paragraph by saying that Christianity is not alone in playing this role, ‘so does Western philosophy’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413), before concluding the paragraph by saying that some speakers in the debate overstate the importance of Christianity to the extent that they ought to reconsider.

Thus, Christiansen’s point seems to be that while she grants that Christianity has had an influence on the development of Norwegian society, it is not Christianity alone that has shaped the nation. In this way, she seems to argue that less significance should be ascribed to Christianity, which I take as an indication that she is arguing against what she finds as the common integrated way of understanding Christianity’s role in the development of Norwegian society.

Christiansen also refers to something as ‘foundational in the Norwegian society’, and that is ‘values’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). This idea comes as part of her attempt to clarify the distinction between neutral with regard to values and neutral with regard to religion, and in saying that education is to convey values. Furthermore, in line with her distinction concerning neutrality, she ascertains that teaching that conveys values, may do so without ‘taking a specific religious belief as a starting point’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). I take this as further support of associating Christiansen with the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, as she here separates specific religious belief from the values that are ‘foundational in Norwegian society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). In an integrated way of thinking, it would be expected that such foundational values instead would be tied to the belief at the core of the integration.

### **The Declaration of Human Rights as a set of principles for the nation**

Djupedal of the Socialist Left Party speaks of principles on which ‘the state is to rest’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410), referring to the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which he points to several times in his contribution to the debate. For him, human rights have a special position in Norwegian culture (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410), perhaps also with a view to the design of the state. The full quote is as follows, ‘In the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 it says which principles the state is to rest on. We as a nation have joined these principles through the ratification of the Declaration’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410).<sup>26</sup>

In this statement, Djupedal seems to be tying his idea of the Norwegian nation (‘we as a nation’) to a specific set of principles, or ideas, expressed in the Declaration from 1948. Is this best understood as an example of the integrated configuration, only with the concept of human rights in the place traditionally held by specific religious traditions, such as Christianity? Alternatively, is it exactly the opposite, an example of the separated configuration, where belonging to the nation is not coupled with belonging to a specific religious belief, but rather set up in such a way that religious and national identity are separated?

The pattern of the idea Djupedal is expressing here seems to lend itself to the former alternative. If one hypothetically were to replace the concept of human rights with a specific religious tradition (e.g. Christianity) in his speech, the reasoning might go as follows: ‘Christianity says which principles the state is to rest on. We as a nation have joined these principles.’ That would be an example of an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, where an imagined notion of Christianity was tied together with the nation. The statement is also made stronger by Djupedal’s use of the personal pronoun in the first-person plural. By saying ‘we as a nation’, he is expressing a notion of group identity common for all Norwegians and tying it to the concept of human rights. In this instance, the concept of human rights may perhaps be said to perform something of the function that Christianity formerly has, providing an ideological core for a sense of national group identity.

However, the concept of human rights is something quite different from the religious tradition of Christianity. For instance, considered as a matter of identity, ‘human rights’ does not come with a social group a person can belong to, as with a religious tradition. That makes it a more

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<sup>26</sup> No countries have ratified the Declaration from 1948, but Djupedal may for instance have been referring to the fact that Norway voted in favour of the Declaration, or perhaps the reference to human rights that was included in the Norwegian Constitution in 1994.

open concept, to which people may give their support regardless of their religious or national identity. Djupedal touches upon this notion of openness when he refers to ‘... the value foundation of Evangelical Lutheran Christianity’ and says that ‘... it is hard to say that that set of values is exclusively Christian. It may with equal right be claimed that the universal philosophy of life in Christendom with equal clarity and consistency is embodied in other religions and not least in the humanist philosophy of life’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Thus, Djupedal rejects the notion of linking the value set exclusively to one religious tradition, even while acknowledging that Evangelical Lutheran Christianity is one tradition where a set of values has been expressed.

Part of the function for the belief tied together with national identity in the integrated configuration is to draw a line between those who are inside and those who are outside the group who have the belief in common. It serves to mark the boundary between ‘them’ and ‘us’, not always only in an absolute sense, but also in milder forms. Therefore, Djupedal’s emphasis on the open nature of the ethical foundation of human rights may be taken as an indication that he is expressing ideas more in line with the separated configuration.

Another difference is that when a religion such as Christianity is bound together with a sense of belonging to the nation, this may be understood at both a cultural and an individual level. The culture in a nation may be influenced by Christianity, and individuals may be Christians. Human rights, however, are not parallel in function. States may be more or less supportive of human rights, and so may individuals too, but human rights do not offer the same level of identification and belonging as a religious tradition does.

Still, Djupedal does appear to be using a sense of cultural identification with human rights as a meta-idea when arguing against confessional RE. He says, ‘I have a hard time seeing how this may be harmonised with the position human rights have in our culture’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Here too, Djupedal is using a pronoun in the first-person plural, speaking of a culture that is ‘our[s]’, and thereby expressing a sense of group identity. This statement may be interpreted as signalling that there is something un-Norwegian about having confessional RE, as he seems to be referring to the way human rights are held in high regard in Norwegian culture. At least, the reference to ‘our culture’ appears to be slightly different from a more legal argument going from the position human rights have in Norwegian law.

As I now move on to discuss the three other aspects of how both Christiansen and Djupedal appear to configure the relationship between national and religious identity, I will leave the question of how best to interpret Djupedal open. I will return to it in the summary of this section.

### **Individuals should be free from government interference in matters of religion**

The next aspect to be discussed is the role of the individual, and here one would expect politicians who fit the separated configuration to imagine individuals as more sovereign, whereas those belonging to the integrated configuration would be expected to place a stronger emphasis on how individuals belong to a specific social fabric.

For Christiansen, having a confessional RE subject is an infringement on the religious freedom of parents, who from her perspective are completely sovereign when it comes to the religious upbringing of their children. In the debate, she says that ‘Freedom of religion is a basic right. Having a freedom of religion for me means that the government should not have any position on the matter at all’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414).

I take Christiansen’s ideas on these matters as support for the observation that she is closer to the separated than the integrated configuration concerning the role of the individual. The reason for doing so is that for her, it seems that very little governmental interference in this area may be tolerated. Thus, she is emphasising the sovereign position of individuals in society, who each have the right to decide on the moral and religious upbringing of their children. For a politician thinking more along the lines of the integrated configuration, one could expect a greater willingness to forego some of the individual’s direct influence on the matter as a concession to the need of the society as a whole.

Djupedal also seems to be against the government having a high degree of influence in this matter, referring to the notion that ‘... education is to teach and confirm Evangelical Lutheran childhood knowledge’ as ‘an anachronism’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). From the perspective of Taylor’s concept, this way of reasoning is interesting, as Djupedal here seems to be saying that having a governmental policy concerning what people ought to believe is a thing of the past, more akin to older ways of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity.

### **Values from Norwegian society or the Declaration of Human Rights?**

The third aspect to be discussed is referred to as ‘moral language’, and here it is to be expected that for politicians with an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and

national identity, the moral language is drawn from the religion that is tied together with belonging to the nation. For politicians who think along the lines of the separated configuration, it is expected that the moral language leaves more to the relative or subjective perspective of individuals.

As regards this aspect, the contributions to the debate from Christiansen and Djupedal are somewhat different. Both of them use the term ‘values’ quite a lot, and as discussed in Section 4.2.1, they seem to see the promulgation of values as a key task for RE. However, when it comes to identifying which values are to be passed on through education, or what forms the value foundation for this endeavour, they seem to differ.

For Christiansen, the values in question are ‘... foundational in Norwegian society’, and a bit further on in her speech, she says that ‘... many of the values one talks about here are values that are common for people independently of whether they are Christians, if they are atheists, if they belong to a different religious view’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). Thus, she does not seem to identify the values any further than pointing to something that is foundational in Norwegian society, seemingly speaking of values that are currently held in high regard in society. Furthermore, she argues that these values may be held independently of religious or non-religious convictions. In this regard, her moral language seems to indicate that the same values may be linked to different beliefs, and perhaps may have a subjective justification that is different for different people. I take this as support for the conclusion that for Christiansen, belonging to the nation and belonging to a religion is separate.

For Djupedal, however, this is another aspect where his reference to the concept of human rights comes into play. After speaking of human rights as providing the principles on which the nation is set up, he says that ‘... giving children an ethical foundation based on the values the Declaration of Human Rights is founded on will be of great significance’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). Here, the concept of human rights and their manifestation in the 1948 Declaration appears to play a role not only in how Djupedal imagines the foundation for the Norwegian nation, but in his moral language. This seems to lend further support to the interpretation of his contribution as an expression of an integrated configuration where the concept of human rights plays a parallel role to how Christianity may function for others.

Later in the debate, Djupedal seems to speak of these as options when it comes to the ethical foundation for education: ‘I [...] think that we will get a better ethical foundation among our future generations with a subject based on the values that are in the Declaration of Human



Rights, and not just the values that are enshrined in [...] the Ten Commandments' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2412). Here, Djupedal may be interpreted as understanding the Declaration from 1948 as an alternative to the Ten Commandments of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Through their position as the first part of Luther's Small Catechism, his version of the Ten Commandments has been a key element in Norwegian education since at least 1739. Perhaps it may be said that they have served as an expression the moral message of Christianity. Subsequently, perhaps one may imagine the Declaration from 1948 as an expression of the essence of the idea of universal human rights? At least, such an understanding may explain Djupedal's juxtaposition of them as alternative sources for morality. In any case, Djupedal here seems to be speaking of morals in a way that maintains an integrated configuration's way of speaking of a specific source of morals.

Still, even if Djupedal appears to be referring to the Declaration from 1948 as an alternative to the Ten Commandments, it is a different alternative. The commandments offer 'shalls' and 'shall nots' regulating people's religious beliefs and everyday lives. The Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 instead proclaims rights people have, in accordance with principles and ideas. Therefore, making this declaration a source of values could perhaps also go well with the separated way of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity. Instead of tying moral values to matters of religious identity, they are tied to rights people have simply by virtue of being humans.

### **Religious identity is not the government's business**

Moving on to the aspect of religious identity, the expectations here are that politicians who think along the lines of the integrated configuration will see religious identity as a matter of mandatory choice, whereas for adherents to the separated configuration, religious identity is decided by experienced authentic meaning.

Both Djupedal and Christiansen underline that for them, religious identity is a matter for individuals to decide. Christiansen says that '... the choice of faith or philosophy of life is a matter of personal conviction, and that it ought to be parents and family who decide which religion the children are to be brought up in' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). Similarly, she argues that it is '... the parents who ought to pass on that which concerns faith and philosophy of life to the children, and the public authorities should not meddle and take a stand to the degree one does today' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). Thus, Christiansen seems to be emphasising the

distinction between the sphere of the family and the public sphere, and places matters of faith and philosophy of life firmly in the former.

This is reminiscent of the French concept of *laïcité* discussed in Section 3.2.2, which according to Taylor may serve as an alternative to religion in an integrated configuration of the relationship between national and religious identity. As he presents it, the French idea of *laïcité*, keeping religion completely out of the public sphere in accordance with the principle of non-discrimination, also ties up with ideas from the French Revolution in a way that provides identification and belonging in France.

Thus, as Christiansen seems to be presenting ideas about religious identity that are similar to *laïcité*, it is necessary to discuss whether this ought to be interpreted as counter-evidence to the starting supposition that her contribution is closest to the separated configuration. Is she instead a representative of an integrated configuration, only with the French ideals of *laïcité* in the place of religion?

The main factor supporting an interpretation of her statements as an expression of such an integrated configuration is that Taylor himself mentions French *laïcité* as exactly the kind of secular thinking that may serve at the core of a configuration. In this case, however, I think the other interpretation is better. In France, the ideas and ideals of the revolution have played a part in the group identity of the French, and I argue that this has been necessary for the ideas of *laïcité* to function in the way Taylor finds in France. When similar ideas are expressed in Norway, the situation is different. In a country with an Evangelical Lutheran state church, which Norway had in 1995, arguing for a stronger separation of church and state, including in matters of RE, does not necessarily equal arguing for replacing the bond between being Norwegian and being Christian with a similar structure centred on a concept of *laïcité*. Rather, it seems better to interpret Christiansen's ideas on this matter as an example of a move towards a less integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. What she seems to want is for the government to stop meddling with people's religious affairs, not to introduce a new concept of what constitutes being Norwegian.

Therefore, due to the different situation and history in Norway and France, I argue that ideas that according to Taylor have served as an integrated configuration in France may be part of a separated configuration in Norway.

Djupedal's wording concerning religious identity seems close to the separated configuration's emphasis on personal, experienced meaning. He says that '[i]t is for every person to decide for themselves what is the true faith or religion, or, as for me personally, who is non-believing' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2412). Here, Djupedal appears to emphasise that the authority to decide on questions of religious identity lies with the individual, supporting his identification with the separated configuration.

### **Is this a separative configuration?**

Is the starting assumption of them being representatives of a separated configuration of the relationship still holding, or have they been shown to lean towards more integrated conceptions?

For both Djupedal and Christiansen, it has been necessary to consider the option that they are more oriented towards an integrated configuration. With Djupedal, this alternative is tied to the ideas he expresses concerning the position of human rights in Norwegian culture, and how Norwegians as a nation have joined the principles from the Declaration of Human Rights. With Christiansen, it was the similarity between the ideas she expresses and the French concept of *laïcité*, which Taylor has shown may serve as the core of an integrated configuration.

As far as Christiansen is concerned, I argued that due to the different situation and history in Norway and France, the ideas of separating state and religion functioned differently. According to Taylor, they may serve as part of an integrated configuration of belonging to the French nation and supporting these ideas, but in the Norwegian setting, this is different. Here, they appear instead as part of a shift away from an integrated configuration, towards a separated one.

In terms of Djupedal's position, it is harder to draw conclusions. On the one hand, his statements about how 'we as a nation' have 'joined' a set of principles coming from the Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 seem to match the structure of an integrated configuration. Likewise, his reference to the values the Declaration is founded on as an ethical foundation for education appears to serve somewhat similarly to how Christianity may function in some integrated configurations.

However, the fact that he is giving the concept of human rights and their manifestation in the 1948 Declaration this function makes for a different kind of integrated configuration than if Christianity is given the same role. As discussed above, the concept of human rights is a more

open category than a religious tradition is, with different consequences for ideas of belonging to a nation.

Therefore, while it in some ways seems evident that the ideas Djupedal expresses here are similar to an integrated configuration, this is also very similar to a lot of the aspects of Taylor's separated configuration. For instance, Djupedal has the same position as the separated configuration concerning religious identity, which is left as a personal matter, and his moral language, even if based on the concept of human rights, leaves a lot of space for subjective or relative positions, both with regard to how one argues for the concept of human rights and how one works out the practical morals based on it.

Thus, it seems that the ideas Djupedal expresses concerning the relationship between human rights and the Norwegian nation and culture challenge Taylor's concept. It is at least very hard to say that it fits either of the two categories perfectly. In practice, I would say that it is closest to the separated configuration because it leaves a lot of room for different religious/non-religious identities as part of being a Norwegian, even while setting up human rights as a common point of reference for the nation.

#### **4.3.2 The non-socialist parties**

Having discussed the ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity as expressed by the Socialist Left Party and the independent MP Christiansen, I now come to the non-socialist MPs, representing the Centre Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democratic Party.

Together with the governing Labour Party, the non-socialist parties formed the strong majority that rejected Christiansen's proposal. But these parties also made a joint remark in the Recommendation to the Storting that was not supported by Labour (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2). In the remark, they made it clear that they wanted the then current confessional Christianity subject to have 'a key role in the value promotion of education' (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2). Based on this, it seems that for them, there is a natural link between the value promotion of Norwegian public education and Christianity. This again seems to indicate that for them, there is a link between what is Norwegian and what is Christian, seemingly in line with an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. Based on this observation I analyse the ideas expressed by them with the hypothesis that these politicians express ideas of an integrated configuration. The analytical task is then to see whether the evidence from the debate supports this hypothesis, with a view to looking for

nuances in how they appear to understand the integration between religious and national identity. As in the previous section, I will approach this configuration by looking at the four aspects in table 1. First, I discuss ideas about the design of the state or society, then about the role of the individual, moral language and finally about religious identity. At the end of this section, before summarising, I also look specifically for ideas that go more in the direction of a separated configuration.

### **Christianity as a thousand-year-old foundation for Norwegian society**

In an integrated configuration, one may expect to find that ideas about the design of the state or society are tied to the belief that is integrated with belonging to the nation. In the Norwegian case, that would be Christianity, or more precisely, Evangelical Lutheran Christianity.

When talking about how removing a confessional link from the Christianity subject would lead to a lack of clarity and uncertainty, Ravnåsen, one of the MPs from the Christian Democrats, refers specifically to Evangelical Lutheran doctrine as ‘... one of the pillars our form of government is committed to’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2418). By referring to this belief as a ‘pillar’, Ravnåsen appears to draw on the image of a construction being held up by pillars. I take his casting of Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as one of the pillars supporting the construction of the Norwegian government or state, as a clear instance of tying this belief to the design of the state, and thus as an indication of an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity.

MPs from both the Conservative Party and the Centre Party also speak of Christianity and society using metaphors of building and construction. Holte of the Centre Party says, ‘All our culture builds on the life stance anchoring of the people’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406), and from the way he continues it is clear that he is referring to Christianity. The use of the possessive pronoun in the first-person plural (‘our’) is again interesting. Holte is speaking among fellow MPs in the Norwegian national assembly, and so it seems fair to interpret his use of ‘our’ to refer to Norwegians as a national group. If that is correct, then his statement may be understood as saying that all Norwegian culture is built on the philosophical anchoring of the people, which he then goes on to make clear is a Christian anchoring. For him, then, it seems fair to say that religious and national identity may be integrated, here in the metaphorical sense that something Christian is imagined as part of the foundations on which Norwegian culture is built.

In the conclusion to the paragraph of his speech quoted above, Holte asserts that ‘... being neutral with regard to religion is as loose and unexplainable as having unpolitical party politics’

(S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). Thus, it seems that for Holte, there is something nonsensical about being neutral with regard to religion in Norwegian education. I take this as further support of the hypothesis that the non-socialist politicians are closest to the integrated configuration, since Holte here seems to reject a basic premise of the separated: that it is possible to be neutral with regard to religion

MPs from the non-socialist parties also tie Christianity to the Norwegian nation by referring to its history. In 1995, a millennial celebration was held, commemorating the arrival of a Christian king on Norwegian shores in 995. This is also referred to in the debate, for instance by Lilletun of the Christian Democrats. In the debate, he describes Christiansen's and Djupedal's ideas about having a non-confessional subject as amounting to '...breaking [...] the thousand-year thread going back' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2403). In this image, it seems that Lilletun is imagining Christianity, and the tie between Christianity and Norwegian education and government, as a bond that ties a thousand years of Norwegian history together. This then, is another example of an integration of religious and national identity.

### **Values of identity are needed more than values of freedom and tolerance**

The second aspect of how this relationship may be configured concerns the role of the individual. Based on Taylor's concept, the integrated configuration may be expected to place less emphasis on the authority and independence of individuals, whereas this is paramount for the separated configuration. The contributions from the non-socialist MPs do not seem to contain many ideas concerning this aspect, but the following quote from Holte of the Centre Party may be discussed with a view to this aspect: 'From my point of view our society and our time are more in need of values of identity than values of freedom and tolerance. Respect for borders and boundary settings should out of consideration for individuals in a multicultural society receive a larger place, both in education and amongst people in daily life' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

This quote comes from a section of Holte's speech where he is arguing for the necessity of providing children with a clear value foundation, to avoid rootlessness and to make them safe. Thus, he is arguing against replacing the Christianity subject with a subject that is neutral with regard to religion, on the grounds that it would increase the risk that children experience rootlessness and become less safe. With this context in the speech in mind, I interpret the quote to mean that for people growing up in Norway in 1995, Holte believes that identity support is more in demand than support for being free and tolerant – not in the sense that these pupils

should be less free and tolerant, but rather that from his perspective, they are more at risk of losing their sense of identity than they are of losing their freedom or becoming intolerant.

Still, it also seems relevant to note that the identity Holte is speaking of is supported through an emphasis on confessional Evangelical Lutheran teaching as part of Norwegian public education. Thus, Holte appears to make the assumption that for Norwegians, identity is supported through familiarity with Christianity, and in a later section of his speech he makes it clear that this is something all Norwegian pupils need, even if they do not share ‘... the faith-related experience that is a core of Christianity’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). From this perspective, it seems possible to interpret Holte’s ideas about this matter as placing less emphasis on the sovereignty of individuals, along the lines of an integrated configuration. For someone thinking along the lines of a separated configuration, it would not make sense to assume that the identity of all Norwegians may be supported by becoming more familiar with a specific religious tradition, since the emphasis rather is on the imagined sovereignty of the individuals, and their authentic experiences of meaning. I therefore take this quote from Holte as further support of the starting hypothesis, that his ideas are more in line with the integrated configuration.

### **Christianity as the source of good morals**

The third aspect through which the nuances of the configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity are teased out is moral language. In an integrated configuration, it is to be expected that the moral language is tied to the belief integrated with belonging to the nation, whereas in a separated configuration, it is left to the subjective or relative positions of individuals.

Here, the non-socialist MPs follow up on their joint remark in the Recommendation, emphasising the role of the Christianity subject as part of the value promotion in education. Sanner of the Conservative Party expresses the position of the three non-socialist parties by saying that their message is that ‘... the teaching in Christianity is to have a vital role in the value promotion of education, [...] it promotes values that we want to strengthen ...’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2409). By ascribing this role to the Christianity subject, Sanner seems to be indicating that it is through learning about Christianity that Norwegian pupils are to learn about good values, which again serves as a foundation for their morals. Thus, he is assuming that in Norway, good values and good morals are developed through engaging with Christian tradition.

Thus, Christianity becomes a vital part of his moral language, which serves as another indication of an integrated configuration of religious and national identity.

The Christian Democrat Lilletun gives his take on this matter in the opening speech of the debate, saying that ‘We need the Christianity subject to explain many of the common values we have in society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). A bit later on he emphasises the need for having an existential perspective on the subject ‘... since without life and personal conviction the Christian ethics would not have vitality in our society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2402). Here, it seems that for Lilletun, the connection between Christianity and Norwegian values and morals is taken a step further than for Sanner. Firstly, a confessional Christianity subject is needed to explain values in society, but furthermore, a sense of ‘life and personal conviction’ is also needed for these ethics to have ‘vitality’ in Norwegian society. Lilletun does not say that everyone ought to be Christians, and does not encourage preaching in the subject, but still seems to argue for the benefit of having pupils engage personally with Christianity. One of these benefits seems to concern the ethical and moral state of the people, and so it may be said that Christianity is integrated with Norwegian morals in his statement.

### **Norwegians are Lutherans, and simultaneously not?**

The final aspect of the different configurations of the relationship between religious and national identity is how religious identity is imagined. In the integrated configuration, every member of society is expected to have a religious identity, chosen from among the available options. In the separated configuration, religious identity is decided by the individual’s experience of authentic meaning and thus less identifiable on a group level.

For MPs representing the non-socialist parties, a basic premise in the debate is that an overwhelming majority of the Norwegian population are Evangelical Lutheran Christians, based on their status as members of the Church of Norway. Lilletun, for instance, asks whether ‘... it is fair that the fact that we have received a few percent with a different life stance should lead to the others, more than 90% having to change their value anchoring?’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2403). From the perspective of a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, it would make sense to challenge Lilletun by asking whether he really thinks that Christian beliefs are a matter of experienced, authentic meaning for all of these individuals, for instance pointing to the discrepancy between the number of members in the state church and the number of people who regularly attend church services. By way of this



contrast, it may be seen that Lilletun's statements here are more in line with the integrated configuration.

Another line of reasoning used by MPs of the non-socialist parties is that by having a confessional Christianity subject, pupils' identities are strengthened, by making them conscious of 'their own cultural roots and own identity' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2418). Sanner, for instance argues that as Norway is becoming more pluralistic, this identity strengthening is becoming more important (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). Again, this strengthening is to happen in a confessional Evangelical Lutheran Christianity subject, and so that which is 'their own cultural roots and own identity' is Christianity. For such a line of reasoning to work, it seems to be a premise that religious identity can exist without the experienced authentic meaning underlined by the separated configuration. Indeed, it is possible, as Holte was quoted as saying above, to speak of the need for Christianity without the 'faith-related experience' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

Perhaps a way to understand the non-socialist MPs ideas about religious identity is to think of it as a kind of double identity. They describe the overwhelming majority of Norwegians as Christians, based on their history and their current membership in the Church of Norway. At the same time, they are aware that individuals have worked out this belonging in different ways. This is, for instance, seen from their strong support for the notion that there should not be any preaching in the Christianity subject. If the subject was full of pupils whose parents are Christian, why be reluctant to include preaching?

I take the tension between on the one hand identifying nine in ten Norwegians as Christians and on the other hand ruling out preaching in the subject as support for interpreting their ideas about religious identity in line with an integrated configuration. Thus, it makes sense that for Norwegians, belonging to Christianity is part of the national makeup, and when religious identity is debated here, it is this belonging that is in question, not the personal, authentic experiences of individuals.

### **What kind of integration is this?**

I have found clear support for the starting assumption that these politicians understanding the relationship between religious and national identity in accordance with an integrated configuration.

As regards the first aspect, the design of the state, I found that some MPs in this group saw Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as one of the pillars of the Norwegian form of government. Others tied Christianity to all Norwegian culture, and finally, references to the notion of a millennium of Christian history in Norway were used to underline the need for confessional RE. There was less evidence concerning the second aspect, the role of the individual, but one MP's assumption of Christian identity at a national level was taken as an indication of less emphasis on the sovereignty of individuals in these matters. Thirdly, the moral language of the MPs in this group contained several examples of being tied together with Christianity, in accordance with what was expected from politicians thinking along the lines of an integrated configuration. Finally, their emphasis on religious identity as a matter of formal membership of the Church of Norway, and not as authentic experiences of meaning, was also taken as an indication that they understand the relationship between religious and national identity in accordance with an integrated configuration, where Evangelical Lutheran Christianity is tied together with being Norwegian.

However, the debate contributions from the MPs representing the non-socialist parties also include ideas that go against or nuance their ideas about an integration of being Christian and being Norwegian. Conservative MP Sanner, for instance, reflects on the increased degree with which Norway may be described as a multicultural country, and says, 'It is important that we who defend the Christianity subject are prepared to face the challenge given to our school by the multicultural society' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). He goes on to say that '[t]radition is in itself an important justification for the teaching in Christianity, but the subject must also be given a deeper justification if it is to defend its position in education' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407).

As I read Sanner here, he seems to be reflecting on the notion that as Norway has become a multicultural society, there is a new need for justification for the Christianity subject. Tradition in itself is not enough. He does not elaborate on what he thinks such a 'deeper justification' may be, but he says that he looks forward to the report from the Green Paper committee who at the time were finishing their proposal for a new Norwegian RE subject.

Later in his speech, Sanner says, 'With an increasing diversity in matters of culture and values in Norway it is necessary to discuss the value promotion of education [...]. We must also discuss how we may provide children from different cultural and religious background with a common foundation to make it easier to meet with mutual understanding, ...' (S.tid. (1994–95),

p. 2408). Thus, while Sanner makes it very clear that for the Conservative Party, changing the objects clause of education or reducing the place of the confessional Christianity subject in Norwegian education is out of the question, he also acknowledges that there is work left to be done when it comes to dealing with diversity in education.

I take this as an indication that for Sanner, there seems to be a sense that while the integration between what is Norwegian and what is Christian is maintained, he is also aware that these matters may have to be renegotiated in what for him appears to be a new and more diverse Norwegian setting.

The Christian Democrat Lilletun also expresses ideas along these lines. Having been challenged by the Socialist Left Party MP Djupedal, who draws attention to the increased religious diversity in Norway, and in the capital Oslo in particular, Lilletun replies by saying that he sees Djupedal's intentions. He goes on to explain that from his own perspective, removing the confessional link to Christianity will have negative consequences for society (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2403). However, he also says 'The fact that we are becoming multicultural we are of course going to take into consideration' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2403). Thus, it appears that Lilletun too recognises that the increasing diversity in Norway has consequences for these matters; it is just that for him, loosening the ties between what is Norwegian and what is Christian appears to have significant negative consequences.

Still, although these two examples show that MPs representing non-socialist parties may also recognise challenges to the integration of being Norwegian and being Christian, it seems clear that they do not see it as a viable option to loosen these ties. Thus, the general impression that the MPs representing these parties express ideas indicative of an integrated configuration remains.

### **4.3.3 The Labour Party**

The third and final group of politicians whose contribution is to be analysed here were all members of the Labour Party. In this group, I include the MPs who represent Labour in the debate and Hernes, the Labour Party's Minister for Education.

The Labour MPs in the Standing Committee on Education, Research, and Church Affairs were split in the Recommendation to the Storting concerning Christiansen's proposal (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)). However, they were together in making their own remark saying that the debate ought to be postponed until the Green Paper committee that was working on a new proposal for

Norwegian RE had finished. The division between them becomes apparent in the majority remark in the Recommendation, which is supported by four of the six Labour MPs on the Standing Committee.

However, only one of the MPs who did not support the majority remark participated in the debate, and then only to briefly explain why the two MPs did not support Christiansen's proposal even though they are sympathetic to much of its content (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2417–2418). Therefore, analysis of the Labour group is primarily concerned with MPs who supported the majority remark, and Hernes, the Minister of Education.

For both groups of MPs analysed so far, it was reasonable to propose a starting hypothesis based on their remarks in the Recommendation to the Storting. For the Labour politicians, however, this is not as straightforward. On the one hand, four out of six Labour MPs on the Standing Committee joined the non-socialist parties in their rejection of Christiansen's proposal. However, they did not support the non-socialist parties in their remark about the central role of the Christianity subject in the value promotion of Norwegian education and the status of the objects clause. Furthermore, the remark supported by all six Labour MPs notes the task of the Green paper committee who was to propose ideas for a new RE subject in Norway and expresses their regret at debating Christiansen's proposal before the Green Paper committee had finished. It does not seem to provide an expression of the Labour Party's position concerning this matter. The majority remark supported by four of the six Labour MPs ties the confessional Christianity subject to matters of identity support in Norwegian education (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2), but as it is probably a text consisting of compromises between the three non-socialist parties and the Labour Party, it is hard to use it as strong evidence of the ideas of the Labour MPs.

Due to nature of the contribution from Labour in the Recommendation, I will not put forward a starting hypothesis in the same way as with the other two groups. Instead, it will be an open matter for each of the four aspects of the possible configurations. To repeat, these four aspects are the design of the state/society, the role of the individual, moral language, and religious identity.

### **Learning about Christianity – a matter of integration or utility?**

For someone imagining the relationship between religious and national identity along the lines of the integrated configuration, the belief tied to belonging to the nation may be integrated with how the design of the state or society is imagined. As seen in the analysis of the contribution

from the non-socialist parties above, this may involve ideas about how the Norwegian nation or society builds on something Christian, or how the history of Christianity in Norway is tied to the idea of the nation.

Among the Labour politicians, the clearest expressions of such ideas seem to come from Minister Hernes. He refers to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as ‘... that which more than any other creed has shaped this country’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415) and the Christianity subject as ‘... in our country one of education’s most important carriers of culture’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). By speaking of shaping the country and carrying culture, Hernes is employing metaphorical language to say something about the position of Christianity in Norway, and thus also about the relationship between what is Christian and what is Norwegian. Do his statements serve as evidence of an integrated configuration of this relationship?

After saying that the Christianity subject is a culture-carrying subject, Hernes goes on to elaborate on what he means by this. He explains that ‘[o]ne who does not know the content of Christian faith, tradition and teaching may neither know our country, our customs, our language, our art, our values, or our mores. The subject ... gives constitutive knowledge – what you must know to be able to interpret and to choose’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). Here, Hernes ties knowledge of Christianity closely to what is Norwegian, in a way that may be taken as indicative of an integrated configuration. However, it also seems possible to understand Hernes in a different way.

The conclusion to the quote above is that knowledge of Christianity is constitutive knowledge that enables individuals to interpret and to choose. In other words, it is useful to know something about Christianity in Norway. The reason for this, according to Hernes’ contribution to the debate, is that Christianity ‘more than any other creed has shaped this country’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). This statement, which is in the past perfect, says something about historical importance, but does not necessarily say much about how Christianity may be shaping the current Norwegian society.

Therefore, I think it is possible to interpret these quotes from Hernes in a less integrated way. If what he is saying is that Christianity has historically been of great importance in Norway, which has resulted in a cultural situation where it is necessary to have knowledge of Christianity to be able to interpret and choose properly, then that may also be compatible with a more separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. Thus, he may be interpreted as saying that Christianity has been integrated with what is Norwegian, due

to its historical significance, but in the current situation, it is not that Christianity and being Norwegian is two sides of the same coin. Instead, Hernes is stressing that familiarity with Christianity in Norway is useful, it is knowledge that gives individuals agency. Instead of speaking as if what is Norwegian is also Christian, Hernes seems to be speaking more of a current situation where knowledge about certain phenomena is useful, due to how things have been in the past. Thus, whether someone has a Christian identity is not the point, but rather whether they have the knowledge that is necessary to negotiate and navigate in a culture that has been influenced by Christianity, regardless of their religious identity, if they have one. I find this to be a form of integration that is oriented by ideas about the consequences of how matters happen to be due to historical circumstance and will tentatively refer to it as historical integration.

### **Tying every individual to the great flood of Christianity**

However, in his speech, Hernes also ties Christianity to people's identity. When he presents his reasons for why everyone should be educated in both Bible and Church history he provides two, the second being that '... it ties every individual's identity to the great flood that has deposited itself in all corners of our minds' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). This statement seems to paint a different picture of the relationship between religious and national identity. Every individual's identity is to be tied to Christianity, which is the great flood in Hernes' imagery. Later in his speech, he is very clear that '... our education includes several beliefs' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415), so he should not be interpreted as saying that everyone should become Christians. However, he seems to believe that through learning about Christianity, everyone acquires a relationship with it, while leaving open what kind of relationship this is to be. Furthermore, when presenting this as a reason for why everyone should receive a thorough education in Christianity, Hernes is also saying that having a relationship with Christianity is something beneficial. This way of thinking only seems meaningful in an integrated configuration, where there is a special relationship between Christianity and Norway concerning individual identity in the present. From the perspective of a separated configuration, it would not make sense to single out one religious tradition in this way, even if it has had a great historical significance.

Above, I interpreted Hernes' use of the concept of constitutive knowledge to say that his integration of being Christian and being Norwegian was a historical integration, expressing the idea that due to historical circumstances, knowledge about Christianity is useful in Norway. Is it possible to interpret his statements about identity in the same way?

Such an interpretation could perhaps be based on the assumption that Hernes believes that individuals benefit from tying their identity to a tradition, and that Norwegian tradition happens to be heavily influenced by Christianity. Thus, becoming familiar with Christianity is a way of acquiring a beneficial foundation for one's identity.

Hernes does not elaborate on the point of identity, and with only one statement mentioning it, it seems prudent to leave the analysis open at this point. The overall impression is that for Hernes, Christianity has played a significant role in shaping the Norwegian nation. However, when speaking of the relationship between religious and national identity in the current situation, he primarily seems concerned with a historical integration, where it is useful for individuals to have knowledge of Christianity, regardless of their religious affiliations, due to Christianity's historical significance in Norway.

### **Christianity as part of a Norwegian background**

The second aspect to be discussed concerns the role of the individual, which is more sovereign in the separated configuration than in the integrated one. Here, quotes from Mathisen, one of the MPs, are relevant. He says that the Christianity subject ought to remain compulsory '... because one must know one's own religion before one may understand others' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404). This statement involves a collective identity assumption similar to the ones seen from non-socialist MPs in the previous section. Mathisen assumes that people's religion in Norway is Christianity. He seems to think along the same lines later in his contribution, when he distinguishes between children of 'Norwegian background' and 'other religions' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406), indicating that religions other than Christianity are something children with a Norwegian background may encounter 'out there in Norwegian society' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406). By setting these elements up in this way, Mathisen indicates that having a Norwegian background excludes religious identities other than Christianity. Instead, such 'other religions' may be found in Norwegian society, represented by people with a non-Norwegian background.

I take these statements as indicative of an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, since the way in which Mathisen talks about identity indicates less emphasis on the sovereignty of the individual. He operates with labels such as Norwegian, Christian and 'other', and uses them at a group level. In doing so, he appears to be less interested in what the individuals would say about their religious identity, which is more important in the separated configuration.

### **Christianity as the provider of values**

When it comes to moral language, which is the third aspect of configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, the first observation is that there seems to be little emphasis on this among the Labour MPs. One of the few statements concerning this is given by Nybakk, one of the MPs who supported the majority remark in the Recommendation. She speaks of how ‘Christianity has ... given us basic common values’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416).

I take this as support for saying that the Labour MPs are closer to the integrated than the separated configuration, since it serves as an example of tying moral language to a specific religious tradition. By saying that Christianity has given us basic common values, Nybakk too uses the personal pronoun in the first-person plural, apparently referring to Norwegians as a national group. This group’s morality is thus tied to Christianity, as she indicates that basic common values in this group have been given to them by Christianity.

Minister Hernes also seems to indicate something to the same effect, in the statement already quoted above. There he spoke of how knowledge about Christianity is necessary to ‘... know our country, our customs, our language, our art, our values, and our mores’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2414). By including values and mores in this list, Hernes provides another example of tying matters of morality in Norway to Christianity, in line with what is expected from having an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity.

### **Religious identity at level of the group**

The fourth aspect of the configurations, which concerns religious identity, has already been touched upon in the discussion of Hernes’ contribution above. Here, I will add some reflections on a statement offered by the MP Mathisen, who stresses that ‘[t]o understand other religions one must know one’s own’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2404).

The statement is given as part of the reasoning for why the Norwegian RE subject should continue to take its cue from the state church. Thus, Mathisen appears to draw on the assumption that for Norwegian pupils, Christianity is ‘one’s own’ religion. By doing so, Mathisen attributes religious identity at a group level, probably based on membership of the state church of the time, and this way of reasoning fits with an integrated way of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity.

For someone thinking along the lines of the separated configuration, it does not make sense to attribute religious identity at such a group level, since religious identity is primarily a matter of



personal, authentic experiences. Thus, by making such a clear identification of Norwegian pupils as predominantly Christian, Mathisen indicates that for him, being Norwegian and being Christian is integrated.

**Different kinds of integration?**

Taken together, then, Mathisen’s statements that have been discussed concerning the aspects the role of the individual and religious identity both point in the direction of an integrated configuration. In the same way, Nybakk’s statement about Christianity and common values indicated that concerning the aspect of moral language, she was closer to an integrated configuration. Concerning the first aspect, however, of the design of the state or society, statements by Hernes was interpreted in a different way. While appearing to reflect an integrated configuration, it was found that the integration itself seemed primarily historical in nature. For Hernes, it appeared that the link between Christianity and being Norwegian was a matter of utility based on historical circumstances, both in terms of understanding the design of the state or society, and in his understanding of the individual.

Considering the Labour politicians as a group, their statements indicate that they are closer to the integrated than the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, but it is worth noting that at least for Hernes, this integration appears to be a reflection of historical circumstance, and not a description of contemporary society.

**4.3.4 Summary of ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity in the 1995 debate**

Here follows the table summarising the ideas expressed by the politicians in the 1995 debate concerning the relationship between religious and national identity:

*Table 3 Ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity in 1995*

	<b>Christiansen &amp; Djupedal</b>	<b>Non-socialists</b>	<b>Labour</b>
<b>Configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity</b>	Separated, but Djupedal’s human rights ideology is difficult to place	Integrated (Christianity)	Integrated, yet for Hernes: historical

In the comparison of these ideas, which happens in Section 6.2.1, I will return to the distinction between the way Hernes and MP Mathisen appeared to imagine the integration between

religious and national identity and compare it with the integration expressed by the non-socialist politicians.

## **4.4 The purpose of education**

The ideas that are to be analysed in the third and last section of the analysis of the debate from 1995 concern the purpose of education, which is approached through the lens of the tension between the Norwegian objects clauses and the ideas of economic utility associated with global education policy, which was prepared in Section 3.3.2 and explicated in Section 3.4. Compared with the two previous sections, this analysis will be different. As charted in Section 3.3.1, how and when the ideas associated with global educational policy became influential in Norway is well known, and it was later than 1995. Therefore, it would be very surprising to find strong indications of the influence of global education policy in this debate. For that reason, this analysis is not about whether these politicians are influenced by global educational policy or the ideas of the objects clause. Instead, it is a matter of describing what ideas about the purpose of education are expressed in this debate. This description will then be used as background for comparison with the ideas from 2008, which may be expected to be more influenced by global education policy.

Furthermore, this was a debate about RE, and not about education policy in general. Therefore, it is fair to assume that there will be fewer ideas expressed about this topic. However, following Mehta's (2011) levels of how ideas function in politics, ideas about the purpose of education may well serve as meta-ideas when discussing problem definitions and policy solutions for RE.

The analysis is again structured according to the division of the politicians in the debate that I have used in the previous two sections, primarily for reasons of comparison. Thus, I will first analyse ideas expressed by the independent MP Christiansen and the MPs from the Socialist Left Party, then from the non-socialist MPs and finally the ideas expressed by the Labour politicians.

### **4.4.1 Independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party**

An important line of critique against Christiansen's proposal of a new RE subject, for instance expressed by Holte (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2406–2407) and Sanner (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408) was that it amounted to value-neutral education. In her main speech in the debate, Christiansen seems to respond to this criticism by spelling out her understanding of value transmission as part of the task of education. She starts by speaking of how 'transmitting basic norms and rules in the Norwegian society' is 'an important task' for education (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413) and

returns to it later by saying that ‘... it is more important than ever before that Norwegian education transmits values that are basic in the Norwegian society’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413).

In a similar fashion, Holand, MP for the Socialist Left Party, also speaks of the need to ‘... strengthen the value transmission in education’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). She continues by naming the kind of values that she thinks is needed most in education, such as ‘respecting each other’s different starting points’, ‘practising the ability to live together’, and ‘tolerance for ... the different reasons one has for one’s ethical choices’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408).

Thus, it seems that for both Christiansen and Holand, education is tasked with the transmission of values. At the same time, there may be nuances between the kind of values they mean. Christiansen refers to values that ‘are basic in the Norwegian society’, while Holand names specific values that all relate to dealing well with differences in society. Still, they both argue that this aspect of education ought to be strengthened in the current situation, probably referring to the increasing diversity in Norway.

For Djupedal, the main MP from the Socialist Left Party in this debate, the concept of the unitary school system appears to be vital. For instance, when giving reasons for replacing the current confessional Christianity subject, which required exemption rights, Djupedal says that ‘... it would be a great benefit for society, education, and the pupils that children receive teaching in the same philosophy of life, ...’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). He then ties this to the unitary school system, and stresses that ‘... all pupils would then receive the same teaching...’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2410). As discussed in Section 4.1.3, the meta-idea of the unitary school system was important to the Socialist Left Party, and here, it is emphasised as a vital aspect of education. From Djupedal’s perspective, it appears that having all children receive the same teaching will be very beneficial for society.

Djupedal also points to the objects clause (from 1969) as a problem. From his perspective, this objects clause also necessitates having a confessional RE subject with full exemption rights, and this runs counter to the ideals of the unitary school systems, where all pupils are supposed to receive the same teaching. In the debate, he criticises the Labour MPs for speaking of having a common subject while at the same time ruling out a removal of the link to Christianity from the objects clause (S.tid. (1994–95), pp. 2405–2406). In so doing, Djupedal signals that from his perspective, the best way forward for education would be to change the objects clause in such a way that the link to Christianity was reduced. Then, the Christianity subject could be

replaced with a non-confessional value subject, and the unitary school system would be strengthened as a result.

Finally, both Djupedal and Christiansen express ideas about what falls under the domain of education and what belongs to the domain of the parents. More precisely, they both state that when it comes to matters of religious identity and philosophy of life, education should stay out of it (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2413). I take this as an indication that for these politicians, this aspect of upbringing is not to be on the agenda in education.

### **Wanting values, but no religion**

The key ideas about the purpose of education as expressed by this group of politicians are that education is to transmit values, while at the same time staying out of matters of identity and philosophy of life. For Djupedal, the idea of the unitary school system seems to have been of vital importance, and for him, that necessitated a revision of the objects clause of education where the link to Christianity was reduced.

#### **4.4.2 The non-socialist parties**

As already mentioned, several times in this chapter, the MPs from the Centre Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democrats made a joint remark in the Recommendation to the Storting that preceded this debate. There, they stressed the position of the objects clause of primary education from 1969 and said that the value transmission in education ought to be strengthened, and that the Christianity subject ought to have a key role in this endeavour (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95), p. 2). In the debate, they express and expand upon these ideas in slightly separate ways.

According to Lilletun, the Christian Democrats view the objects clause of education as ‘just about equal with the Constitution’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416). Here, he is referring to the Norwegian Constitution, which first came into being in 1814. The Constitution is among the most important symbols and structures of Norwegian democracy, so to say that the objects clause of education has nearly equal importance is a strong way of saying that they find it very important.

Sanner of the Conservative Party brings up the implications of the objects clause, saying, ‘For the Conservatives it is important to underline that the objects clause of education must involve more than a commitment of cultural history. The Christian view of humanity, the idea of loving one’s neighbour and the Ten Commandments must be important’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408).

Here, Sanner seems to be underlining the Christian aspect of the objects clause. In his speech, he seems to be making this point as a criticism of the Labour Party, which according to him only supports the idea of cultural history. He thus stresses the difference between the Conservatives and the Labour Party by giving support to a reading of the objects clause that is more concerned with aspects of Christian theology.

Further in line with their remark, the non-socialist parties also stress the importance of the Christianity subject as part of education. Sanner says that it should have ‘a key role in the value transmission of education’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2409), while Lilletun appears to go further by referring to it as ‘the most important subject [in education]’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416). Thus, while the non-socialist parties agree with Christiansen that it is fitting to strengthen education’s function as transmitter of values, as, for instance, Holte says (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2406), they all tie this function to the Christianity subject.

Sanner, however, also underlines that ‘... the transmission of values is to be strengthened in several subjects’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2409), which I take as an indication that the transmission of values is seen as a vital part of education as a whole.

Holte of the Centre Party argues that due to the increasingly diverse situation in Norway, part of the task of education now ought to be to support children in developing stronger ties to Norway’s Christian history and tradition, as a way of giving them roots and making them safe (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). Thus, it seems that education may function as a resource for providing children with a stronger sense of identity in a more diverse Norway.

For Sanner, the approach seems slightly different. He speaks of the need for providing ‘children from different cultural and religious background with a common foundation, to make it easier to encounter each other in mutual understanding’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). Thus, the emphasis does not seem to be on ensuring that children develop a strong identification with Norwegian Christianity, but rather that a common ground is found that may serve as a platform for dialogue between people of different backgrounds.

### **Christianity as the supreme foundation for Norwegian education**

The non-socialist politicians underline the idea that the objects clause of education is of the highest importance, including the link to Christianity. Furthermore, they see the Christianity subject as an important, or as the most important subject, in education, which also indicates that becoming familiar with Christianity is seen as a vital purpose of education. This is also tied to

supporting identity development and ensuring children have a strong connection to the Norwegian nation.

#### **4.4.3 The Labour Party**

There are two Labour politicians who clearly express ideas about the purpose of education in this debate. One is the Minister Hernes, and the other is the MP Nybakk. The latter's starting point seems to be the following: 'In an exceedingly divided society the unitary school system keeps the best in the community's passing on of knowledge, values, and attitudes (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416). Thus, Nybakk ties together several of the ideas expressed in the debate. She refers to the increasing diversity in Norway and goes on to point to the unitary school system as a primary resource when faced with the challenge of diversity. Thus, she expresses the Labour position concerning the unitary school system, which is that it is important and should be maintained.

Together with Hernes, Nybakk also says something about the scope of the unitary school system. Nybakk mentions 'ethical fostering, existential questions, and basic common values', while Hernes speaks of how one, in education, '... is to learn to know both oneself and others, and just as well know oneself through the dialogue that may be established in education' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2415). Thus, they indicate that exploring one's own identity and understanding of existential matters is part of the domain of the unitary school system.

Furthermore, Nybakk says that '[i]t is important that all children may gather in the unitary school system where a common tradition and common values are emphasised' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416). In that way, she seems to highlight the unitary school system as a force of integration in a more diverse society.

With regard to the current objects clause of education, the Labour politicians are not quite as enthusiastic as the non-socialist MPs, but Hernes is clear that he does not believe it ought to be changed. When pressed by Lilletun of the Christian Democrats, he says that it '... is sensibly worked out and should remain' (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2416).

#### **A unitary school system with a foundation in tradition**

The Labour politicians express their support for the idea that the unitary school system is a vital resource for facing increasing diversity in Norway. Furthermore, they indicate that ethical development, existential questions, and basic values are part of the scope of education. They

also underline the benefit of all pupils becoming familiar with the same tradition and values, and finally, at least Hernes rules out changing the objects clause of education, dating from 1969.

#### 4.4.4 Summary of ideas about the purpose of education in the 1995 debate

Here is the table with the keywords summarising the ideas about the purpose of education expressed in the contribution from these politicians.

*Table 4 Ideas about the purpose of education in 1995*

	<b>Christiansen &amp; Djupedal</b>	<b>Non-socialists</b>	<b>Labour</b>
<b>The purpose of education</b>	<p>Transmission of values.</p> <p>For Djupedal: the unitary school system.</p>	<p>Value transmission, Christian objects clause.</p> <p>Supporting identity development.</p> <p>Esp. for the Centre Party: Strong connection to Norway as a nation.</p>	<p>Support for the unitary school system.</p> <p>Ethical development.</p>

In the comparison of these ideas, which happens in Section 6.3.1, I will discuss how many of these politicians saw the transmission of values as a vital part of the purpose of education while disagreeing about the sources for these values.

## **5 Ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education in 2008**

This chapter is the second of the two chapters of analysis. Here, I analyse ideas about religion education, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, as expressed in the proceedings from the debate concerning the government's proposal of revisions to the KRL subject following the verdict against Norway in the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the summer of 2007.

The structure of the chapter mirrors the one found in Chapter 4. Before starting the analysis, I will give a brief introduction to the cultural and political situation in Norway at the time of the debate. Then, as an introduction to the debate itself, I present the key ideas functioning as policy solutions, problem definitions, and meta-ideas in the debate, using the terminology of Mehta (2011). The rest of the chapter is divided according to the three topics about which I analyse ideas. Ideas about RE are analysed in Section 5.2, ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity are analysed in Section 5.3, and ideas about the purpose of education are analysed in Section 5.4.

### **Norway around 2008**

After decades of oil export, Norwegians were getting wealthier than ever before in 2008. Consumerism was everywhere and spending money was more about social than material needs (Ohman Nielsen, 2011, p. 264). The population was also characterised by a higher degree of plurality in matters of religious and non-religious beliefs than before, even though a significant majority were still members of the Church of Norway and especially rites of passage brought people to the churches (Ohman Nielsen, 2011, pp. 283–285). It was a time when old institutions, such as the state church and the reference to religion in the constitution from 1814 was being revised (Ohman Nielsen, 2011, pp. 285–286), even though it would take several years to complete these revisions.

The previous general election had been in 2005 and had secured a majority for a new coalition government, consisting of the Labour party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party. The first majority government in Norway for 30 years. At the same time, debates concerning several significant political issues, such as a revision of the relationship between the state and the church, resulted in large compromises, where all, or nearly all, the parties represented in the Storting participated (Mathiesen, 2013). This strategy did not work out, however, when it came



to the revision of the RE subject following the verdict against Norway in the ECtHR in 2007 (ECtHR, 2007), which was the formal prelude to the debate I analyse.

### **The verdict in the ECtHR as the background for the debate**

As told in Section 1.2, the introduction of integrative RE in Norway, in the form of the first KRL subject, led to a legal process in which parents sued the Norwegian state in order to have their children fully exempted from the KRL subject. In 2007, the ECtHR declared that the denial of full exemption rights was in violation of the rights parents have of ‘ensuring their children an education in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions (Lied, 2009, p. 263).

Faced with this verdict, the government proposed to revise the KRL subject to ensure that there could be no doubt that the current integrative RE subject in Norway was neutral enough to continue the practise of only giving a partial right to exemption (Ot.prp. nr. 54, (2007–2008)). Among the changes they proposed was removing the reference to Christianity in the name of the subject and reducing the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity.

The opposition parties protested, saying that the government was using the verdict from the ECtHR to introduce ideologically driven policy changes, supposedly wanted by the Socialist Left Party, under cover of fulfilling human rights commitments. From their perspective, the revisions proposed by the government was going further than necessary, especially as the KRL subject already had been revised twice since its introduction in 1997, and it was the 1997-iteration of the subject that had been considered by the ECtHR (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)).

### **About the debate and the proceedings**

There were 14 politicians taking part in the debate, including the Minister of Education, Bård Vegard Solhjell.<sup>27</sup> Taken together, the debate consisted of 21 speeches and 51 replies, covering nearly 22 pages in the published version of the proceedings (O.tid. (2007–2008), pp. 668–689). As usual in the Storting, the parties received time allotments according to their size, leading to the Labour Party and the Progress Party receiving 15 minutes each, the Conservative Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Christian Democratic Party receiving 10 minutes each, and the Centre Party and the Liberal Party receiving 5 minutes each. Whether for this reason or not, the different sizes of the contribution to the debate between the MP representing the Centre Party

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<sup>27</sup> Again, short biographical notes about the politicians active in the debate may be found in appendix I.

and his colleagues from the coalition partners Labour and the Socialist Left Party is noteworthy. The brevity of the contribution from the Centre Party will be mentioned several times in the analysis and is a possible source of error.

In the 1995 debate, I divided the politicians into three groups, according to differences in policy solutions and positions taken in the Recommendation to the Storting. In this debate, I have decided to only have two groups: the politicians representing the governing parties, and the ones representing opposition parties. The governing parties were the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party, while the opposition parties were the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party.

This division is based on the fact that in the Recommendation to the Storting preceding the debate (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)), there are in the main two policy solutions: the proposed revisions from the government and an alternative proposition from the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democratic Party. Thus, all the three government parties support the same policy solution in the recommendation and are expected to support each other in the debate. The Liberal Party offered their own alternative to the revisions, which was fairly close to the proposal from the government. However, the dynamic of the situation, with a majority government, appears to have led to a polarisation of the debate, where members of the three governing parties avoid criticising one another, and the opposition doing the same amongst themselves. Thus, while it could have been possible to treat the Liberal party as its own group, and possibly the Centre Party as well, since they appear to express somewhat different ideas than the other two governing parties, such further division of the material seemed to make the analysis more complicated than necessary. The differences between ideas expressed by the Centre Party and the Liberal Party will be discussed within the sections analysing ideas expressed by the governing parties and the opposition parties respectively.

## **5.1 Key ideas in the debate**

As in Section 4.1, Mehta's (2011) three levels of how ideas may function in politics will be used to give an overview of the key ideas in the debate. To recap, Mehta argues that ideas may function as policy solutions, problem definitions and meta-ideas (Mehta, 2011, pp. 27, 33, 40–41). Policy solutions are political solutions to known problems. Ideas serving as problem definitions lay out the challenges and aims in a situation, and meta-ideas may, for instance, express the ideological principles of a party, or both spoken and unspoken notions held to be true by everyone in a group, sometimes referred to as *zeitgeist*.

While the presentation in Section 4.1 started with the key problem definitions, this presentation will begin by laying out the three policy solutions given in the Recommendation to the Storting that preceded the debate. The reason for doing it differently is that while the core issue in the debate from 1995 was whether to say yes or no to Christiansen's proposal, the debate in 2008 comes at a time when three more or less distinct solutions were offered as a good response to the ruling against Norway in the ECtHR in the summer of 2007 (ECtHR, 2007). These three policy solutions are the content of what is being debated and starting with them gives an overview of how the different parties positioned themselves in the debate, and what they disagreed about.

Following the presentation of the policy solutions, I will give an overview of the key problem definitions expressed in the debate, showing how politicians from different parties understood the situation at hand. Finally, I will briefly discuss a selection of ideas that function as meta-ideas in the debate.

### **5.1.1 Policy solutions**

The Recommendation to the Storting concerning this issue offers three distinct proposals, which I interpret as ideas functioning as policy solutions since they are three different responses to what the Storting should decide following the problem at hand: the verdict against Norway in the ECtHR. Specifically, the matter at hand was how to revise the Education Act following the verdict (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)).

#### **The proposal from the government**

The government delivered a Proposition to the Odelsting with the revisions they deemed necessary. Following the failure to find a compromise with the opposition, the MPs representing the government parties, which held a parliamentary majority, passed a revision of the relevant paragraphs in the Education Act that with one exception was identical to what the government had proposed. The exception was a phrase about exemption, which was unanimously added by the Standing Committee.

At the time of the debate, the phrasing of the section on RE in the Education Act was from 2005, following the criticism of Norwegian RE legislation from the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC, 2004). It specified the content and aims of the subject in six bullet points, in addition to making it clear that there should not be any preaching in the subject, and that all religions and philosophies of life were to be presented 'from the standpoint of their

particular characteristics’.<sup>28</sup> A notable aspect of these bullet points was the language used to describe the knowledge aims concerning Christianity and other religions and philosophies of life. The two aims concerning Christianity speak of ‘thorough knowledge’, whereas the two concerning other religions and philosophies of life and ethics and philosophy only speak of ‘knowledge’.

In the proposal from the governing parties, these bullet points were replaced with one sentence listing the different topics in the subject, and one listing the aims of the subject. Furthermore, they replaced the phrase about presenting religious and philosophies of life from the standpoint of their particular characteristics with saying that the teaching in the subject was to present ‘different world religions and philosophies of life in an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner’, echoing the demands made of compulsory teaching from the ECtHR (Ot.prp. nr. 54, (2007–2008), p. 11).

The governing parties also make it clear in their remarks to the Recommendation (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)) that they intend for the note allocating 55% of the time in the subject to teaching about Christianity to be replaced with one saying that teaching about Christianity will have the largest share of allocated time. Most politicians in the debate interpret this as reducing the amount of time allocated to Christianity from 55% to around 33% of the total time in the subject.

Furthermore, the governing parties wanted to change the name of the subject. Since 1997, the first part of the name of the Norwegian RE subject had been ‘Christianity’, but this was now dropped. Instead, the name of the subject became ‘Religion, Philosophy of Life and Ethics’, and it was given the initialism RLE.

I take this proposal as one of three policy solutions in the debate. It represents an idea about what ought to be done with RE legislation following the verdict in the ECtHR. This policy solution is to revise the section on RE in the Education Act, to make it clearer that this RE subject is to be neutral and objective enough to be compulsory in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), with a partial right to exemption. The measures to achieve this effect are:

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<sup>28</sup> The phrase ‘from the standpoint of their particular characteristics’ is the translation of the Norwegian phrase *ut fra deres egenart* used by the ECtHR (2007, p. 7).

- to replace the six bullet points about content and aims with a sentence that treats all parts of the subject equally,
- to state directly that the teaching in the subject is to be objective, critical, and pluralistic, instead of saying that all religions and philosophies of life are to be presented from the standpoint of their particular characteristics,
- to reduce the time allocated to teaching about Christianity
- to remove 'Christianity' from the name of the subject.

The two policy solutions offered by the other parties in the Recommendation take issue with different parts of what the governing parties proposed.

### **The Progress Party, the Conservative Party and The Christian Democrats' alternative**

The main opposition to the governing parties comes from the Progress Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats, who all support the same alternative proposal for a new section on RE in the Education Act. In their version, they keep a revised version of the bullet points listing the content and aims of the RE subject. They drop the modifier 'thorough' before the points on learning about Christianity and combine the two points on aims into one sentence. They also keep the phrase about presenting different religions and philosophies of life from the standpoint of their particular characteristics, while adding the modifiers 'professional and factual' to the phrase. They do not include the phrase about being 'objective, critical and pluralistic'. In their remarks in the Recommendation, they make it clear that they want the share of time in the subject allocated to teaching about Christianity to remain the same (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)). At the same time, they also indicate that it may be necessary to increase the number of competence aims concerning Christianity in the curriculum plan to match the 55% share of the subject that they want the teaching about Christianity to have. Finally, these three parties from the opposition want to keep the name of the subject as it is, still calling it 'Christianity, Religion and Philosophy of Life', with the initialism KRL.

### **The alternative offered by the Liberal Party**

The last party to be represented at the Storting at this time, the Liberal Party, offered their own proposal for a revision of the section on RE. Their version is similar to the governing parties' proposition, but they put a lot of emphasis on retaining the phrase about presenting religions and philosophies of life from the standpoint of their particular characteristics, which will be shown more clearly in the analysis. In addition, they also have their own remark in the

Recommendation concerning the allocation of time to teaching about Christianity. There, they state that both the competence aims and the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity should stay the same (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)). They thus offer a different proposal to both the governing parties and the rest of the opposition.

### **Two alternative revisions and one proposal of maintaining most of the status quo**

There were thus three distinct policy solutions concerning the section on RE in the Education Act offered in the Recommendation to the Storting before this debate: one from the governing parties, Labour, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party, one from the Progress Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats, and finally one from the Liberal Party. The governing parties held a majority in the Storting, and therefore their policy solution was the majority proposal from the Standing Committee.

As I now move on to give an overview of the key ideas serving as problem definitions, the focus is shifted to how MPs from the different parties explain the challenges and aims in the current situation, which also serves as their explanation of why they support different policy solutions.

#### **5.1.2 Problem definitions**

The main problem, so to speak, facing the Norwegian politicians in this situation was the verdict against the Norwegian KRL subject of 1997 in the ECtHR, given in the summer of 2007 (Lied, 2009). The main point of contention in the debate is whether the changes to the Education Act proposed by the government are necessary for Norwegian RE legislation to comply with the requirements set for compulsory RE by the ECtHR.

#### **How large is the need for further revisions to the KRL subject?**

Norwegian RE legislation had already been revised twice since the inaugural version of the KRL subject was introduced in 1997: first, following the publishing of two evaluation reports of the first years of KRL (Hagesæther & Sandsmark, 2006; Johannesen & Aadnanes, 2000), and second following the decision against Norway by the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2004 (HRC, 2004). It was therefore relevant to consider whether the measures taken in these two previous revisions were enough to ensure that the KRL subject at the time of the debate in 2008 was already in compliance with human rights legislation, or if it was necessary to make further revisions following the verdict in the ECtHR.

Here, the governing parties refer to legal advice and say that the change they are proposing is ‘... important and necessary in order to get a more unifying and inclusive subject and ensure that there can be no doubt that the subject is not in violation of the ruling from the European Court of Human Rights’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). The opposition parties, on the other hand, strongly disagree, and say that the governing parties are ‘using a ruling about the subject as it was eleven years ago to justify changes to the subject as it is today’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). I take this as a disagreement about problem definition, where one side of the Storting is saying that it is necessary to make further changes to the subject for it to comply with human rights legislation, while the other is saying that the government is using this occasion to revise the RE subject under the cover of the ruling from the ECtHR, while the real reason is the policy wishes of the governing parties, especially the Socialist Left Party. This final point is made by the Christian Democrat Eriksen, who says that they want a new KRL subject that complies with human rights, ‘but is without the Socialist Left Party add-on’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669), indicating that she believes the changes introduced by the majority coalition government stem from this party.

An important keyword in this disagreement is the phrase ‘no doubt’ used by the MP from a governing party quoted above. Members of the opposition point to the use of this phrase, and to MPs from governing parties saying that the changes ensure that there will be no new case against Norway in the ECtHR. In the debate they argue that this phrase is evidence of a political strategy. Instead of just working to avoid another ruling against Norway, the opposition claims that the government has instructed their legal advice to propose measures that would remove any doubt concerning the RE subject and human rights. In this way, the opposition claims, the government has managed to acquire legal advice that supports making further revisions to the subject, going beyond the changes enacted in 2005. According to the opposition, the changes from 2005 were enough to ensure that the KRL subject would not be convicted if a new case was brought against it. In other words, this debate also concerned what legal standard to apply to the subject. Was a situation where the politicians could expect that the KRL subject would not be in violation of human rights satisfactory, or was it necessary to go further, to ensure that there could be ‘no doubt’ and that no one would bring up such a case.

Again, a contribution to the debate from Christian Democrat Eriksen may serve as an example. She says, ‘Getting a subject where one is absolutely certain of avoiding risk of legal procedure and is without doubt are words the minister has used. [...] [A]sking lawyers to be dead certain will give us a subject that is within the frame of what human rights say, but it will also be inside

the *passee partout*. That means that one has more leeway than when a lawyer is absolutely certain' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 688). Eriksen here seems to be pointing to a disagreement concerning what level of compliance with human rights legislation the Norwegian Storting ought to aim for. For her, and other key members of the opposition in this debate, it is enough to be confident that the subject would never again be convicted, while the MPs from the governing parties and the Minister of Education from the Socialist Left Party talks about not having legal procedures brought against the subject in the future. I understand this difference in the degree of compliance with human rights to be another example of disagreement at the level of problem definition, seeing as they disagree about what the situation following the verdict calls for.

### **What is the appropriate quantitative share of the subject to allocate to Christianity?**

More specifically, the disagreement between the governing parties and the main opposition (the Progress Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats) primarily concerns the share of time in the subject allocated to teaching about Christianity and the name of the subject. I will first discuss the matter of allocating a 55% share of the time in the subject to Christianity.

Jensen, MP for the Socialist Left Party, refers to criticism of the regulation saying that 55% of the time in the KRL subject should be devoted to teaching about Christianity, whereas 25% is to be used for teaching about other religions and philosophies of life, and the final 20% is allocated to teaching about ethics and philosophy. At the time, this regulation was found in the curriculum plan from 2005 (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2005). The criticism Jensen refers to says that '... the allotment in percentages constitutes qualitative differentiation of the content in the subject' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 674), and to interpret Jensen's statement, it is first necessary to clarify the distinction between qualitative and quantitative differentiation, which is a key element in the verdict from the ECtHR.

In the judgement, the ECtHR makes it clear that '[i]n view of the place occupied by Christianity in the national history and tradition of [Norway]', having 'knowledge about Christianity [representing] a greater part of the Curriculum [...] than knowledge about other religions and philosophies cannot [...] of its own be viewed as a departure from the principles of pluralism and objectivity amounting to indoctrination...' (ECtHR, 2007, p. 38). In other words, human rights legislation does not require time to be allotted equally in teaching about all religious traditions in a compulsory RE subject. Instead, states have a 'margin of appreciation in planning and setting the curriculum' (ECtHR, 2007, p. 38), where a religious tradition's place in national



history and tradition may be reflected by allowing it a greater share of time in the subject. In the debate, this is referred to as allowing quantitative differentiation, in effect devoting a larger share of the subject to Christianity than other religions and philosophies of life.

The ECtHR, however, also found that when matters such as the Christian objects clause and the differences between the aims concerning different religious traditions in §2-4 of the Education Act were considered, ‘... not only quantitative but even qualitative differences applied to the teaching of Christianity as compared to that of other religions and philosophies’ (ECtHR, 2007, p. 39). Here the word ‘qualitative’ is used to describe treating the teaching of Christianity differently not only in giving it a larger share of the time allotment, but also by having different aims for this part of the subject and treating the content associated with Christianity in the subject in a different way to other content. The qualitative differentiation, taken together with only granting parents a partial right to exemption, and given the practical problems associated with the system of partial exemption, is what led the majority of the judges in the ECtHR to conclude that the KRL subject of 1997 constituted a violation of European human rights legislation (ECtHR, 2007, p. 42). A certain amount of quantitative differentiation is therefore within the margin of appreciation that states have in a compulsory RE subject, but qualitative differentiation necessitates exemption rights.

Going back to the statement quoted from MP Jensen above, it may be somewhat surprising to note that she refers to the allotment in percentages as *qualitative* differentiation. Most of the time, the differences in allocation of time in the subject are what is referred to as *quantitative*, and thus potentially acceptable, differentiation, but in this instance, she refers to it as qualitative differentiation. She continues by pointing out that ‘... one is to spend more time on achieving the competence aims in Christianity than in the other philosophies of life and religions and in ethics’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 677). To understand this point, it is necessary to recapitulate how the then current curriculum plan in KRL was structured. The 2005-iteration of the KRL subject, which was the revision that followed the criticism of Norway by the UNHRC (HRC, 2004), was also the first Norwegian curriculum plan to follow the principles of the curriculum that became known as ‘the Knowledge Promotion Reform’. Where the previous Norwegian curriculum plans had listed specific content to be learnt, the new plans gave competence aims concerning each part of the subject instead (Thuen, 2017, p. 208). Therefore, when Jensen is speaking of competence aims, she is referring to how the content in the subject is listed in the curriculum plan.

Furthermore, when Jensen is saying that the allotment of 55% of the time in the subject to teaching about Christianity amounts to spending ‘more time on achieving the competence aims in Christianity than in the other philosophies of life and religions and in ethics’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 677), she appears to be pointing to a potential discrepancy between different factors in the curriculum plan from 2005.

In that plan, the KRL subject was divided into three parts, referred to as ‘main areas’. Christianity was one, the second was called ‘Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Philosophies of Life’, and the third was called ‘Philosophy and Ethics’. Furthermore, for each of these main parts, a number of competence aims are listed for each of the three main levels in Norwegian primary and lower secondary education. Following the tripartite structure of the main areas of the subject, one could say that Christianity amounted to a third of the subject. Jensen’s point seems to be that when 55% of the time in the subject is to be devoted to teaching about one-third of it, then that means that more time is to be spent on working towards the competence aims in Christianity than in the other main areas. In other words, there may be an imbalance between the norms for allocating time in the subject and the main areas of the structure.

This, then, is where the qualitative aspect of the differentiation comes in. When Jensen is referring to the allotment in percentages as qualitative differentiation, she seems to be saying that when the curriculum plan specifies that more time in the subject be used on the main area Christianity than what the numbering of competence aims suggests, then that amounts to treating these competence aims in a qualitatively different manner. This, as seen above, is unacceptable from the perspective of the judgement in the ECtHR, and therefore the allotment of time in percentages must be removed.

The MPs from the opposition instead repeatedly point to the fact that the judgement from the ECtHR allows some quantitative differentiation, based on a religious tradition’s place in national history and tradition. As an example, MP for the Progress Party Anundsen replies to Jensen’s statement by saying that ‘... based on the historical situation concerning Christianity in Norway, it is accepted [by the ECtHR] that we may have a quantitative differentiation’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 674).

However, members of the opposition also agree that there is an imbalance between the allotment in percentages and the competence aims. MP for the Christian Democrats Eriksen says that she has ‘... listened carefully to what the governing parties have said in this matter,

that we have had an imbalance between competence aims and allotment in percentages. [...] [The opposition] says that that means that the competence aims must be adjusted according to the allotment in percentages' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). Thus, Eriksen indicates that she does not take issue with the problem definition from Jensen. She seems to accept the reference to this imbalance. Yet, instead of agreeing with Jensen's policy solution, the main opposition wants to increase the number of competence aims associated with the main area Christianity, in such a way that it would reflect the allotment of 55% of time in the subject.

For the main opposition, then, the key problem definition here is that quantitative differentiation is accepted by the ECtHR, and the imbalance may therefore be dealt with by letting the competence aims reflect a 55% share, instead of removing the allotment in percentages.

The problem definitions concerning the amount of time that ought to be spent on teaching about Christianity are therefore both shared and contested between the governing parties and the opposition. They agree that a certain quantitative leeway is afforded states in the judgement, but they disagree about whether teaching about Christianity may have a 55% share of the time in the subject. This disagreement partly comes down to politicians from the governing parties understanding the 55% norm as an indicator of qualitative differentiation, whereas the opposition MPs only see it as quantitative. Furthermore, they appear to agree that there may be an imbalance between the 55% norm and the current number of competence aims in the subject, but as they disagree on other aspects of the problem definitions, they offer different policy solutions in this situation.

### **Having 'Christianity' as part of the name of the subject**

Another specific point of disagreement between the policy solutions of the governing parties and the opposition concerns the name of the subject. There, the problem definitions play out somewhat differently.

When presenting the position of the governing parties, MP for the Labour Party Kjernli, argued that the name shortened RLE was in better agreement with the name of the RE subject in upper secondary education, and that '...it does not leave the impression that one religion or philosophy of life has precedence' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). This ties the changing of the name from KRL to RLE, which primarily means dropping the reference to 'Christianity' in the name, to two different problem definitions. The first is a reference to the fact that the RE subject in Norwegian upper secondary education is called 'Religion and Ethics'. Changing the name of the subject in primary and lower secondary from KRL to RLE makes it more similar to

‘Religion and Ethics’. The second problem that this change solves, from Kjernli and the governing parties’ perspective, has to do with ‘the impression that one religion or philosophy of life has precedence’, which ties in with the requirement from the ECtHR judgement’s criticism of qualitative differentiation in the subject.

From the perspective of the governing parties, having ‘Christianity’ come first in the name of the subject, while ‘Religion’ is listed next, risks giving the impression that Christianity is something other than religion. This could be interpreted as giving Christianity a preferred position in the subject, which would run counter to their aim of ensuring that the RE subject is neutral and objective, in line with the requirement for compulsory RE set by human rights legislation.

The main opposition, however, do not agree with this problem definition. Rather, they repeatedly point to the fact that the name of the subject was not criticised by the ECtHR, for instance such as MP for the Conservative Party, Søreide did. In her speech, she states that ‘[t]he judgement neither criticised the name KRL in itself, [nor] the allocation of the content...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). According to her perspective, it seems that this is the most relevant aspect of the situation concerning the name: the ECtHR does not require ‘Christianity’ to be dropped from it.

Christian Democrat Eriksen ties the issue of the name to the amount of time allotted to teaching about Christianity, saying that ‘... with the content in the subject that the Christian Democrats want, it would be completely natural to have a K’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). The ‘K’ she is talking about is the first letter of the initialism KRL, which stands for ‘Christianity’ in Norwegian, and so her point seems to be that in a subject where teaching about Christianity takes up 55% of the time, it is only fair to reflect this in the name of the subject. Thus, she indirectly argues that having a reference to Christianity in the name of the RE subject is a consequence of the quantitative differentiation between Christianity and other religions and philosophies of life, and not a signal of Christianity having a qualitatively different status.

The disagreement about the name is thus also tied to different problem definitions. The governing parties argue that it is a problem that the name may indicate that Christianity is given precedence in the subject, while the main opposition either point to the fact that the judgement from the ECtHR did not mention the name or that the name is a reflection of quantitative differentiation.

### **Is the role of cultural heritage at stake?**

In addition to the different problem definitions concerning the interpretation of the judgement from the ECtHR and its consequences for the allotment in percentages and the name of the subject, there is another cluster of key ideas functioning as problem definitions in this debate. These ideas concern the notion of cultural heritage and the effects of the policies of the current government.

According to the opposition parties, particularly the Progress Party and the Christian Democrats, the government, which was a coalition of the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party, is using its majority to pass and enact laws that reduce the standing of Norwegian Christian cultural heritage, which according to their perspective puts the nation at risk.

Anundsen of the Progress Party draws a contrast between the government and the main opposition, talking about ‘... us, who dare to say something about what values this society is to be built on – we who dare hold on to centuries of Christian tradition, later supplemented by a humanistic value perspective – and those who contribute to demolishing the value foundation of the nation’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 672). As a problem definition, this statement places the issue of the RE subject within a broader description of the situation. Anundsen mentions issues such as removing Christianity from the objects clause of education, not allowing Christian songs before meals in school, and allowing gay marriage, and argues that reducing the standing of Christianity in Norwegian society is a recurring theme in the government’s policies.

In this way, Anundsen and other members of the opposition, such as Sørfohn of the Christian Democrats (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 686), tie the current issue of revising RE legislation together with a broader conflict between the government and the opposition, while also painting the government itself as a problem. From their perspective, the majority coalition is taking Norway in a new and wrong direction, where cultural heritage is being neglected.

MPs from the governing parties do not spend a lot of time in the debate on rebutting these accusations, but there are some replies. Sørensen, MP for the Labour Party, gives one of these, saying that it is wrong to accuse the government of not taking a stand on values. Rather, she says, ‘It is exactly values such as equality, tolerance, and respect for basic human rights that serve as the foundation for our view, together with Christian and humanistic cultural heritage and tradition’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), pp. 684–685). Thus, she rejects the problem definition

offered by MPs such as Anundsen and says that it is not a problem in the current situation that the government is reducing the standing of Christianity in Norwegian society.

### **The interpretation of a judgement and a bigger picture of Norwegian society**

The key ideas serving as problem definitions in this debate primarily concern the interpretation of the judgement from the ECtHR and the relationship between the judgement and the Norwegian RE subject as it was in 2008. In other words, the question is to what extent further revisions are needed in order for the subject to comply sufficiently with human rights legislation and whether that includes reducing the time allotted to teaching about Christianity and removing the reference to Christianity in the name of the subject. Furthermore, for the main part of the opposition it is important to tie the issue of revising RE together with a broader problem definition concerning the government's policies and the position of Christian and humanistic cultural heritage in Norway.

#### **5.1.3 Meta-ideas**

As with the meta-ideas in the 1995 debate discussed in Section 4.1.3, there are many ideas to choose from at this level from the 2008 debate. A key cluster of meta-ideas that politicians from all parties engage with in their contributions concerns aims for the RE subject, but since that is the main material for the analysis in Section 5.2, I will not discuss it here. Instead, I will demonstrate how ideas about human rights may be said to function as zeitgeist for these politicians and look at how some politicians in the debate espouse and interpret the notion that one must know oneself before encountering others.

In Section 2.2, I presented Mehta's (2011) understanding of the concept of zeitgeist as a label for how ideas may function in politics. These ideas are characterised by being 'widely shared and not open to criticism in a particular historical moment' (Mehta, 2011, p. 27). Early in the debate, Kjernerli from the Labour Party expresses an idea concerning the standing of human rights in Norway, saying 'We have a tradition of holding human rights in high regard and not acting in violation of the international human rights commitments we thankfully have taken on' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). Here, Kjernerli is saying something about 'we', about a group, and from the local context in his speech, it seems reasonable to assume that he is speaking about the Storting as a whole, or Norwegians as a whole. For instance, he opens the preceding sentence by speaking of 'all parties' and how 'we all realise' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670).

What Kjernerli is saying is that having high regard for human rights is something that is held in common in the Norwegian Storting, together with a commitment not to act in violation of these

rights. For this to be understood as a zeitgeist idea, it should be widely shared and not open to criticism, which matches well with how MPs from the opposition parties express themselves concerning human rights.

Gåsvatn, for instance, MP from the Progress Party, says ‘We have a framework concerning human rights’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685), before claiming that the main opposition’s proposal meets the demands from the ECtHR’s judgement. Thus, he illustrates that for him, it is not a question of whether or not to comply with human rights, but rather that he believes the policy he supports is within the human rights framework.

Similarly, Søreide of the Conservative Party says that ‘[n]obody wants a subject that is in violation of human rights’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). In her speech, she takes issue with accusations from governing party politicians saying that the main opposition wants a subject that is in violation of human rights. This statement fits with labelling the ideas of supporting human rights as zeitgeist for these politicians, since the answer to the criticism clearly signals a will to comply with human rights.

Eriksen, MP for the Christian Democrats, chooses to summarise the debate in the following way: ‘A headline for all parties in this assembly through the debate has been that everyone wants a subject that complies with human rights, and one has made changes in one’s paragraphs for them to comply with them’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 688). Thus, she actively chooses to underline how all the parties, not just the governing parties, have been interested in passing policy solutions that comply with human rights.

Together, I believe this shows how compliance with human rights legislation is a meta-idea functioning as zeitgeist in this debate. No politicians in the debate indicate that it may be acceptable to violate human rights or say that Norway should withdraw from its international commitments to human rights. Rather, they all go out of their way to underline that what they are proposing is in full compliance with human rights and the judgement from the ECtHR.

### **Knowing oneself as a prerequisite for understanding others?**

The notion that it is important to know oneself to understand others is a more contested meta-idea in the debate. In the Recommendation to the Storting preceding it, the opposition parties make a joint remark that includes the following passage: ‘It is important to know oneself and one’s own cultural heritage to understand others’ (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)). The passage stands as part of the reasoning for stressing the importance of giving sufficient time in the

subject to teaching about ‘the Norwegian Christian and humanistic heritage’ (Innst. O. nr. 72 (2007–2008)). Therefore, the idea seems to be that it is important for pupils to learn about Christianity in order for them to be able to understand ‘others’.

In the debate, this notion is repeated, for instance, by the Conservative MP Søreide. She says that she wants to ‘... underline one aspect that is especially significant: we must know ourselves to understand others’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). In her way of phrasing it, she uses pronouns in the first-person plural, signalling that she is referring to a group that she also belongs to, and in the local context in her speech it seems fair to interpret her as meaning ‘Norwegians’ as a group. She may therefore be interpreted as saying that for Norwegians to understand ‘others’, it is important that they are well informed about ‘their own’ cultural background, which is a reference to Christian and humanistic heritage.

Dørum, MP for the Liberal Party, dwells quite a bit on how he understands meetings between different perspectives in the subject and in terms of the notion of knowing oneself to understand others, he says that ‘... we must know where we come from when we live in a society where all the great world religions are to meet’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682). Again, a member of the opposition uses the pronoun in the first-person plural when speaking about these matters, referring to a sense of group identity to which he also belongs. He mentions this when talking about his support for referring to cultural heritage as something living and relevant, and not just a matter of learning about what has been important in the past, and so it seems fair to tie what he says together with ideas about learning enough about Christianity and Christian and humanistic cultural heritage.

Elvik, MP for the Socialist Left Party, which was one of the governing parties, sees things differently. In a reply to Dørum’s speech she takes issue with his support for the remark including the passage about knowing oneself and one’s own cultural heritage to understand others. She says, ‘I would like to ask the MP to turn these words over in his head: oneself and others. I think it is a bit strange that the Liberal Party has a need to speak of oneself and others, that is, we and them, an old dichotomy that we have worked hard to do away with’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 681). Here, Elvik gives a different perspective on the notion of knowing oneself to understand others. For her, this way of speaking upholds an old dichotomy between us and them, which she has been working to abolish. Thus, she finds it outdated and wrong to tie knowledge about Christian and humanistic heritage in Norway to the idea of knowing oneself to understand others. Thus, the notion of learning about oneself in order to understand



others is shown to be a contested concept in this debate, and an example of a meta-idea that is not shared by everyone.

### **Shared recognition of human rights and contested vision of identity and understanding**

The ideas that human rights are to be held in high regard and that one must know oneself to understand others are two key meta-ideas in the debate. The former appears to function as zeitgeist, an idea that only receives support, and no one criticises. The latter, on the other hand, is a contested meta-idea, which some politicians espouse, and others criticise. This illustrates different ways that meta-ideas function in the debate.

#### **5.1.4 Summary of the key ideas in the 2008 debate**

This section has presented the key ideas in the 2008 debate. The key ideas functioning as policy solutions were:

- To revise the Education Act, concerning the RE subject, to make it clearer that this RE subject is to be neutral and objective enough to be compulsory in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), with a partial right to exemption.
- To only make a careful revision of the Education Act, keeping the 55% norm and adjusting the number of competence aims in the curriculum to better reflect this norm.
- To revise the Education Act to make it clearer that the RE subject is to be neutral and objective enough, but maintaining about the same amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity.

The key ideas functioning as problem definitions concerned these topics:

- How large is the need for further revisions to the KRL subject following the judgement?
- What is the appropriate quantitative share of the subject to allocate to Christianity?
- Should Christianity be part of the name of the subject?
- Is the role of cultural heritage in Norwegian society at stake?

The key meta-ideas that I have discussed in this section concerned the role of human rights for Norwegian society and the relationship between identity and dialogue, or whether a clarification of one's own identity was needed as an initial stage when working towards understanding others. All the politicians shared the idea that the state of Norway should not break human rights legislation. For this reason, I characterised this as a zeitgeist-idea. The relationship between

identity and dialogue, however, was contested. One idea was that one has to know oneself before understanding others. Another was that the categories used in that statement themselves represented an outdated dichotomy, especially when applied to the RE subject.

## **5.2 Religion education**

In this section, I analyse ideas about RE expressed in the debate from 2008. The analysis uses the division of the contributions to the debate into two groups, the government parties and the opposition, as explained in the opening of the chapter.

Ideas about RE was operationalised in Section 3.1, and repeated in Section 3.4, as the distinction between confessional and non-confessional RE, and separative and integrative RE, and by internal and external aims for RE. As made clear in Section 3.1, the distinction between confessional and non-confessional RE is based on work by Kimanen (2015) and her dimensions of confessionality, in addition to Jensen and Kjeldsen's (2013, p. 188) distinction between 'small-c' confessional and 'capital-C' Confessional. The use of the terms 'integrative' and 'separative' is based on my reading of Alberts (2007, 2008), and the terms 'internal' and 'external aims' are from Kjeldsen (2016), who in turn draws on Grimmitt's (1987) distinction between learning about and learning from religion.

Thus, for both groups of politicians analysed here, I will first consider the ideas they express with a view to confessionality, then integrative vs separative, and finally at the aims they have for RE and how that may be understood in view of Kjeldsen's categories.

### **5.2.1 The government parties**

The MP for the Labour Party who contributes most to the debate, Kjernerli, opens his speech by describing what he believes is the political consensus about RE in Norway. He says that he thinks '... all parties are concerned with having an RE subject that is as unifying and inclusive as possible' and also '... that we all realise that we in Norway have a heritage – humanistic and Christian – that it is important that such a subject reflects in a non-discriminatory manner' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). From his perspective, the disagreement expressed in the debate happens within these frames. Thus, he indicates that all parties want an RE subject that is non-confessional and non-separative, in the sense that no one supports going back to the separative model with alternative RE subjects, and no one thinks that the compulsory RE subject should promote Christian beliefs.

At the same time, he is also saying that they agree that the RE subject in some way should reflect what he understands as Norway's heritage, described by the keywords 'humanistic' and 'Christian'. Thus, while not promoting Christian beliefs, the national history is still to have a function in the compulsory RE subject.

Kjernli's contribution offers further support for labelling his way of imagining RE as non-confessional in a reply to criticism coming in the wake of his speech. There he is talking about how the government's proposed changes to the RE subject are well suited '... to ensure that we have a subject [...] that treats all religions qualitatively equally, ...' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 672). This is in line with a basic tenet of non-confessional RE, which holds that all religious traditions must have the same status in the subject, instead of giving one perspective a privileged position.

### **Support for small-c confessional RE?**

Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013, p. 188) argue that a subject that is not 'capital-C' Confessional may still be small-c confessional, by promoting a general positive attitude to religion, or encouraging children to develop a sense of spirituality. However, the contributions from the politicians representing the governing parties offer no ideas indicating such aims. Instead, as will become clear in a later part of the analysis, the aims are consistently focused on transmitting knowledge and making pupils capable of understanding each other.

Another way to look at matters of confessionality and the ideas expressed by politicians from the governing parties is to consider in what direction the revisions of the RE subject they are supporting will take the subject. Will the non-confessional profile of the subject be made more or less clear following these changes?

The effect is that it is more clearly a non-confessional subject. For instance, both reducing the amount of time in the subject spent on teaching about Christianity and dropping the reference to Christianity from the name of the subject is intended to make it more neutral, and to avoid the impression that Christianity has a preferred position in the subject. As an example, Jensen of the Socialist Left Party argues for removing the allotment of time in percentages 'because it is perceived as giving Christianity a qualitative precedence before the other religions' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678).

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the governing parties still support allocating a larger share of time in the subject to teaching about Christianity than other religious traditions. The

Minister of Education from the Socialist Left Party, Solhjell, makes this clear in his speech, saying that ‘knowledge about Christianity is to have the quantitatively largest share of the content in the subject’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682). I interpret this as the governing parties’ way of reflecting the position of Christianity in Norwegian history and culture, as indicated by Kjernli above.

Taken together, it still seems clear that the politicians from the governing parties support non-confessional RE and are interested in revising the Norwegian RE subject further to make its non-confessional profile clearer, even while allowing for a continued (and reduced) quantitative emphasis on Christianity.

### **Approaching integrative RE in a study-of-religions sense?**

The second distinction used to shed light on ideas about RE is between separative and integrative RE. This distinction is firstly about whether or not RE ought to be organised as separate, alternative, often confessional subjects, or as one, non-confessional subject (Alberts, 2007, pp. 1–2). In this sense, all the politicians taking part in this debate support integrative RE.

Secondly, however, integrative RE may be used to refer to RE following the study-of-religions approach, as detailed by Alberts (2007, 2008). When used in this sense, the meaning is more specific, as the study-of-religions approach has certain characteristics that must be met. Alberts has discussed these (Alberts, 2007, pp. 372–385), listing requirements concerning the name of the subject, its concept of religion, strategies for the delineation of the subject matter, and the organisation of the subject. I will now look at these aspects of integrative RE following the study-of-religions approach to see in what sense these politicians may be said to imagine a similar kind of RE.

As regards the name of the subject, Alberts (2007, pp. 372–373) argues that it should not refer to any specific religious traditions, and here, the politicians from the government parties are very much in line. They are proposing to remove the reference to Christianity from the name, and for instance Kjernli of the Labour Party argues that one of the benefits of the new name, with the initialism RLE, is that it ‘does not leave the impression that one religion or philosophy of life has precedence’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671).

The concept of religion is a significant aspect of the study-of-religions approach to RE, which requires a non-religious, non-essentialist, and diverse concept of religion. For the purposes of this analysis, it is harder to get a grip on, as it is not thematised directly by any of the politicians

in the debate. However, if anything, it seems that the politicians are referring to religion in an essentialist manner, usually speaking of Christianity with a definite article (Norwegian: *kristendommen*) and speaking of ‘world religions’, for instance as Jensen does when listing the content of the subject: ‘... knowledge of Christianity and other world religions’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). At the same time, it does not seem fair to expect politicians to engage in thorough discussions about the concept of religion when discussing revisions of RE, and it seems quite possible that if challenged on this issue, they would perhaps have chosen other wordings.

That caveat notwithstanding, it may at least be said that the kind of attention given to the concept of religion in the study-of-religions approach is not found in the ideas expressed by politicians in this debate, which encourages care in labelling their approach to RE integrative in a study-of-religions sense.

When it comes to the delineation of the subject matter and the organisation of the subject, the politicians from the governing parties seem to want to take the subject in a direction that would make it more like the study-of-religions approach, by removing the allotment of time in percentages and making the subject as unifying and inclusive as possible, as demonstrated by the quotes from Jensen and Kjernli above.

Therefore, the revisions supported by the politicians from the governing parties indicate that they wish to take the Norwegian RE subject in a direction that is closer to the study-of-religions approach than it was before, while still being different from it, especially when it comes to the concept of religion.

### **Aiming for knowledge and supporting social-ethical development**

The final part of the analysis of the ideas about RE concerns the aims for the subject, understood through Kjeldsen’s (2016) categories. She follows Grimmitt (1987) by dividing between aims that are inherent to the subject (learning about religion) and aims that are external (learning from religion), and divides the latter category into four subcategories of learning from religion: social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, existential-religious development, and analytical-critical development.

The inherent aims for the RE subject, learning about religion, are well illustrated by the following statement from the Socialist Left Party MP Jensen, who speaks of ‘... a subject that will provide the pupils with good knowledge about Christianity and other world religions, and about philosophies of life and ethics, in a qualitatively equal manner, ...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008),

p. 678). Thus, the RE subject is for her a subject where pupils are to learn about important religious traditions, philosophies of life and ethics. Statements expressing similar ideas from the other government parties are also found.

The first subcategory of the external aims is social-ethical development, which are aims that concern the pupils as part of society. Here, Jensen, MP from the Socialist Left Party, may again serve as an example, talking about having an RE subject ‘... that builds bridges and creates trust and tolerance ...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). These are societal aims for RE and establishes the RE subject as something that may cross divides between people in Norway and make it easier for people who are different to live well together, by creating trust and tolerance among pupils.

On a similar note, the Minister of Education, Solhjell, also of the Socialist Left Party, says that RE is ‘a subject for dialogue – not conflict – and for respect’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682). This way of imagining RE emphasises its potential for letting people meet across their differences, aiming for dialogue and not conflict as a result.

The next subcategory is existential-ethical development, which, for instance, may be understood as the transformative effect of coming to know other cultures or worldviews sometimes referred to as ‘edification’ (Jackson, 1997, pp. 130–137; Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 29). The politicians from the governing parties do not offer a lot of ideas concerning this aspect of the external aims, but the use of the word ‘understanding’ is perhaps an indicator. Jensen of the Socialist Left Party also speaks of how the subject is to ‘... contribute to understanding and respect for different views’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678), and thus signals that there are aims for attitudes and perspectives that pupils are to develop in the subject. At the same time, these statements usually come as part of statements about social-ethical development, which indicates that existential-ethical development is thought of in tandem with social-ethical development.

Kjeldsen’s third category is existential-religious development, which, for instance, may concern being able to relate to one’s own religiosity. The contributions from the government party politicians offer no examples of having this as an aim for RE. In this debate, they never speak of pupils’ own religiosity as part of the RE subject. As seen above, there are aims of knowledge, attitudes, and understanding, but they never point at the pupils’ own religion. Instead, they emphasise, for example in the way that Sørensen, MP for the Labour Party does, that it is important to provide ‘... knowledge about religions and philosophies of life in an objective manner’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 684). This seems to indicate that any potential

relationship between the content in the RE subject and the role it may play in the pupils' existential-religious development is beyond the scope of RE for these politicians. At least, none of the politicians from these parties argues for including existential-religious development as part of the aim of the RE subject.

### **Is RE necessary for understanding Norwegian society?**

Kjeldsen's fourth category is analytical-critical development, which may concern the aim of religious literacy, or speaking of how pupils may attain the general analytical skills and reflexivity that the study of religion fosters (Alberts, 2008, p. 320; Kjeldsen, 2016, pp. 31–32; Moore, 2007, pp. 56–57).

In the debate, politicians from the opposition accuse the government of passing RE legislation that will render pupils unable to understand what they refer to as the Christian cultural heritage. This may be understood as an analytical skill, referring to pupils' ability to interpret and navigate Norwegian society and culture. One of the government party MPs responding to this criticism is Labour MP Sørensen, who rejects the notion that the government parties want '... to deprive future generations of their familiarity with the Christian cultural heritage' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 684). However, she then goes on to suggest that while the place of Christianity is maintained in the RE subject, it is in subjects such as Norwegian and history that the Christian heritage is discussed in a historical sense. To support her point she asks, 'How may pupils read Arne Garborg without talking about Christian tradition faced with secular modernity?' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 684).

I take this as an indication that for the governing parties, the RE subject is not seen as the most important place for developing the pupils' analytical and critical skills. Rather, they seem to see this as an aim for several of the subjects in education, and more closely associated with subjects such as Norwegian and history than necessarily with RE.

### **A more non-confessional RE – for better integration**

The ideas about RE in the contributions from the governing parties indicate that they want RE to be non-confessional and integrative. Their ideas also take the subject further in that direction, making it closer to the study-of-religions approach to RE.

With regard to the aims of RE, there is a clear emphasis on learning about religion, and the external aim of social-ethical development. RE is intended to serve as a bridge builder through

the dissemination of knowledge, which, together with dialogue, is expected to foster trust, understanding and tolerance among pupils.

### **5.2.2 The opposition parties**

As seen in Section 5.1.1, two policy solutions were offered by opposition parties: one from the Progress Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats, and one from the Liberal Party. Both of these amounted to having RE that could be characterised as non-confessional and integrative, in the sense that both alternatives mean having one, compulsory RE subject, which ideally all pupils were intended to take part in. The proposal from the largest group was a careful revision of the KRL subject from 2005, while the Liberal Party proposed a slightly different version of the government's proposal. However, there are differences in the aspects of RE that are emphasised, and in this sense, there are also differences in how non-confessional or integrative (in the study-of-religions sense) the politicians imagine the subject to be.

#### **Non-confessional RE – with a special place for Christianity?**

Gåsvatn of the Progress Party makes a clear statement indicating a non-confessional conceptualisation of RE, saying that it is '...not a matter of putting one specific religion qualitatively ahead of another' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). In the same way, his party colleague Anundsen says that the KRL subject '...is not to be and has never had a preaching manner. It has treated all religions with equal respect from the standpoint of their particular characteristics' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673). Thus, from their perspective, the KRL subject is understood as a non-confessional subject.

At the same time, they may also speak of the position Christianity ought to have in the subject, for instance in the way Gåsvatn does here: '... we keep and show our common Christian cultural heritage, which we are proud of' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 686). In saying this, Gåsvatn indicates that for the Progress Party, Christian cultural heritage has a special place in the subject.

Similarly, Eriksen of the Christian Democrats says that it is important to have '... good knowledge about our Christian and humanistic heritage – not in the shape of a preaching manner, but through exciting dissemination of knowledge' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). Once again, a reference is given to a particular heritage, which is held in common in Norway. This heritage is sometimes only associated with Christianity, such as in the quotes from Gåsvatn above, and sometimes together with 'humanistic', as discussed in Section 1.2.



Based on the above quotes, there appears to be a tension in the ideas offered by the opposition politicians between a general non-confessional approach to RE, with a clear ambition of treating religions qualitatively equally, and their emphasis on the role of a specific cultural heritage.

Looking at this from the perspective of Kimanen's (2015) dimensions of confessionality, it seems that the role of the cultural heritage may involve an element of identity assumption. Kimanen's (2015) observation is that in confessional subjects, assumptions are often made about the religious identities of pupils, for instance assuming them to be members of specific religious communities. Thus, an assumption is made about the religious belonging of the pupils. While there are no indications of opposition politicians assuming specific religious identities on behalf of the pupils in Norwegian education, the question is whether their emphasis on a cultural background may have something of the same function.

For instance, when Dørum of the Liberal Party says that 'we must know where we come from' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682), he is speaking of the place of the cultural heritage in the subject, and arguing that around half the time in the subject ought to be allocated to teaching about Christianity. His point, then, seems to be that the group he is speaking about, using the personal pronoun in the first-person plural, comes from something Christian. This is a kind of identity assumption, as he assumes that Christianity is a common background for everyone in the group he is speaking about.

At one level, there is no disagreement among the politicians in this debate about the relevance of Christianity for Norwegian cultural heritage, but there is a difference in how large a position this aspect of the subject is given. Here, it seems that the politicians in the opposition parties assume a higher degree of affiliation between the pupils in Norwegian education and Christianity than those representing the governing parties.

### **Non-confessional RE – for understanding religious feelings?**

Eriksen of the Christian Democrats offers another idea about RE that is relevant for the discussion of confessionality, which is to speak of 'understanding for the religious feelings' as part of the aim for RE. Is this similar to the small-c confessionality that Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013, p. 188) speak of? They say that a subject may be small-c confessional if it encourages a positive view of religion in general or intends children to develop a sense of spirituality. Is this what Eriksen's reference to 'religious feelings' is getting at?

The full sentence that Eriksen says is as follows: ‘Only through knowledge and understanding of the religious feelings may we prevent conflict’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). I take this as evidence that she is not speaking of religious feelings in a small-c confessional manner. Her point rather seems to be that religious feelings are something not everyone has an understanding of, and that the subject may enable pupils to come to understand it, with the aim of avoiding conflict between people who have such feelings and those who do not. In other words, the point does not seem to be to encourage religious feelings among pupils, or to present such feelings in a favourable light, but rather to enable people to live well together in a situation where some have what Eriksen speaks of as ‘religious feelings’.

### **Will the new subject be too theoretical?**

Eriksen also shares a worry she has about the subject that the government parties are proposing: ‘I am afraid that the subject we will get now will be heavily theorised, [as an example] the nave is no longer to be explored, but it is to be described’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). Here, it seems that Eriksen is worried that there will be a reduction of the involvement of pupils in the interaction with the content of the RE subject. From her perspective, describing is a more theoretical activity than exploring, and this is the wrong development for RE. This may indicate that she wants a higher degree of involvement of pupils in the content of the subject, which again may be conflict with a non-confessional way of doing RE. However, it may, for instance, also be a reflection of a wish for all education to be exciting and not too theoretical, so it is hard to draw a firm conclusion.

Dørum also touches on a matter that is perhaps similar when he says that he wants to commend the government for ‘reinstating the words “familiarity with”, which is something else than “knowledge” – this means that one brings along completely different dimensions in this subject...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 680). Here, the translation is a challenge. In Norwegian, Dørum is speaking about the difference between *kjennskap* and *kunnskap*. It would be possible to translate both these words as knowledge, but by rendering *kjennskap* as ‘familiarity’ I wish to reflect the aspect of personal knowledge, or perhaps intimate knowledge, that may lie in *kjennskap*. It is a word that has a stronger emotive side than *kunnskap*, and Dørum here is highlighting this difference. From his perspective, speaking of *kjennskap* in RE brings in ‘completely different dimensions’, which I interpret as a higher degree of personal involvement with the content. Thus, it seems that both Eriksen and Dørum are concerned with this aspect of RE, even if Dørum is more satisfied with what the government has done than Eriksen is.

This concern about personal involvement with the content is also relevant for the matter of confessionality and non-confessionality, as it is clear that a confessional subject sets up a higher degree of personal involvement than a non-confessional subject, for instance as Kimanen (2015) understands it. Eriksen's and Dørum's reflections on these matters thus serve as another slight counter-indicator to the general non-confessional impression given by the opposition MPs.

### **Presenting religions from the standpoint of their particular characteristics**

Another idea to be considered in light of the concept of small-c confessional RE is the discussion about presenting religions from the standpoint of their particular characteristics. This principle concerning presenting the religions in the subject had been a clause in the paragraph legislating RE since the first KRL subject in 1997, and the government parties now proposed to remove it.

This is brought up by Dørum, who opposed the removal of this clause, arguing that it was 'obvious that each religion must be [...] presented from its own viewpoint, and not the viewpoint of others' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 680). For Dørum, the situation the governing parties were now arranging for amounted to having Christianity from an Islamic perspective, which from his point of view is an obvious mistake (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 680).

Later in the debate, Dørum explicates his view on this matter by saying that when a religion or philosophy of life is to be presented in RE, that 'must pedagogically happen by taking what is told in the source writings and the documents that exist as one's starting point' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 686). Furthermore, he says that '[o]ne cannot, as a starting point, when presenting Christianity or other religions and philosophies of life, present it from any other point of view than one's own' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 687).

The reason for bringing up Dørum's statements about presenting religions in a discussion about small-c confessional RE is that he seems to presuppose that RE must either give the insider perspective from one religious tradition or use an insider perspective from another religious tradition to present it. An RE subject where only insider perspectives are used to present religious traditions may give a general impression of religion as something good or beneficial per se. This may, for instance, go along with a normative kind of RE that presupposes a positive attitude to all religious traditions and religion in general. As Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013) have pointed out, that is not the same as neutral RE, and may thus be an indication of what they call small-c confessional RE. Dørum's contributions to the debate do not offer enough material to

conclude that this is his position, but his insistence on the clause about presenting each religion from the standpoints of their particular characteristics is another counter-indicator to the main, non-confessional impression given by these politicians.

There can be no question that the opposition politicians want RE to be non-confessional, in the sense that no qualitative differentiation between religious traditions is intended. However, the emphasis on Christianity's position as cultural heritage, more personal involvement, and presenting religions from the standpoints of their particular characteristics serves to indicate that this is not as strict a non-confessional approach to RE as was seen from the governing parties.

### **Further distance to the study-of-religions approach to integrative RE**

The second distinction to be discussed as part of the analysis of ideas about RE is between integrative and separative RE, and since none of these politicians are in favour of going back to a separative model for RE, the discussion is focused on considering the opposition politicians' ideas about RE in light of integrative RE in the study-of-religions sense of the concept. To briefly recap, this is Alberts' (2007) second meaning of integrative RE, with criteria concerning the name of the subject, its concept of religion, the delineation of the subject matter, and its organisation.

In terms of the name of the subject, the politicians from the opposition parties are divided. The largest group, the Progress Party, the Conservatives, and the Christian Democrats support keeping the name KRL, including 'Christianity' at the start. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, supports the governing parties' proposal of removing 'Christianity' from the name.

From the perspective of the study-of-religions approach to RE, the name of the subject should not include references to specific religious traditions (Alberts, 2007, pp. 372–373). Thus, the main opposition's policy of keeping 'Christianity' in the name distinguishes them from this approach.

The concept of religion is a key aspect of integrative RE following the study-of-religions approach, and here it is harder to get a clear impression of the ideas in the debate. One element is how Søreide of the Conservative Party seems to speak of religions and philosophies of life as distinct entities, for instance in the following: '... knowledge about all religions and philosophies of life, but also about Christianity' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). Speaking about 'religions and philosophies of life' in the plural, and then adding Christianity, may at least be

seen as an indication of an essentialist understanding of religious traditions, where the larger traditions are thought of as distinct entities. Similarly, the use of the concept ‘world religions’ may also be an indication of the same and is here used, for instance, by Dørum of the Liberal Party (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682).

Another aspect of the concept of religion is whether emphasis is placed on religion as a historical phenomenon or as a phenomenon in the world today. Here, Eriksen of the Christian Democrats criticises the new curriculum plan for placing too much emphasis on religion as a historical phenomenon, saying that ‘... religion is much more than history, it is alive now for many. [...] There is a difference between a herbarium and a flowery meadow’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). Thus, Eriksen seems to argue for a concept of religion that emphasises contemporary expressions of religion.

As discussed in the analysis of the politicians from the governing parties, it may be asking too much of politicians to place much emphasis on a few statements mentioning religion. However, it may still be surmised that they do not express ideas indicating a concept of religion that is similar to that found in the study-of-religions approach.

With regard to the organisation of the subject, Alberts (2007, pp. 382–383) specifies that time should not be allocated among religious traditions by percentages. This is another instance where the opposition parties, with the exception of the Liberal Party, express ideas that are in clear disagreement with this approach. The Liberal Party MP Dørum is open to removing the percentages if that is required by the ECtHR but says that ‘as much time as today [ought] to be spent on Christianity’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682), which indicates that he is closer to the other opposition parties than to the governing parties in the discussion of the quantitative share of the subject allocated to teaching about Christianity.

Taken together, the main impression is that compared with what the government is proposing, the opposition parties wish to take the subject in a direction that is further away from the study-of-religions approach to integrative RE, specifically concerning the name and allotment of time in percentages. Still, there can be no doubt that they want RE to be integrative in the first sense that Alberts (2007, pp. 1–2) uses it, as they want the subject to be non-separative and non-confessional, as discussed above.

### **Learning about religion, philosophies of life and certainly Christianity**

The final part of the analysis of these politicians' ideas about RE concerns the aim of RE, understood through Kjeldsen's (2016) distinction between aims that are inherent to the subject (learning about religion) and those that are external to the subject (learning from religion), with the latter's four subcategories: social-ethical development, existential-ethical development, religious-ethical development, and analytical-critical development.

The ideas expressed by the opposition politicians concerning the inherent aims for RE are similar to what was found in the analysis of the politicians from the governing parties. Søreide of the Conservative Party says that 'it is important that pupils in Norwegian education today receive thorough and good knowledge about all religions and philosophies of life, but also about Christianity ...' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). Similarly, Gåsvatn of the Progress Party talks about what is to be in focus in the teaching in RE, listing 'knowledge about different religions, philosophies of life, ethics and humanistic values' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685).

Thus, both Søreide and Gåsvatn mention religion and philosophies of life as main content, while Gåsvatn adds ethics and 'humanistic values'. This final part is somewhat surprising, and not mentioned by anyone else, but most likely a reflection of the second part of the common expression 'Christian and humanistic values'. Sørfohn of the Christian Democrats also underlines the importance of 'necessary knowledge about our Christian and humanistic heritage' as part of what pupils are to learn about in RE.

Taken together, the ideas expressed by opposition MPs indicate an understanding of RE that emphasises learning about religion and philosophies of life, with a special emphasis on Christianity and Christian and humanistic heritage. In addition, Gåsvatn emphasises ethics and humanistic values.

### **RE for integration and ensuring common frames of reference**

Kjeldsen (2016) divides the external aims for RE, which are based on Grimmitt's (1987) notion of learning from religion, into four subcategories, the first of which is social-ethical development. These are aims that concern the pupil as part of society.

Here, the first part of the sentence quoted from Sørfohn above is relevant. He speaks of how important it is to have a subject that gives '... a common cultural frame of references, which contributes to respect between different philosophies of life' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 686). The Norwegian word *livssyn*, which I translate as 'philosophies of life', may be used both as a

reference to non-religious belief and as an umbrella term including both religious- and non-religious belief. When Sørffonn here speaks of ‘different philosophies of life’ without mentioning ‘religions’ it seems most likely that he intends it as an umbrella term. Given that interpretation, his statement indicates that he sees integrative RE as important for social-ethical development because pupils of all beliefs, religious or non-religious, will receive a common cultural frame of references by attending the same subject and learning the same things. By having everyone attend the same subject, they all acquire some of the same knowledge and perspective. From Sørffonn’s point of view, this will contribute to respect between people of different faiths.

Eriksen, also of the Christian Democrats, speaks of two aspects of RE together with the aims of social-ethical development. Firstly, she says, ‘If we are to succeed with integration in Norway, it is important to increase the knowledge about the world’s religions’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669), and secondly, ‘Only through knowledge and understanding of the religious feelings may we prevent conflict’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). Here, Eriksen ties RE to ‘integration in Norway’ and to preventing conflict. Thus, it seems that from her perspective, part of the aim with RE is to contribute to the reduction of conflict in society, and to help different groups become more integrated.

The idea of seeing RE as something that brings different kinds of people together is perhaps also expressed in the way Søreide, MP for the Conservative Party, describes the background for the first KRL subject, which was the ‘wish to create a unifying subject’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). In that way, RE may be understood as a component in a political strategy for creating togetherness in a more diverse society.

As discussed in Section 5.1, Søreide is also one of the proponents of the meta-idea that ‘[w]e must know ourselves to understand others’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). Seen as an aim for social-ethical development, the point here seems to be that by teaching children about Christianity and Christian and humanistic cultural heritage, Søreide believes that the requirement for understanding others is fulfilled, they get to know themselves. From her perspective, then, teaching about Christianity and cultural heritage is also a matter of social-ethical development.

The MP from the Liberal Party Dørum also expresses this idea, saying that ‘the living Christian humanistic cultural heritage we have [is to be] used as a tool for encountering people with a different background. And in that encounter, we shall make mutual respect’ (O.tid. (2007–

2008), p. 681). From his perspective, it is important for the aim of social-ethical development, encouraging mutual respect between people of different backgrounds, to ensure that the subject provides knowledge about cultural heritage.

Thus, the ideas in the contributions from the opposition MPs indicate that social-ethical development is an important aspect of what they see as the aim for RE. This involves providing pupils with common frames of references, increasing the knowledge about the world's religions and understanding of religious feelings, and making pupils familiar with a cultural heritage that may be used as a tool in encounters with people of other backgrounds. All of these aspects point towards encouraging greater respect across differences in beliefs, and inclusion of different groups in society.

### **Indications of wanting to support existential-ethical development?**

Moving on to external aims concerning existential-ethical development, which emphasises the individual or personal aspect of development in the subject, for instance through the concept of edification (Jackson, 1997, pp. 130–134; Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 29), there are considerably less data to be found in the debate.

The attitude of respect is, however, one indication of the kind of personal aim that goes together with the social-ethical aims described above. For instance, the quotes from Dørum above show how 'respect' is the goal for the encounter between people of different backgrounds and seen from the perspective of existential-ethical development, this may also be understood as an aim concerning the personal attitudes of pupils. They are to learn to have and show respect through having RE.

Søreide of the Christian Democrats mentions another aim that may be understood as part of existential-ethical development, saying that 'the familiarity with the Christian foundation of values and culture must not be lost' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 686). This is another instance where the Norwegian word *kjennskap* is used, and Sørffonn may have chosen it to indicate that from his perspective, this is about more than having knowledge about Christian values and culture, it is also about being familiar with it personally. If this is a correct interpretation, then it may be an aim for existential-ethical development that pupils are able to relate their understanding of ethics and values to a notion of Christian values and culture, as Sørffonn sees it.

At the same time, neither Sørffonn nor any other MPs give any indications that they want RE to be a subject that has aims concerning the pupils' personal beliefs, be they religious or non-



religious. There are no mentions of cultivating faith, existential questions to be answered, relating to one's own religiosity, or similar. Perhaps the only indication lies in how Eriksen of the Christian Democrats speak of the first KRL subject as a place to 'discuss faith', but this is in a part of a later speech where she is highlighting her party's support for a unifying subject, and not part of her reasoning for how she wants RE to be.

Thus, while drawing conclusions from a lack of evidence is difficult, it may at least be said that none of the politicians belonging to the opposition parties appear to express aims for RE that fall under Kjeldsen's subcategory of existential-religious development.

### **Knowing Christianity is vital for understanding Norwegian society**

The fourth and final subcategory of Kjeldsen's external aims is analytical-critical development, which may involve notions of religious literacy or analytical skills and reflexivity being developed through the study of religion. While none of the opposition politicians speak of religious literacy, there are indications of them having ideas about RE as a subject where pupils become adept at interpreting both history and contemporary life.

Anundsen of the Progress Party says, 'One must actually have knowledge about and understanding of Norway's Christian background and history to understand key elements in our history and in our everyday lives today' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673). Here, Anundsen is speaking of the importance of learning about Christianity and the Christian and humanistic heritage, while drawing a line to its importance for being able to interpret Norwegian history and contemporary life. His idea seems to be that this knowledge is necessary to understand Norwegian society, and in this sense, it may be interpreted as a form of analytical-critical development, especially in the sense of religious literacy. The similarity lies in how he seems to think that having knowledge about Norway's Christian background makes it possible to read and understand Norwegian society.

Similarly, MP Eriksen from the Christian Democrats argues that the governing parties' plans to reduce the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity in the subject will lead to a situation where '[f]ew will have the knowledge to understand our society's national culture and treasures' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). Again, given that knowledge about Christianity is tied to the ability to understand an important part of Norwegian culture, it may be surmised that in Eriksen's ideal RE subject, a kind of analytical-critical development for the pupils would be tied to learning about Christianity. Note, however, that the ability to interpret Norwegian life and culture is tied by both Eriksen and Anundsen specifically to learning about Christianity.

For that reason, this seems to be an idea of Christian literacy rather than religious literacy in general.

Looking at all of Kjeldsen’s categories, then, the MPs from the opposition parties argue for including knowledge about all religions and philosophies of life as part of what pupils are to learn about in RE, yet they also emphasise that just over half the time in the subject should be allocated to teaching about Christianity. Concerning the external aims, they emphasise social-ethical development. There are perhaps some indications of aims involving existential-development, and finally there appears to be an aim of a kind of Christian literacy.

### **Non-confessional RE with an emphasis on Christianity**

The ideas about RE expressed by opposition politicians point to having non-confessional, integrative RE. However, with a view to the study-of-religions approach to RE, their ideas are further from this approach than the proposals from the government. Concerning the aims of RE, they emphasise the share of time allocated to teaching about Christianity and stress the importance of social-ethical development. Some indications of aims concerning existential-ethical development were discussed, along with an apparent aim of a kind of Christian literacy.

### **5.2.3 Summary of ideas about RE in the 2008 debate**

As in Chapter 4, each section of the analysis is summarised in a table with keywords referring to ideas expressed in the contributions from these politicians.

*Table 5 Ideas about religion education in 2008*

	<b>Governing parties</b>	<b>Opposition parties</b>
<b>Confessional/non-confessional</b>	Non-confessional	Non-confessional
<b>Integrative/separative</b>	Integrative	Integrative
<b>Aims for RE</b>	Learning about religion  Supporting social-ethical development	Learning about all religions/philosophies of life, yet 55% Christianity  Emphasis on supporting social-ethical development  Existential-ethical dev.?  Christian literacy

In the comparison of these ideas, which happens in Section 6.1.2, I will discuss how my findings indicate a high level of consensus concerning the ideas about RE in this debate. In Section 6.1.3, I discuss how this forms a contrast to what was found in the analysis of the debate from 1995.

### **5.3 The relationship between religious and national identity**

This section analyses ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity expressed in the debate from 2008. Continuing the analysis from Section 5.2, the contributions to the debate are once again split in two. I analyse the contributions from the governing parties first, and then the contributions from the opposition parties. The governing parties were the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party, while the opposition consisted of the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party.

However, when looking for ideas about this topic, the different sizes of the contribution from the government parties to the debate becomes a challenge. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, politicians from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party were more active in the debate than those from the Centre Party. This is particularly challenging concerning this part of the analysis since, as will be shown, the contribution from the Centre Party MP may be indicative of a different understanding of these ideas to the other two parties. However, since the contribution from this MP is so short, it is hard to say how far this disagreement went. Therefore, when analysing contributions from the governing parties, most of the observations and conclusions in this section will refer to the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party. In addition, I will analyse the statement from the Centre Party MP and explain why his ideas seem different from those of the two other members of the government coalition.

Mirroring Section 4.3, the analysis is based on the theoretical groundwork laid down in Section 3.2. Ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity are understood through the prism of Taylor's concept of different ways of configuring this relationship, with the distinction between an integrated and a separated configuration, operationalised through four aspects, as shown by table 1, page 61.

As in Section 4.3, the analysis will be a discussion of which of the two configurations the ideas expressed by the politicians are closest to, with the aim of highlighting possible nuances between politicians in each group.

I use the aspects of the integrations to structure the analysis, beginning with the design of the state/society, and then discussing the other three aspects in turn before summarising with a general consideration of the ideas about the relationship between religious identity and belonging to the nation.

### **5.3.1 The governing parties**

Beginning with the first aspect, ideas about the design of the state or society, it seems that politicians from both the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party often include a clause about how society has changed as part of their speeches. For instance, Kjernli, the first MP to give a speech for the Labour Party, says, ‘Great changes have happened since the establishment of education and the introduction of Christianity as a compulsory subject in 1739. [...] One thing may we at least ascertain: laws have come and gone, [...] all to adapt to new facts and a new society’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). Here, Kjernli seems to draw attention to the distance in both time and social reality between Norwegian society of 1739 and that of 2008, and to the fact that laws too have been changed. He then goes on to apply this to the current debate, saying, ‘The revisions to the law we decide today contribute to a new RE subject more suitable in today’s society’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). Thus, Kjernli seems to argue that having an RE subject with less emphasis on Christianity, for instance by not referencing it in the name of the subject, and by reducing its quantitative share of teaching, is more in accordance with what Norwegian society is currently like. At the same time, he indicates that Norwegian society is different now to what it was before.

Similarly, Chaudhry of the Socialist Left Party says, ‘We live in a new society. We live with new facts that demand courage and that demand a different kind of policy today to what we had maybe ten years ago’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 688). In the same way as Kjernli, Chaudhry too highlights how Norwegian society has changed recently, and that these changes are part of the motivation for the changes to RE that the government has proposed.

I interpret their choice of speaking of change in Norwegian society as a way of indicating that Christianity now has a smaller role in society than it used to have, and that this is not something to lament. Rather it is presented as a *fait accompli*, which the politicians now have to take the consequences of, for instance by revising RE.

Sørensen, MP for the Labour Party, says that ‘Norway in the year 2008 is a multicultural society, where all religions are entitled to the same respect’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 684). By referring to Norway as multicultural, she gives an indication that for Norwegian society, no

religion may be singled out for special reverence. Therefore, I take her use of ‘multicultural’ as a label for Norwegian society as indication that she is closest to the separated configuration.

Chaudhry of the Socialist Left Party also spends time discussing the role of minorities in Norway, and relations between majority and minority. At one point he says that his ‘understanding is not that the minorities are out to dechristianise Norway or deny the country’s cultural heritage. They are only out to taking part in shaping the future, which is held in common for Christians, other new religions and groups associated with philosophies of life’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 688). Thus, he seems to indicate that from his perspective, it is not a matter of forgetting the past, or instigating a total break with what Norway or Norwegian culture and religion has traditionally been. Instead, he is concerned with pointing out that today’s situation is new, that these minorities are here, and that they have a rightful claim to take part in shaping what Norway’s future ought to be, including with regard to culture and religion. Thus, Chaudhry leaves room for saying that Christianity has a special place in Norwegian cultural heritage, while at the same time indicating that when looking forwards, the new diversity must be recognised.

#### **A different message from the Centre Party?**

Skjælaaen, the MP from the Centre Party, however, does not bring up the notion of how Norwegian society has changed, or how it is currently a multicultural society. Rather, he argues that the government’s inclusion of a section on the content and aims of RE in the Education Act ‘... provides a clear anchoring of [the notion that] the teaching in the subject shall continue to reflect Christianity’s special position in Norway, ...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 679). Thus, where at least some MPs from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party underline how the government’s changes are fitting for a new and multicultural Norway, the MP from the Centre Party draws attention to the degree to which the government’s proposal maintains Christianity’s special position instead. I take this as an indication of at least somewhat different ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity being expressed by the three parties forming the majority coalition that held government at the time of the debate. The Centre Party MP seems to place more emphasis on Christianity’s continued role and special place in Norwegian society, whereas MPs from the two other parties accentuate the difference between the past and the present instead.

However, it would be wrong to present an image of the contributions from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party that only emphasised their accentuation of a new and multicultural

Norway. In fact, they also repeatedly speak of the role of cultural heritage and the need to reflect such a heritage in RE. As an example, Kjernli of the Labour Party says, ‘We all realise that we in Norway have a heritage – humanistic and Christian – ...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670) and ‘One recognises that Norway has a long history as a Christian country, ...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). Here, Kjernli appears to express two ideas: first, that Norwegians have a heritage that is humanistic and Christian, and secondly, that Norway has a long history as a Christian country. Thus, he shows that when speaking of the heritage he describes it as humanistic and Christian, but when describing the country’s history, he only refers to Christianity. Of the two statements, the concept of heritage may be understood to refer to something that is currently valid. It appears to refer to something held in common by contemporary Norwegians. On the other hand, pointing to a history as a ‘Christian country’ may also be an indication that such a label is only historically accurate, and may not be used to describe the country today. If this is a correct interpretation, then it seems that Kjernli uses ‘Christian’ together with ‘humanistic’ to describe that which is currently valid, whereas the reference to Christianity alone belongs to history.

The Minister of Education, Solhjell from the Socialist Left Party, talks about the clause in the curriculum plan saying that Christianity is to have the largest share of time in the subject (replacing the former allotment in percentages) and that it ‘underlines what Christianity means in Norway, historically and as cultural heritage’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682). Here, Solhjell uses the present tense in describing Christianity’s meaning in Norway, and then points to its historical meaning and the concept of cultural heritage. Therefore, it seems possible to interpret him, along the same lines as Kjernli, as signalling that Christianity has one meaning that is more or less confined to history, and another, contemporarily relevant, that is tied to its function as part of cultural heritage.

Kjernli also distances the governing parties from what the main opposition parties are arguing, by saying that he ‘observes that it has symbolic significance for the Christian Democratic Party, the Progress Party, and the Conservative Party to give Christianity a unique position in the name of the subject. It does not hold such a significance for the governing parties’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). This is another way in which he signals that showing symbolic reverence for Christianity is not the government’s policy, at least not to the extent that it is for these opposition parties.

### **The significance of human rights**

In addition to emphasising the changes to Norwegian society, the politicians from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party also appear to be concerned with pointing to human rights as a framework for the state. Kjernli, for instance, speaks highly of the tradition Norway has for ‘holding human rights in high regard’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). In his speech, he spends a full section dwelling on the significance of human rights, telling the story from 1948 and onwards. In conclusion he says, ‘It is a victory for humanity that we have international rules of law and binding agreements that regulate how states are to treat their inhabitants when it comes to basic rights and freedoms’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). Thus, Kjernli hails the concept of human rights as a victory for humanity as a whole.

When analysing ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, it is also interesting to note his discussion on the role of religion in the making of the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Kjernli mentions the question of referring to a specific religion as one of the challenges facing the leaders at the time, and points to the fact that ‘[w]hat they did was to drop the reference to a specific form of religion, precisely because it was to be universal rights that were valid for everyone, independently of religion and philosophies of life’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). Kjernli does not himself draw the line from his recounting of the history from 1948 and how he sees matters of religious and national identity in Norway in 2008, but he seems to be bringing this element forth as something good, and something that he supports. I therefore take it as further evidence of him being closer to the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity.

MPs representing the Socialist Left Party, such as Jensen, also stress the significance of human rights, for instance by reminding the Storting that ‘the ECtHR is above Norwegian law’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 677), and by repeating and underlining words such as ‘violate’ and ‘necessary’ when speaking about the judgement against Norway (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 677). Jensen also appears to show the high regard she has for human rights by speaking of having an RE subject that ‘will build up human rights’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). It is not immediately clear what she means by this phrase, but it seems that she believes that the new RE subject will have a positive effect on human rights in Norway, and that this is one of its hallmarks.

Given how the politicians from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party speak of human rights it is worth considering whether the concept of human rights may serve as a kind of philosophical belief that is tied to belonging to the nation, in accordance with a more integrated

way of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity. In other words, might a reverence for human rights function in a way that is similar to how Christianity may have functioned in former Norwegian integrations of the relationship between being Christian and being Norwegian?

Kjernli speaks of having a high regard for human rights as a tradition ‘we’ have, and it seems that the ‘we’ he is referring to is all Norwegians, as it was used in the previous sentence together with ‘in Norway’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). Does that indicate that he finds a reverence for human rights to be part of what is Norwegian? A reason for not ascribing that high a significance to this statement is that when he later speaks of the history of human rights, he does not speak of human rights in Norway, or what it could mean for Norway. Therefore, it seems better to understand his and the other Labour and Socialist Left Party politicians as being closer to the separated configuration, and that the reverence for human rights fits with that, since Kjernli stresses how they are independent of any religious belief or philosophy of life.

Taken together, the contributions from the politicians representing the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party seem closer to the separative configuration than the integrated when it comes to the design of the state or society. They refer to Christianity having a special place in Norwegian society as a thing of the past, with the exception of its function as cultural heritage. However, in that function, they do not refer to Christianity alone, but rather together with a reference to humanism. This is also an indication that they do not see it fit to tie the design of Norwegian society to a specific belief.

The MP representing the Centre Party in the debate makes a much smaller contribution but gives at least some indication that he sees things differently, as he stresses how continuation of the special position of Christianity is ensured by the government’s proposal.

### **Emphasis on individuals – indicative of a separated configuration?**

Moving on to the three next aspects in the table summarising the configurations, the role of the individual, moral language, and religious identity, there are far fewer relevant ideas to find in the debate. Therefore, the following discussion of these three aspects is more a matter of seeing how the few statements that have been analysed match the indications given in the analysis of the first aspect.

As regards the role of the individual, it appears relevant to note the Socialist Left Party MP Elvik’s criticism of how MP Dørum of the Liberal Party speaks of oneself and others that was



discussed at the end of Section 5.1.1. As quoted there, she says in the debate that she thinks ‘...it is a bit strange that the Liberal Party has a need to speak of oneself and others, that is, we and them, an old dichotomy that we have worked hard to do away with’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 681). I take this as an indication that she also objects to grouping people together as is done when the terms ‘we and them’ are used. Dørum did not use those exact words, but Elvik interprets his use of ‘oneself and others’ to mean the same thing, and objects to it. This may be an expression of a wish to signal high regard for individuals as their own sovereigns, instead of allowing phrases like ‘us and them’ to group them together. At the same time, this is not strong evidence to draw conclusions from, as Elvik does not elaborate her point beyond the criticism of Dørum.

Another potential indication of the politicians representing the governing parties having a high regard for individuals as sovereign in these matters may be how Kjernli argues that the ‘revisions we propose are good to ensure [...] respect for each individual’s faith and conviction’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). Here, Kjernli emphasises individuals in a way that also indicates that that is the level of society that he is most concerned with when it comes to religious identity. He could, for instance, have spoken about respect for religious traditions per se, or religious groups, but instead he says ‘each individual’s’, which fits with imagining the relationship between religious and national identity in accordance with the separated configuration.

MP Jensen also points to individuals when talking about what the Socialist Left Party is concerned with in education, saying, ‘[W]e shall have subjects that build up every single child’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). Thus, she too uses language that indicates that individuals are important from her perspective.

### **Values as a foundation – together with cultural heritage?**

When it comes to moral language, one statement from the politicians belonging to the governing parties stands out. Sørensen, MP for the Labour Party, reacts to criticism saying that the government is scared of taking a stand in matters of values, and responds by saying, ‘It is exactly values such as equality, tolerance, and respect for basic human rights that serve as the foundation for our view, together with Christian and humanistic cultural heritage and tradition’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), pp. 684–685). Here, Sørensen engages in a discussion that is partly about moral language. She rejects the accusation from the opposition and names values that ‘serve as the foundation for our view’. These values are equality, tolerance, and respect for human rights.

Furthermore, she says that this serves as the foundation ‘together with Christian and humanistic cultural heritage and tradition’.

Here, it seems that by listing specific values first, and saying that they function as a foundation, Sørensen sets up the values separately of the Christian and humanistic cultural heritage and tradition she mentions next. In the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, moral language is relative or subject, which means that it is open to different ways of justifying values. Sørensen’s statement seems to fit this description, as she is stating that the values serve as a foundation without saying that they are based on Christian and humanistic cultural heritage and tradition. Instead, they function as a foundation ‘together with’ this cultural heritage and tradition. I therefore take this expression of moral language as another indication of a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity among the government politicians.

Finally, I wish to revisit the statement from Kjernli concerning religious identity quoted above. It is the only instance where a politician representing the governing parties mentions ‘faith’. Kjernli spoke of ‘respect for each individual’s faith and conviction’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). Is this indicative of understanding religious identity as a matter of mandatory choice within a national framework, or rather of seeing it as a reflection of experienced authentic meaning? Indeed, both an integrated and a separated configuration could be reflected by having respect for each individual’s faith, and so this statement alone could not support a conclusion in either direction concerning this aspect. However, when seen in the light of the other aspects, it is worth noting that it also fits the general impression of how the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party appear to imagine the relationship between religious and national identity in a way that is most similar to the separated configuration.

### **A separated configuration to fit the times**

The few statements that have been analysed concerning the role of the individual, moral language, and religious identity support the general impression from the analysis of the design of the state/society: the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party appear to understand the relationship between religious and national identity in a separated way, where no religious belief is given a special position when belonging to the nation is in question. At the same time, they still see Christianity as a part of Norwegian cultural heritage, but not enough to warrant the same kind of special position that it has held previously.

The Centre Party MP does not contribute at lot to the debate, and for that reason it is much harder to draw conclusions. Still, the statement that was analysed indicated that Skjælaaen emphasised different aspects of the government's proposal, and therefore it appears that the Centre Party MPs saw these matters differently to their colleagues in the government coalition. Their position may seem to be more in line with an integrated configuration but given the brevity of their contribution it seems best to leave it at that.

### **5.3.2 The opposition parties**

The analysis of ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity will once again start with the ideas about the design of the state or society. In regard to this aspect, MP Gåsvatn of the Progress Party appears to emphasise the role of Christianity in Norwegian history. In his speech, he talks about what the consequences would have been 'had Christianity not been brought into the country' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). Among these consequences, Gåsvatn says, 'We had not emerged as a joint nation, and there had absolutely not been a foundation for our forefathers to be able to pass a Norwegian constitution...' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). Here, Gåsvatn ties the introduction of Christianity to Norway to two major events in Norwegian history. The first is the emergence of Norway as a nation in its own right and the second is the passing of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814, which may serve as a symbol of the birth of the modern Norwegian nation. I take this as an indication that Gåsvatn's way of imagining the relationship between religious and national identity is closer to an integrated configuration. For him, it seems that both the emergence of the historical Norwegian nation and the inauguration of what became modern Norway are tied to the religious tradition of Christianity.

Furthermore, Gåsvatn also says, 'The Christian cultural historical heritage has served as a foundation wall for our development of a democratic, free and well-functioning society' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). In saying this, he ties a notion of Christianity understood as heritage to three hallmarks of Norwegian society today: it is a democratic society, a free country, and well-functioning. Gåsvatn has previously mentioned that some international reports found Norway to be 'one of the world's best countries in which to live' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685) and says that he 'dares to claim that Norway would never have experienced such a status if it had not been precisely due to our Christian cultural heritage' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). Thus, Gåsvatn also ties the nature and characteristics of Norwegian society to the religious tradition of Christianity. For that reason, it seems reasonable to say that from Gåsvatn's perspective, Christianity has played a major part in the design of both the Norwegian state and society.

The other opposition MPs do not express ideas that are as easily relatable to Taylor's concept as Gåsvatn concerning these issues, but the ideas expressed by most of them appear to go in the same direction. Anundsen, also an MP for the Progress Party speaks of 'the value foundation that Norway in the main is built on', apparently with reference to Christianity functioning as 'our nation's traditional cultural heritage' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 672). Eriksen, of the Christian Democrats, speaks of having a subject that is clear '... on what our nation has been and has been shaped by' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 689) and Søreide of the Conservative Party speaks of Christianity as something that has 'taken part in shaping Norway through a millennial tradition and heritage' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675). Thus, references to Christianity as something shaping the Norwegian nation, or that the Norwegian nation is built on, are made by most of the opposition MPs.

In addition to speaking of Christianity in this way, the opposition politicians also sometimes include 'humanistic' as part of the cultural heritage. In one of these instances, Anundsen of the Progress Party also talks about the relationship between Christianity and humanism as cultural heritage, speaking of 'centuries of Christian tradition, later supplemented by a humanistic value perspective' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 672). This statement is an indication that while the opposition politicians may make several references to Christianity, they are not to be interpreted too strictly. This appears to be an understanding of Christian tradition that is flexible enough for Anundsen to say that it was supplemented by 'a humanistic value perspective'.

As regards the aspect of the design of the state or society, Dørum of the Liberal Party represents something of an exception among the opposition politicians. He speaks quite a lot about Christianity and its importance as cultural heritage but does not appear to tie this cultural heritage to the development and shaping of the Norwegian nation. In Dørum's contribution to the debate, the relationship between cultural heritage and Norwegian society almost seems opposite to that expressed by his opposition colleagues. Dørum says that the cultural heritage 'is developed in our society over a long time' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 680). Thus, instead of saying that Norwegian society is shaped by a specific cultural heritage, Dørum seems to be saying that it is the cultural heritage that is shaped by Norwegian society. At the same time, Dørum also praises the government for speaking of Christianity as cultural heritage in the present tense, which means that 'it is presented as something that is alive, that is active' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 680). Thus, it may seem that while Dørum does not emphasise Christianity or Christian cultural heritage as something that has influenced the design of the Norwegian state or society, he does see it as a vital element in Norwegian society today.

### **Assuming a group identity for the individuals?**

The second aspect of the configurations of the relationship between religious and national identity is the role of the individual. Separated configurations place more emphasis on individuals as sovereign and independent, whereas integrated configuration tends more to see individuals as part of a specific social framework. As with the governing politicians, there is considerably less data concerning this aspect than the previous one. Therefore, the analysis is more about considering how statements here may fit impressions from the analysis of the previous aspect.

Anundsen of the Progress Party says of the RE subject that ‘it has been important to contribute to giving the pupils insight into and understanding of the tradition they are a part of’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673). Here, Anundsen is talking about the allocation of time to teaching about Christianity in the subject, and for that reason it seems fair to interpret the ‘tradition’ he is talking about as being a Christian tradition. Thus, what he is saying indicates that from his perspective, all pupils in Norway, or at least the large majority of them, are part of a Christian tradition. This is an idea that seems to fit well with the impression of an integrated configuration from Anundsen.

### **The opposition as an alternative in an upcoming election of values**

The third aspect is moral language, where it is expected that politicians who have an integrated configuration use language associated with the belief that is tied to belonging to the nation to speak of morality, whereas those with a more separated configuration speak of morality in a way that leaves more room for relative and subjective perspectives. When Gåsvatn is speaking about the different consequences of Christianity being brought into the country, he also says, ‘If Christianity had not been brought into the country, we would perhaps still be running around and beating each other to death or throwing rocks at each other’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). Here, Gåsvatn ties the introduction of Christianity to Norway to changes in how people behave, which may be understood as a matter of morality. This fits well with the impression above that Gåsvatn expresses ideas along the lines of the integrated configuration.

His party colleague Anundsen speaks of ‘an election of values’ with reference to the general election that was to be held the following year. This election, he says, will be between ‘us who dare to say something about which values this society is to be built on – centuries of Christian tradition, later supplemented by a humanistic value perspective – and those who contribute to demolishing the value foundation of the nation’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 672). Here, Anundsen

paints a picture of two alternatives in Norwegian party politics, where he represents a group that believes that Norwegian society should be built on Christian tradition supplemented by a humanistic value perspective, while the governing parties are cast as something that with regard to values is a destructive force. Thus, Anundsen too is tying Norwegian values to a specific notion of tradition and heritage, in line with an integrated configuration.

Anundsen also ties Christianity to values in education by saying, ‘The government’s proposal of a new objects clause for education will also contribute to undermining Christianity’s significance as a supplier of terms for values that are to be reflected in education...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673). In this case, Christianity is tied to values in Norwegian education, which indicates that it is to have a continued and active role in Norwegian morality.

### **A different perspective from the Liberal Party**

Dørum of the Liberal Party, however, appears to see things differently. He talks about how people in the Norwegian society are different, and that the Liberal Party believes in being ‘able to live with each other around absolutely key common values, as for instance will be expressed when we discuss the objects clause later...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 681). Thus, instead of referring to cultural heritage or Christian tradition as something that unites people, Dørum refers to ‘key common values’ and ties this to the debate about the objects clause.

For that reason, it appears that Dørum and Anundsen see the government’s proposal of a new objects clause in different lights. At the time of the debate, the proposal from the Bostad committee (NOU 2007:6) was known. With a view to moral language as an aspect of the configuration of relationship between religious and national identity, the point is that, as mentioned in Section 3.3.2, the proposal for a new objects clause from the committee said that education was to build on a list of specific values, and then said that these values could be expressed in different traditions. This appears to be similar to what Dørum is saying, that living together in society happens ‘around ... common values’, whereas Anundsen is more concerned with saying what the origins of the value foundation for Norwegian society ought to be. Therefore, it seems that while Anundsen is expressing ideas along the lines of the integrated configuration, Dørum may be interpreted as understanding the relationship between religious and national identity in a more separated way.

### **Christian identity assumption as evidence of the integrated configuration?**

The final aspect of the configurations of this relationship is religious identity, and while none of the opposition politicians speak directly about people’s religious identity, they express some

ideas that make it possible to discuss how they relate to the two configurations in this aspect as well.

When discussing this aspect, the meta-idea about knowing ourselves to understand others, as, for instance, expressed by Søreide of the Conservative Party, seems relevant. She seems to say this as a reason for keeping the allotment of time in the subject as it is, which means spending 55% of the time in the subject on teaching about Christianity. When ‘knowing ourselves’ is used as a reason for spending a lot of time teaching about Christianity, it indicates that all the pupils, or at least a large majority of them, have a relationship with Christianity. As discussed before, it assumes that people’s identities in some ways are tied to the religious tradition of Christianity. That kind of assumption is very hard to imagine in a separated configuration, since it is based on where one grows up and the history of one’s country, rather than authentic experiences of meaning.

At the same time, it seems important to note that Søreide does not elaborate on this and does not spend a lot of time talking about it, and for that reason, it should perhaps not be emphasised. One could, for instance, imagine that while Søreide sees some form of bond between Christianity and people growing up in Norway, she would perhaps not have referred to this bond as their religious identity. However, the point here is that just having such a bond and tying it to ‘knowing ourselves’ is hard to combine with a separated configuration.

### **An integrated configuration – but quite open?**

The main impression from the analysis of the four aspects is that politicians from the Progress Party, the Conservative Party and the Christian Democrats express ideas that are closer to an integrated configuration, whereas the Liberal Party seems closer to the separated configuration. However, it seems relevant to point out that among the three parties closest to the integrated configuration, the Progress Party seems to be so most clearly. The statements by Gåsvatn are the easiest to align with an integrated configuration, while for instance Søreide of the Conservative Party is less so.

Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss what kind of integrated configuration this appears to be. As an example, it is worth noting how Gåsvatn of the Progress Party describes the Norwegian constitution from 1814 that according to him would have been impossible to pass if Christianity had not been introduced to Norwegian shores some 900 years before. He speaks of ‘a Norwegian constitution that was set up with a view to generosity concerning freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the rule of law’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). Thus, it appears that from

his perspective, Christianity served as a foundation for openness, justice, and intellectual freedom. In other words, he does not appear to refer to Christianity as something strict offering a dogmatic base for how people should live and what they ought to believe. Rather, Christianity for him appears to be the source of freedom. This shows that the integration that Gåsvatn is speaking of is quite an open one. It involves tying the nation to a specific belief, while also assuming that people have a large degree of freedom both with regard to how they choose to live their lives and what they believe.

### 5.3.3 Summary of ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity in the 2008 debate

Here follows the table with the keywords summarising the ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity expressed in the contributions from these politicians:

*Table 6 Ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity in 2008*

	<b>Governing parties</b>	<b>Opposition parties</b>
<b>The Relationship between religious and national identity</b>	Labour and The Socialist Left Party: Separated  Centre Party: Not clear. Perhaps integrated.	Progress Party, Conservatives, and Christian Democrats: integrated  Liberal Party: separated?

In the comparison of these ideas, which happens in Section 6.2.2, I will discuss how most of the politicians from the governing parties and the opposition appear to have different ways of understanding role of Christianity and humanism in the design of Norwegian society. Furthermore, in Section 6.2.3, I observe that, as in 1995, ideas that could be associated with both the separated and the integrated configuration was expressed in the debate.

## 5.4 The purpose of education

The third and final part of the analysis of the debate from 2008 concerns ideas about the purpose of education, seen through the tension between the Norwegian objects clauses of education and the ideas associated with global education policy. This tension was explored in Section 3.3, which also established that the growing influence of global education policy in Norway has been well documented. In 2008, when this debate is set, it may be expected that such ideas are shared among the politicians in the debate.



The analytical interest is, in this instance, particularly geared towards the comparison between the ideas expressed in the debate in 1995 and this one. The task here will therefore be to describe ideas that are expressed about the purpose of education with a view to contrasting them with the corresponding ideas described in the analysis of the debate from 1995, which will happen in Section 6.3.3.

The analysis is structured in a similar way to Sections 5.2 and 5.3, having divided the contributions from the politicians in two. The ideas expressed by politicians belonging to the governing parties, the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party are analysed first, while the ideas from politicians representing the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberal Party follow.

In the summer of 2008, when this debate was held, the objects clause for Norwegian education was being revised. The Green Paper committee led by Bostad had published their report the previous year (NOU 2007:6), and the government had presented their first proposal for a new objects clause, which was nearly identical to the one proposed by the Bostad committee. However, according to statements in the debate analysed here, the government had since made it known that they were open to reconsidering the phrasing of the objects clause (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673). Consequently, what was to be the new objects clause for Norwegian education was not yet finalised at the time of this debate, while both the proposals from the Bostad committee and the government were known.

#### **5.4.1 The governing parties**

With regard to education, the Socialist Left Party MP Jensen says that her party ‘... has always been concerned with having subjects in education that [...] build up every single child, and that forges togetherness and builds bridges’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). Thus, she emphasises the importance of each individual child, and ties education to the task of keeping society together. I take the use of the phrase ‘build up every single child’ as an indication of a perspective on education and human development. Instead of emphasising the ideas associated with global education policy, such as the dissemination of knowledge, learning, or achieving competence aims, Jensen may here be bringing in a broader perspective on human development, where education is about developing the entire person. Furthermore, the phrase ‘builds bridges’ appears to assume chasms over which such bridges must be built, and for that reason it seems that Jensen’s vision for education has a built-in sense of diversity in Norway.

This point is also supported by the way she ends her main speech in the debate, claiming that one of the tasks for politicians is ‘to create an inclusive comprehensive school where we are concerned with that which binds us together’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). By speaking of an inclusive comprehensive school, Jensen appears to refer to Norwegian public education as an institution that is intended to encompass every Norwegian pupil, and then, by being concerned with what ‘binds us together’, she seems to indicate that an important part of the purpose of education is to forge togetherness in society.

Looking at Jensen’s statement with a view to the objects clause of 1998 and the one proposed by the Bostad committee in 2007, there are similarities. For instance, the objects clause of 1998 included a passage saying that education was to ‘support a common foundation of knowledge, culture and values in the population’ (Innst. O. nr. 70 (1997–98), p. 36), which is similar to Jensen’s aim of ‘forging togetherness’.

When looking for other ideas about education in general that are similar to the objects clauses in this debate, the following statement from MP Sørensen may be singled out: ‘It is [...] values such as equality, tolerance, and respect for basic human rights that serve as the foundation for our view, together with Christian and humanistic cultural heritage and tradition’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), pp. 684–685). Here, Sørensen appears to build on values in a way that is similar to the one found in the proposal for a new objects clause given by the Bostad committee in 2007. As discussed in Section 3.3.2, that objects clause said that education was to build on values, such as equality, and linked these values to human rights. In addition, there is a reference to Christian and humanistic tradition, which matches the second part of the quote from Sørensen. I take this as an indication that Sørensen, as a Labour Party MP, expresses a value-oriented perspective on education that is parallel to the one expressed by the Bostad committee.

The other MP from the Labour Party who makes speeches in the debate, Kjernli, does not express ideas that directly concern education in general, but a comparison of the ideas he expresses about the RE subject with Jensen’s ideas about education in general appears to indicate that he shares her perspectives. For instance, Kjernli refers to the government’s changes as ‘... the changes that are to contribute to a more unifying and inclusive subject’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 671). Thus, where Jensen spoke of an education that is inclusive and forges togetherness, Kjernli may speak of an RE subject that is unifying and inclusive. In this instance, it appears that the MPs from Labour and the Socialist Left Party are expressing some of the same ideas about RE and education in general.

### **Competence aims in curriculum plans as a way of governing education**

Another aspect of education that several politicians representing the governing parties mention has to do with the role of curriculum plans and the competence aims set within them. As mentioned in Section 1.2, Norwegian education went through a major reform in the years prior to this debate, where one of the key changes was the new concept of competence aims. Previous curriculum plans had listed specific content that the pupils were to learn. The new curriculum plans from the reform, which for the most part came in 2006, listed competence aims instead, with the intention of leaving teachers with the freedom to find the appropriate content for enabling their pupils to achieve these aims.

In this debate, there are several references to curriculum plans with competence aims as key policy documents in education. The Minister of Education, Solhjell, for instance, says ‘Today we are in the special situation that competence aims in all subjects govern what the pupils are to learn’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 683). While it may be hard to say why he refers to this situation as ‘special’, it is clear that he ascribes a key role to the competence aims in Norwegian education.

Solhjell’s party colleague Jensen also speaks of curriculum plans and competence aims, saying (of the government’s revision of the RE subject), ‘We keep the curriculum plan and it is the curriculum plan that is governing within all subjects’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). In her speech, she mentions the competence aims when discussing the removal of the allotment in percentages of time devoted to teaching about Christianity. She then says, ‘[T]he actual use of time with regard to the competence aims may be shifted. That means that one in a school will be able to spend more time on any subject one wishes, as long as one achieves the competence aims in the curriculum. That is after all the intention with the whole curriculum plan: one is to achieve the competence aims one has set, [...]. It must be a relief for schools not to have to use a stopwatch in the teaching in the new RE subject’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 677). Here Jensen draws attention to several aspects of the education reform of 2006. By replacing items listing content with competence aims, individual schools were to become freer to spend time as they saw fit, as long as they achieved the aims that were set for them in the curriculum plan. Thus, she perhaps gives something of a caricature of what she sees as the old regime, where the time in RE was allotted in percentages, when she speaks of having to use a stopwatch to keep track. She also highlights the new freedom of the schools in the following way: ‘After the change schools will be completely free to choose how to achieve the aims in the curriculum plan. They

will be able to choose which methods they want to use, which teaching aids they want to use, and how much time they wish to use on the different aspects' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 677). Thus, from her perspective it appears that having education be governed by competence aims is a way of making individual schools freer.

I take the expression of these ideas as an indication of the influence of global education policy. In particular, the way Jensen is speaking about curriculum plans and competence aims is clearly reminiscent of the principle of accountability. When clear aims are set for schools in curriculum plans, it also becomes possible to hold them accountable for achieving these goals, as discussed in Section 3.3.1.

When it comes to the Centre Party, the brevity of their contribution again makes it hard to describe their ideas. Skjælaaen, the only MP from the party who is active in the debate, does mention competence aims, however, saying that '... there will still be room for local variations in the actual distribution [of time] between the main topics in the teaching to achieve these competence aims' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 679). Here, Skjælaaen is talking about the quantitative differentiation of the main topic Christianity. In his speech, he appears to be interested in highlighting that the quantitative differentiation of Christianity is continued, even if it is reduced from the former 55% allotment. When considering his ideas about education, though, the main point is that he too refers to the competence aims as the goal of teaching, as that which the teaching is to achieve. Thus, his way of speaking about this appears to fall in line with the ideas found among the Socialist Left Party politicians above.

### **Tension between value-founded education and accountability-oriented governing**

The ideas expressed by politicians from the governing parties may be described as having two sides to them. On the one hand, education is cast as a value-founded, inclusive, and unifying institution in society, more or less in line with the image of education found in the proposal for a new objects clause from the Bostad committee; on the other, the way some of these politicians speak of curriculum plans and competence aims may be taken as an indication of the influence of utility-oriented, global education, allowing for an accountability-oriented way of governing education.

### **5.4.2 The opposition parties**

MP Gåsvatn of the Progress Party says in his speech that '...there is cross-party agreement that knowledge is to have the main focus in Norwegian education' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685). This statement appears as part of a line of reasoning for not having a preaching manner of

teaching in the RE subject. In other words, ‘knowledge’ here appears as the antithesis to a preaching manner, perhaps indicating an idea about knowledge as something objective.

The word ‘knowledge’ is used several times by MPs from the opposition parties. For instance, both Søreide of the Conservative Party, and Sørfohn of the Christian Democrats use it. Søreide speaks of how it is ‘important that pupils in Norwegian education today receive thorough and good knowledge about all religions and philosophies of life...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 675) and Sørfohn says that ‘knowledge about Christianity must have plenty of space in education’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 686). Anundsen of the Progress Party also uses this word, saying that ‘[o]ne must actually have knowledge about and understanding of Norway’s Christian background and history, ...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673). For all of these three, the word ‘knowledge’ appears to be used to refer to what pupils are to gain in education.

The Norwegian education reform of 2006, which was mentioned in the analysis of the ideas from the governing parties, was called ‘The Knowledge Promotion Reform’, and in a similar vein the word ‘knowledge’ was used in several instances, including the renaming of the Ministry of Education, which became the Ministry of Knowledge. The frequent use of the word ‘knowledge’ as the core element in education may therefore be taken as an indication of the influence of the education reform of 2006 and subsequently global education policy, which was a key inspiration for the reform.

### **A room for more than theoretical knowledge in education?**

However, other ideas about education and knowledge also appear to be expressed by opposition politicians. As touched upon in the analysis of ideas about RE, MP Dørum of the Liberal Party praises the governing parties for ‘reinstating the words “familiarity with”, which is something different to “knowledge” – this means that one brings along completely different dimensions in this subject...’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 680). Thus, Dørum indicates that from his perspective, speaking of ‘knowledge’ is not enough. The Norwegian word *kjennskap*, which I translate as ‘familiarity’, is close to ‘knowledge’ in meaning, but perhaps slightly more personally involving, and thus less objective. Dørum also speaks of the encounter between ‘all the great world religions’ in Norwegian society and says that ‘There is also to be a pedagogical encounter’ (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682). It is hard to say what Dørum means by ‘pedagogical’ in this instance, but perhaps he is referring to an encounter that is to lead to learning?

As discussed in the analysis in Section 5.2, Eriksen, MP for the Christian Democrats, expresses a concern about the signals sent in the new curriculum plan for RE, saying that she is ‘afraid

that the subject we will get now will be heavily theorised ... the nave is no longer to be explored, but it is to be described' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). This refers specifically to what goes on in RE, but when considering ideas about education in general, it seems that it may also be indicative of some of the same ideas as Dørum about the level of personal involvement. Eriksen is sorry to see the word 'explore' being replaced with 'describe', since, from her perspective, it leads to a more 'theorised' subject. I interpret this as a signal that she wants education to be about more than objective knowledge, and also involve an element of personal involvement.

Above, I analysed Gåsvatn's reference to a cross-party agreement that knowledge is to be the main focus of education, used as part of the reasoning for not having a preaching manner of teaching in RE, to indicate an understanding of knowledge as something objective. In contrast to this statement, it seems that Eriksen and Dørum are more inclined to highlight personal and subjective aspects of what goes on in education. At the same time, it also seems possible to harmonise the statements. Gåsvatn speaks of a 'main focus', and Eriksen uses the word 'knowledge' several times to refer to what pupils ought to gain in education (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 669). Therefore, it seems best to tone down the impression of a disagreement between them, and rather see Eriksen's and Dørum's statements as expressions of nuances, or different emphases, in the ideas about education offered by opposition politicians.

### **Education as a value-founded endeavour**

Another aspect of education that is given attention by opposition politicians is its value foundation. For instance, Anundsen says of his party, 'For the Progress Party it is important that one shall not reduce the place Christian and humanistic heritage has ...' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 673), and Søreide of the Conservative Party talks of '...a difference in opinion between the opposition parties and the governing parties concerning the emphasis of Norway's Christian and humanistic heritage' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 676). Both of these politicians also refer to the fact that the entire Storting had agreed upon a reference to Christian and humanistic heritage in the recent revision of the Constitution, as mentioned in Section 1.2. Anundsen says, 'The insight into the value foundation we unanimously decided to support in the new §2 of the Constitution does not receive room to grow further in education through the new subject', and in a subsequent reply speech this is tied to the Bostad committee's proposal of a new objects clause, which Anundsen says 'completely erases that which has been the Christian and humanistic value foundation in Norwegian education' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 674). Thus, Anundsen, and, in a different way, Søreide, signal that they see the government's proposal for a new RE subject as a reduction of the significance of education's value foundation.

Furthermore, Anundsen ties this to the government's new proposal for an objects clause, based on the proposal from the Bostad committee.

Thus, it seems that compared with the Bostad committee's proposal of basing education on a list of values, Anundsen wants to tie values in education directly to an expression of a Norwegian value tradition instead, as the Storting did in the revision of the Constitution, referring to Christian and humanistic heritage.

### **What about the competence aims?**

The prevalence of ideas about curriculum plans and competence aims in the contributions from politicians representing the governing parties indicates that it is relevant to look for such ideas among the opposition politicians too.

However, where politicians such as Jensen and Solhjell from the Socialist Left Party repeatedly refer to curriculum plans, competence aims and their role in education, the opposition politicians rarely do so. Furthermore, in one instance where an opposition politician actually does refer to competence aims, it seems to be with a different understanding. Eriksen of the Christian Democrats says, '[W]e have had an imbalance between competence aims and allotment in percentages. [...] [The opposition] says that that means that the competence aims must be adjusted according to the allotment in percentages' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 670). Here, Eriksen is referring to how the politicians from the governing parties have said that the competence aims should take precedence as a reason for removing the allotment of time in percentages and offers her own solution to the problem they pose. In doing so, she indicates that from her perspective, the allotment in percentages is more important than the current set of competence aims, and accordingly that the competence aims in RE should be revised to reflect the allotment in percentages she supports.

### **Tension between insisting on knowledge and emphasising a value foundation**

The ideas analysed with a view to the purpose of education here indicates that the opposition politicians emphasise 'knowledge' as a key aim for education. MP Gåsvatn spoke of knowledge in a way that seemed to understand it as something objective, opposite of having a preaching manner, whereas Dørum and Eriksen brought more personally involving aspects. Furthermore, the opposition politicians expressed several ideas concerning the value foundation of education, and how it ought to be tied to Christian and humanistic heritage, in keeping with the agreed revision of the Norwegian Constitution.

### 5.4.3 Summary of ideas about the purpose of education in the 2008 debate

Here follows the table with the keywords summarising the ideas about the purpose of education expressed in the contributions from these politicians:

*Table 7 Ideas about the purpose of education in 2008*

	<b>Governing parties</b>	<b>Opposition parties</b>
<b>The purpose of education</b>	Education is a value founded, inclusive, and unifying institution in society.  Education is about achieving competence aims specified in curriculum plans.	Education is about attaining knowledge.  Education ought to have a value foundation tied to Christian and humanistic heritage.

In the comparison of these ideas, which happens in Section 6.3.2, I will discuss how both groups of politicians appear to express, on the one hand, ideas about the role of values in education, and on the other, ideas that apparently reflect the influence of global education policy. Furthermore, the differences in the role of values in the purpose of education between these politicians and the ones active in 1995 is discussed in Section 6.3.3.



## **6 Comparing ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education**

The purpose of this chapter is to complete the analysis by comparing the ideas identified in the two debates analysed in Chapters 4 and 5. The observations drawn from the comparison will then serve as the foundation for the discussion of the research questions in Chapter 7.

As presented in Section 2.2, the comparison is structured in two ways. First, it follows the division of the analysis into three topics. Ideas about RE are compared first (Section 6.1), then ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity (Section 6.2), and finally ideas about the purpose of education (Section 6.3). Secondly, it is organised by different kinds of comparison. For each topic, I first compare the ideas expressed in the 1995 debate, then the ideas expressed in the 2008 debate, and finally the ideas expressed in 1995 and 2008. The first part of the comparison follows the structure of the analysis. Therefore, in the comparison of ideas about RE, matters of confessionality are compared first, then the distinction between separative and integrative RE, and finally ideas about different aims for the subject. The comparison of ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity follow the aspects of the two configurations established in Section 3.2.2. The analysis of ideas about the purpose of education was not structured in the same way, and for that reason the comparison is also different. Here, the comparison starts by recapping the key ideas described in the analysis, before discussing the similarities and differences within the debates in more detail. Then, as the third part of each section, following the comparison of ideas within the two debates, I do comparison of the ideas described in the two debates.

### **6.1 Religion education**

As prepared in Section 3.1, the analysis of ideas about RE in Sections 4.2 and 5.2 was structured by the distinctions between confessional and non-confessional RE, between integrative and separative RE, and Kjeldsen's (2016) categories for aims of RE. Here, I first do a comparison of ideas from 1995. In Section 6.1.2, I compare ideas in the debate from 2008, and in Section 6.1.3, the ideas about RE in the two debates are compared.

#### **6.1.1 Ideas in the 1995 debate**

At the close of the analysis in Section 4.2, the ideas about RE were summarised in table 2, page 113. As shown by the table, there were significant differences in the ideas about RE expressed

by the politicians in this debate. On one hand, the independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MP Djupedal argued for having non-confessional, integrative RE, aimed at learning about different religious traditions and supporting the pupil's existential-ethical and social-ethical development. On the other, the non-socialist MPs mostly argued for having confessional, separative RE, in which pupils primarily were to learn about Evangelical Lutheran Christianity. These non-socialist politicians also tied the pupils' existential-ethical development to Christianity and saw this as a good foundation for social-ethical development. Finally, the Labour politicians offered their own take on having confessional RE, which they interpreted in a different way from the non-socialists. Labour politicians wanted more integrative RE and argued that pupils ought to learn about Christianity together with other religious traditions, as well as philosophy and ethics. They also appeared to see RE as a subject for supporting social-ethical and existential-ethical development, together with a notion I refer to as Christian literacy, which concerns how knowledge about Christianity was cast as necessary for being able to interpret and act in Norwegian society.

### **Opposing ideas of confessionality**

The analysis indicated that while Christiansen and Djupedal wanted non-confessional RE, the non-socialist MPs and the Labour politicians, both of whom spoke of confessional RE, used the term differently. This is reflected in table 2, in which the non-socialist ideas about confessionality are reflected by the term 'confessionally bound', and the ideas of Labour politicians by the terms 'confessionally anchored/associated'.

This difference in ideas was touched upon already in Section 4.1.3, where confessionality was briefly discussed as a meta-idea. There I pointed at the distinction between the ideas of the Labour Minister of Education, Hernes, and the Conservative MP Sanner. Hernes said that confessionality was only a matter of deciding which form of Christianity was meant when the curriculum plan spoke of Christianity, whereas Sanner said that confessionality involved giving a preference.

This was explored further in the analysis of ideas about RE, and I found that the MPs from non-socialist parties expressed ideas amounting to 'capital-C' Confessionality (Jensen & Kjeldsen, 2013, p. 188), with Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as the explicit confessional framework, and the aim of having the pupils receive instruction in this confession. Using Kimanen's (2015) dimensions of confessionality, however, it also became clear that the non-socialist ideas about confessionality were not in complete congruence with Kimanen's fully confessional ideal type.

The non-socialist politicians argued for an RE subject in which other religious traditions and philosophies of life would also be taught, and they did not express the aim of having the pupils confess faith in Christianity. Instead, they were clear that there should not be preaching in the subject. Still, when it came to the dimension of identity assumption, they appeared fully confessional, assuming Evangelical Lutheran Christianity as the religious identity for most of the pupils.

The Labour politicians were harder to place. The analysis indicated a difference between the ideas of the Minister Hernes and the MPs Mathisen and Nybakk. Hernes, as written above, said he only saw the confessionality as a matter of distinguishing Evangelical Lutheran from Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox. Mathisen and Nybakk, however, spoke of having a subject that was ‘associated with a confession’ and with ‘confessional anchoring’. At the same time, they explicitly rejected the phrase ‘confessionally bound’. I interpreted this as a reflection of their ideas involving a lesser degree of influence from the confession upon the teaching in the subject, resulting in a weaker, or more distant relation between the confession in question and the teaching in the subject than the one desired by the non-socialist politicians, who said that the subject was ‘confessionally bound’.

When using Kimanen’s dimensions of confessionality, it seemed that Mathisen was making identity assumptions in a confessional way, whereas Hernes avoided it. At the same time, I discussed whether the difference could be a reflection of the differences in their rhetorical styles.

Taken together, there were three different ideas about confessionality in the 1995 debate. Christiansen and Djupedal wanted a non-confessional subject, the non-socialist MPs argued for a ‘capital-C’ Confessional Christianity subject, and the Labour politicians appeared to take a middle position. They seemed to want the subject to remain confessional, but also gave indications of wanting to make it less so, or to interpret what confessionality meant in a different way than the non-socialist MPs.

### **Different approaches to the organising of RE**

Table 2 also shows that there were differences concerning the distinction between integrative and separative RE. While almost all the participants in the debate mentioned that there were problems with the then current separative model, their ideas about how best to solve these problems differed. Djupedal and Christiansen argued for integrative RE, as did the Labour politicians. The non-socialist MPs, however, gave slightly different impressions in this matter.

Sanner of the Conservatives and Lilletun of the Christian Democrats argued for maintaining a separative model with a confessional Christianity subject and full exemption rights. In addition, they argued for the establishment of new ‘meeting places’ as a remedy for some of the challenges associated with the separative model. Holte of the Centre Party, however, wanted to make the Christianity subject more compulsory and ensure that all pupils received knowledge about Christianity, perhaps with only partial exemption rights.

This distinction thus sheds further light on the differences between the Labour politicians and the non-socialists. They agreed on rejecting Christiansen’s proposal of RE that was neutral with regard to religion, but they differed in their ideas about what kind of RE would best serve Norwegian education and society. In addition, MP Holte from the Centre Party took something of a middle position, perhaps agreeing more with the Labour politicians in emphasising the need for gathering as many of the pupils in the same subject as possible, while at the same time maintaining a strong confessional profile similar to the other non-socialist parties.

When considering the second sense in which Alberts (2007) uses the term ‘integrative RE’, referring to the study-of-religions approach, a difference may also be seen between Djupedal and Christiansen on the one hand, and the Labour politicians on the other. These groups both supported integrative RE in the sense of wanting as many pupils as possible to take part in the same subject, as well as the sense that the subject should not be confessional to the degree that full exemption rights would be necessary. However, Djupedal and Christiansen’s ideas were closer to the study-of-religions approach, as they also wanted to remove the reference to Christianity from the name of the subject, and to a lesser degree emphasised the need for allocating a large share of the subject to the topic of Christianity.

### **More agreement concerning the aims of RE**

Thus far, the differences between the ideas of the politicians active in the debate have been highlighted, concerning both confessionality and separative versus integrative RE. However, when it comes to their aims for RE, it seems they are more in congruence. While there is disagreement about the extent of different parts of the subject, all the politicians imagined learning about Christianity and other religious traditions and philosophies of life as part of its inherent aim. Furthermore, they all also saw social-ethical development as a vital aim for the subject, together with existential-ethical development. In addition, I discussed whether the Christian Democrat Lilletun expressed existential-religious aims but found that his ideas in this matter may just as well be labelled existential-ethical. Lastly, the Labour politicians also spoke

of knowledge about Christianity in a way that I labelled ‘Christian literacy’, which I take as a kind of analytical-critical aim.

### **Despite some agreement – a conflict of ideas about RE**

Even though there were some agreement concerning the external aims of the RE subject, the main impression from the debate in 1995 is that it shows a conflict of ideas about RE. The politicians active in the debate in 1995 disagreed on whether RE ought to be confessional or non-confessional, integrative or separative. They also disagreed about the extent to which the subject was to teach about other religions than Christianity. The exception to the disagreement was the common support for the external aim of supporting the pupils’ social-ethical and existential-ethical development. Note, however, that there was disagreement about what the sources ought to be for both these external aims.

### **6.1.2 Ideas in the 2008 debate**

In the final part of the analysis in Section 5.2, the ideas about RE were summarised in table 5, page 177. The table indicates that when approached through the lens of my analysis, the 2008 debate was to a large extent characterised by consensus. Politicians from both the governing parties and the opposition argued for having RE that was non-confessional and integrative, and both groups of politicians supported RE that included learning about all religions and that emphasised the pupils’ social-ethical development. However, there were also differences, mainly in how non-confessionality was understood, and in the way the opposition MPs included ideas of Christian literacy in their aims for the subject.

### **Different takes on non-confessional RE**

Concerning the matter of confessionality, the analysis showed that both groups of politicians supported non-confessional RE. However, it was also noted in the analysis of the contribution from politicians representing the government parties (Labour Party, Socialist Left Party, and Centre Party) that they supported policy changes that would make the Norwegian RE subject more non-confessional. Both removing the reference to Christianity in the subject name and reducing the quantitative position of Christianity in the subject were revisions that made it clearer that this was to be non-confessional RE. The opposition parties (Progress Party, Conservative Party, Christian Democratic Party, and Liberal Party), however, were against the changes proposed by the government. Instead, they wanted to uphold the balance between non-confessional ideas about the subject and the position of Christianity in the subject that had been established earlier.

Using Kimanen's (2015) dimensions of confessionality, I found that, for instance, MP Dørum of the Liberal Party expressed ideas amounting to an identity assumption on behalf of Norwegian pupils, appearing to assume Christianity as a common background when saying that 'we must know where we come from' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 682). In addition, the analysis indicated that some of the opposition politicians may have expressed ideas about the approach to religion in RE going in the direction of Jensen and Kjeldsen's (2013, p. 188) concept of 'small-c' confessional. This could have given pupils a general impression of religion as something good or beneficial, which I interpreted MP Dørum's insistence on the importance of having an insider's perspective's on religion to be a signal of.

MPs representing the opposition parties also expressed ideas indicating that they wanted to see a higher degree of involvement from the pupils in the content of the subject, reflected, for instance, in their emphasis on the Norwegian word *kjennskap*, which I translated as 'familiarity'.

Taken together, the analysis indicated that for the non-socialist opposition parties, there was a tension between expressing ideas about the subject that are clearly non-confessional, and on an emphasis on cultural heritage, usually referred to as 'Christian'. Progress Party MP Gåsvatn's rejection of 'putting one specific religion qualitatively ahead of another' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 685) shows the non-confessional point, whereas both the identity assumption and the degree of involvement in the subject content serve as examples of more confessional ideas.

Thus, even though both groups of politicians wanted non-confessional RE, they appeared to disagree on the practical consequences of this approach. For the government parties, it was vital to make the subject more clearly non-confessional, whereas the opposition parties instead emphasised aspects of the subject that made its non-confessional profile less clear. Thus, even though the analysis indicated that they shared the idea of having non-confessional RE, it also showed that they interpreted this idea in different ways.

### **Agreeing about integrative RE – but taking it in different directions**

The second distinction used to shed light on ideas about RE was between separative and integrative RE. Table 5 shows that both groups of politicians in the debate supported integrative RE, in the sense of having one RE subject in which all pupils participate, regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliations. However, integrative RE is also used in a second sense in the analysis, following Alberts' (2007) two uses of the term. The second use ties it to the

study-of-religions approach to RE, and here the same differences that were found concerning confessionality become relevant again.

It was found in the analysis that the politicians from the governing parties supported changes that would make the subject more in line with the study-of-religions approach. This was the policy of removing the reference to Christianity in the name of the subject, removing the allotment of time given to Christianity in terms of percentages, and ensuring that there would be minimal use of the partial right to exemption.

The opposition parties were somewhat divided in this matter. The largest group, consisting of MPs from the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democratic Party, wanted to keep the reference to Christianity in the name of the subject, which goes against the principles of the study-of-religions approach. They also wanted to keep the allotment of time in percentages.

The Liberal Party supported the governing parties' proposal to remove the reference to Christianity in the name of the subject and was also open to removing the allotment of time in percentages. However, they made it clear in the debate that they wanted roughly the same amount of time to be devoted to Christianity as before. Thus, while being open to removing the percentages, they agreed with their colleagues in the opposition when it came to the actual amount of time.

Taken together then, the analysis indicates that the ideas expressed by politicians from the governing parties are more in line with the study-of-religions approach, whereas the majority of the opposition clearly went against it. The Liberal Party was in something of a middle position, supporting some of the policy that fits the study-of-religions approach, while at the same time wanting to maintain a quantitative differentiation that allocates around half of the time in the subject to teaching about Christianity.

### **The government parties emphasise learning about religion and dealing with diversity**

I will now compare the analytical findings concerning the ideas expressed in the 2008 debate about the aims of RE. For the politicians representing the governing parties, the analysis indicated a clear emphasis on two aims for RE: learning about religion and supporting social-ethical development. The first was illustrated by a quote from MP Jensen of the Socialist Left Party, which referred to 'good knowledge about Christianity and other world religions, and about philosophies of life and ethics' (O.tid. (2007–2008), p. 678). The second was exemplified

by quotes from her and the Socialist Left Party Minister of Education, Solhjell. They used phrases such as ‘building bridges’ and ‘creating trust and tolerance’, and words such as ‘dialogue’ and ‘respect’. The general impression given by the governing party politicians was that the RE subject was to be a resource for social-ethical development in Norway, enabling pupils to live well together in an increasingly diverse society.

In line with this finding, there is little mention of the other three kinds of development listed by Kjeldsen (2016). The analysis was clear on finding that none of the governing party politicians supported existential-religious development, and it was also hard to find examples of existential-ethical development. The only indication of the latter came through references to creating understanding among the pupils, but this always appeared in tandem with the aim of social-ethical development. The impression from the analysis is therefore that the aim of social-ethical development is primary, and that existential-ethical development only appears in service to this aim. Furthermore, the aim of analytical-critical development was also discussed in the analysis, with the findings indicating that the politicians from the governing parties tied this aim primarily to school subjects other than RE.

Concerning the politicians representing the opposition parties, the analysis indicated both similarities and differences with the politicians from the governing parties. The first aim, learning about religions and philosophies of life, is shared, but as they wanted to maintain a 55% share of time in RE allocated to teaching about Christianity, the balance of the knowledge content of the subject was different. For the opposition, there was a larger emphasis on learning about Christianity.

### **The opposition parties want the same, but add Christian literacy**

As with the politicians representing the governing parties, the opposition MPs appeared to have social-ethical development as the main aim for RE. This included notions such as providing Norwegian pupils with the same frames of reference, increasing knowledge, and understanding of religion to strengthen integration and reduce conflict in society, and making pupils familiar with what was assumed to be their own cultural background, intended as a tool for encountering people of other backgrounds.

There were few traces of existential-ethical development as an aim and no findings of aiming for existential-religious development in the contributions from the opposition MPs. The little evidence that appeared to indicate an aim of existential-ethical development was the reference to cultivating the attitude of respect across differences, which fits well with supporting social-



ethical development. Furthermore, there may be indications in the analysis that some opposition MPs argue there is an existential-ethical development in becoming familiar with Christian values and culture, but there is not strong evidence to support this conclusion.

However, when discussing Kjeldsen's (2016) last subcategory, analytical-critical development, the analysis indicated that the opposition MPs expressed ideas about RE as a subject from which pupils become adept at interpreting both history and contemporary life. Both the Progress Party MP Anundsen and the Christian Democrat Eriksen spoke of knowledge about Christianity as something that enabled pupils to interpret and understand Norwegian history and the current Norwegian society. However, this aspect of the subject, that it was to allow the pupils to interpret and understand Norwegian society, was only tied to learning about Christianity, and it was therefore labelled 'Christian literacy' in the analysis.

The comparison of ideas about the aims of RE shows that while agreeing about supporting social-ethical development and in excluding existential-religious development, there were also differences between the two groups of politicians. The opposition placed greater emphasis on learning about Christianity, and also tied this to a notion that in the analysis was labelled Christian literacy. Furthermore, the analysis found some indications of aiming for existential-ethical development, but not enough to support a strong conclusion.

### **A situation of near consensus concerning RE in Norway**

The comparison of ideas expressed in the 2008 debate indicate that the politicians to a large extent agreed about what kind of RE subject ought to be part of Norwegian education. They agreed that it ought to be non-confessional, even if they disagreed on what role Christianity could have in a non-confessional subject. They also agreed that the subject ought to be integrative, even if more differences appeared when analysing their ideas with a view to integrative RE in the study-of-religions sense of the term.

When it came to the aims for RE, they agreed that pupils in the subject ought to learn about different religions, philosophies of life, and ethics, even if the opposition MPs placed a larger emphasis on learning about Christianity. In addition, they agreed on having social-ethical development as a main aim of RE. Here, though, the opposition MPs also included a notion of Christian literacy which was not supported by the governing politicians.

### **6.1.3 Ideas about RE in the debates**

In this section, the comparison of ideas about RE is completed by comparing the ideas expressed in the two debates. This comparison will be briefer than the comparison of ideas in each debate, and the intention is to point to the main indications from the analysis.

#### **Towards a non-confessional and integrative consensus**

Concerning the first distinction used to shed light on ideas about RE, between confessional and non-confessional, the two debates contain very different ideas. In 1995, some non-socialist politicians argued in favour of ‘capital-C’ Confessional RE, based on Lutheran Christianity as the doctrine of the state church. The independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs argued for strictly non-confessional RE, and the Labour Party politicians were somewhere in between. Thus, at least three distinct ideas were expressed concerning the confessional or non-confessional status of RE.

In 2008, however, the analysis found that all the politicians wanted a non-confessional subject in the sense that no religious tradition was to be treated in a qualitatively different manner than the others. They also agreed that Christianity was to have a quantitatively larger place in the subject than other religious traditions, due to its importance in Norwegian history and culture, but disagreed as to how much larger this could be without leading to a qualitative differentiation. Thus, the comparison between the two debates indicates that concerning this distinction, the ideas about RE had shifted from a situation in which several options were seen as politically viable to one in which only non-confessional RE was seen as an option for the public education system.

A similar development emerges when comparing the ideas concerning the distinction between integrative and separative RE. In 1995, some politicians argued for a continuation of the separative model for RE while others argued for the need to replace the separative model with an integrative one. In 2008, no politicians questioned the basic premise of integrative RE: having a non-confessional RE subject intended to include all pupils, with only a limited right to exemption. However, when looking at the concept of integrative RE from the standpoint of the study-of-religions approach, the analysis indicated that in both 1995 and 2008, some politicians leaned more in this direction than others.

#### **Less emphasis on supporting existential-ethical development – social-ethical remains**

When looking at the aims of RE, as operationalised by Kjeldsen (2016), the analysis found that concerning the inherent aim of the subject, there was consensus in both debates that the subject

should include knowledge about Christianity, other religious traditions and philosophies of life, and ethics. However, there was disagreement about how time in the subject was to be allocated between the topics. In 1995, at least the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives argued for a continuation of the Christianity subject, which, although it included some content about different religious traditions and philosophies of life, was predominantly about Christianity. On the other hand, the MPs from the Socialist Left Party and the independent Christiansen emphasised the need to learn about different religious traditions and philosophy, while at the same time underlining that they, too, imagined that learning about Christianity would be a large part of the subject. In 2008, the disagreement appeared to concern whether the time allocated to teaching about Christianity was to be around 33% or continue to be about 55%. Therefore, concerning the inherent aim of the subject this development regarding the two distinctions was found: a shift towards a higher degree of consensus in 2008.

The external aims, however, are more complex. In 1995, all the politicians argued for a combination of social-ethical and existential-ethical development, with the latter clearly focused on a concept of values. In 2008, this value-oriented existential-ethical development was not found. Instead, the emphasis on social-ethical development had become greater. Furthermore, the analysis indicated that in 1995, some of the Labour politicians argued for an analytical-critical development tied to knowledge about Christianity, which I labelled 'Christian literacy'. In 2008, the non-socialist parties expressed similar ideas, whereas the Labour politicians did not. This gives the impression that these ideas had become less important for Labour, but instead had been taken up by the non-socialists, who did not appear to express them in 1995.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the aim of social-ethical development – that RE is to be a subject that will support the pupils' ability to live well together in a diverse society – was important to the politicians in both 1995 and 2008. Also notable is that with the exception of a possible interpretation of some statements by the Christian Democrat Lilletun, the analysis did not find any evidence of Norwegian politicians arguing for the subject to support existential-religious development in either of the two debates.

### **A move towards consensus about having non-confessional, integrative RE**

This comparison has indicated that, based on the debates analysed in this dissertation, it appears that ideas about RE in Norwegian politics has moved towards a greater degree of consensus. While there was discussion about the subject's confessional nature and its organisation in 1995,

these matters are mostly agreed upon in 2008. Concerning the aims of the subject, the main finding is that for both 1995 and 2008, supporting social-ethical development is a key aim. In addition, it has been found that the other main aim in 1995, existential-ethical development tied to a notion of values, is much less of an aim for RE in 2008.

## **6.2 The relationship between religious and national identity**

The analytical tool used for describing ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity was given in Section 3.2.2. In that section, Taylor's concept for understanding different configurations of such a relationship was applied to the Norwegian setting, and operationalised as an integrated and separated configuration, consisting of different ideas about four aspects. In Sections 4.3 and 5.3, these configurations were used to describe ideas in the two debates.

In this section, the ideas that have been described are compared, first in each debate, and then with a view to both debates. The observations following these comparisons will then inform the discussion in Chapter 7.

### **6.2.1 Ideas in the 1995 debate**

In this section, I will recap and compare the main findings for each of the three groups of politicians active in the 1995 debate, as summarised in table 3, on page 136. The presentation here repeats the structure of the analysis, following the four aspects of Taylor's two configurations of the relationship between religious and national identity, as summarised in table 1, on page 61.

At the start of the analysis, I used the different parties' contributions to the Recommendation to the Storting (Innst. S. nr. 93 (1994–95)) to hypothesise that MPs Christiansen and Djupedal would agree with the separated integration, and that the non-socialist MPs would agree with the integrated configuration. For the Labour politicians, the Recommendation did not provide a clear impression, so they were analysed without such a starting hypothesis.

#### **Different perspectives on the role of Christianity – and human rights as an alternative?**

The first aspect of the configurations of the relationship between religious and national identity concerns ways in which a belief plays a part in ideas about the design of a state or a society. Here the three different groups of politicians in the 1995 debate took different stances.

The analysis found that the independent MP Christiansen expressed the idea that less significance should be ascribed to Christianity when it came to the development of Norwegian

society. She argued that Western philosophy also had played a part and I interpreted her contribution to the mean that other politicians in the debate overstated the importance of Christianity. In addition, the analysis indicated that while she expressed a notion of foundational values in Norwegian society, she separated these values from specific religious beliefs. In other words, she argued for the possibility of supporting the values she found in Norwegian society without taking Christianity as a starting point.

MP Djupedal, the main MP from the Socialist Left Party, the only party supporting Christiansen's proposal, expressed somewhat different ideas concerning this aspect. The analysis of his contribution examined whether a notion of human rights played the same part in his conception as Christianity played in the conception of politicians thinking along the lines of the integrated configuration. For him, it appeared that human rights could provide an ideological core for a sense of national group identity. At the same time, the analysis also highlighted the differences between having a religious tradition and a concept of human rights in this role. Here, the analysis also indicated that Djupedal's contribution to the debate challenges Taylor's concept and the distinction between the separated and integrated configuration.

The ideas described in the analysis of the non-socialist politicians' contribution, however, matched Taylor's categories better when it came to this aspect. The analysis indicated metaphorical language that saw Christianity as part of the foundation of the Norwegian government or state upon which all Norwegian culture was built, and as a bond that tied a thousand years of Norwegian history together. In all of these cases, Christianity was given a significant, almost exclusive, role in the development of Norwegian society.

The analysis of the Labour politicians focused on Hernes, the Minister of Education, and his emphasis on Christianity as something that had played a significant role in the shaping of the Norwegian nation. At this point, the analysis also indicated that Hernes appeared to be speaking of this in a different way than the non-socialist MPs. For him, the temporal aspect seemed different. Instead of seeing Christianity as a current pillar of Norwegian society, he appeared to cast its significance as a thing of the past. This past still had consequences for the current society, but the active role of Christianity seemed to have changed. In the analysis, I suggested that the way Hernes integrated Christianity with being Norwegian might be referred to as a historical integration, and at the end of this section, I will consider this matter further.

The second aspect of the two configurations is the role of the individual. Here the analysis found that MPs Christiansen and Djupedal expressed the same ideas. By emphasising the sovereign position of individuals, and criticising ideas about the government having control over what people ought to believe, they were considered to be in agreement with the separated configuration. Both the non-socialists and the Labour MPs expressed ideas that seemed to go in the opposite direction, placing less emphasis on the sovereignty of individuals.

### **What is the best source of values – the Ten Commandments or human rights?**

On the contrary, the third aspect, moral language, showed a greater variety of ideas in the debate. MP Christiansen stressed how values may be linked to different beliefs, which leaves room for subjective perspectives on how values are justified. This matched the separated configuration well. MP Djupedal argued that human rights offered a better source of morality than the Ten Commandments of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which in the analysis further warranted the discussion of how his ideas about these matters best matched Taylor's categories. Here the analysis indicated that his ideas could accord with a separated configuration.

The politicians from both the non-socialist parties and Labour tied Norwegian morality to Christianity, which was taken as support for associating their ideas with the integrated configuration. In addition, MP Lilletun of the Christian Democratic Party stressed that personal engagement with the content of Christianity was beneficial for the ethical and moral development of the pupils. In this way, he seemed to take the integration further when it came to this aspect.

The analysis of the fourth and final aspect, religious identity, warranted a discussion of whether MP Christiansen could be said to espouse ideas of *laïcité* in a way that amounted to one of Taylor's examples of an integrated configuration. The analytical conclusion was that by expressing these ideas in Norway, she was instead closer to the separated configuration. In a similar way, MP Djupedal stressed that the authority to decide on questions of religious identity lay with individuals.

The non-socialist MPs instead referred to membership in the state church as a key indicator of religious identity, while simultaneously leaving room for how individuals may have worked out this belonging in different ways. The same analytical finding appeared in the study of the contributions from the Labour politicians.

The analysis also indicated that different politicians used the category of religious identity differently. For the non-socialist and Labour politicians, it made sense to speak of religious identity at a group level, associating more than 90% of Norwegians with Christianity. At the same time, it was apparent that this identification could still be valid without what one of them referred to as ‘the faith-related experience’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2407). In the analysis, these observations were found to accord with the distinction between the integrated and separated configurations of the relationship between religious and national identity.

### **A variety of configurations**

These findings indicate that concerning the configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, the main difference in the 1995 debate is between the separated configuration of Christiansen and perhaps Djupedal, on the one hand, and the integrated configuration of the non-socialist and Labour politicians, on the other. Furthermore, Christiansen and Djupedal differed in that the former expressed ideas that were similar to French *laïcité*, while the latter pointed to human rights in a way that challenged Taylor’s categories. The analysis pointed to instances in which it seemed like Djupedal was referring to human rights in a way that was reminiscent of how Christianity was referred to in the integrated configurations. However, the difference between referring to a religious tradition and a notion of human rights made Djupedal’s configuration different from an integrated one.

Concerning the non-socialist politicians and the Labour politicians, the main nuance was how the Minister Hernes was found to place the integration in the past. The non-socialist politicians, as well as some of the other Labour MPs active in the debate, seemed to express a more contemporary integration. I will refer to this distinction as the difference between a contemporary and a historical integration. By contemporary, I mean that, for these politicians, the integration between Christianity and being Norwegian appeared to be a matter of continued, living relevance, whereas for the Minister Hernes, it seemed to be the consequence of a historical integration.

Based on the comparison, the labels used to describe the ideas expressed about the relationship between religious and national identity in 1995 may be slightly revised, and I will therefore give a new summary of ideas about religious and national identity in 1995:

*Table 8 Ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity 1995 (revised)*

	<b>Christiansen &amp; Djupedal</b>	<b>Non-socialists</b>	<b>Labour</b>
<b>Configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity</b>	Separated, but Djupedal's notion of human rights appears similar to an integrated religious belief.	Contemporary integration between Christianity and being Norwegian.	Contemporary integration for some; historical integration for Hernes.

### **6.2.2 Ideas in the 2008 debate**

In the same way as the previous section, this section will recap and compare the analytical findings concerning the ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, but now with a view to the debate in 2008, analysed in Section 5.3 and summarised in table 6, page 191. The structure of the analysis is used to structure the recap here as well, beginning with the first aspect of the configurations: the design of the state or society.

#### **Christianity's significance a thing of the past?**

Concerning this aspect, the analysis indicated a divide among the three coalition partners who together made up the majority government, the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party. Politicians from the first two parties seemed to cast Christianity's significance in the past and argued that the time for giving Christianity a special place in society was over. The MP from the Centre Party was not very active in the debate but gave at least some indication of wanting to maintain Christianity's special position in Norwegian society.

The politicians from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party also expressed ideas about Christianity being significant in Norwegian society but tied this to ideas about cultural heritage and pointed to Christianity in tandem with humanism. Furthermore, the analysis included a discussion of whether the strong emphasis placed on human rights and their position in Norwegian society were indicative of a way of thinking that amounted to an integrated configuration with a notion of human rights at its core. The conclusion to this discussion was that it was not a matter of an integrated configuration, but rather a way of imagining the relationship between religious and national identity that fitted well with a separated configuration.

Based on these findings, the politicians from the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party were associated with the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, as they argued against pointing to a specific belief as a key element of the makeup of



the state or society. The MP from the Centre Party was arguably closer to the integrated configuration, but due to the small size of his contribution to the debate, it was hard to draw a strong conclusion.

### **Christianity given a significant, but varying role by the opposition**

The ideas expressed by the opposition parties' MPs could be divided into three groups according to the analysis. Firstly, MP Gåsvatn from the Progress Party expressed ideas that strongly tied Christianity to the emergence of the Norwegian nation, in both medieval and modern times. He also tied Christianity as heritage to what for him were three hallmarks of Norwegian society: that it is democratic, free, and well-functioning. According to the ideas he expressed, all of these hallmarks were tied to the influence of Christianity in Norway. Secondly, a large group of opposition MPs, representing the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democratic Party, spoke of Christianity as something shaping the Norwegian nation, or as something the Norwegian nation was built on. And thirdly, the analysis indicated that the Liberal Party MP placed no particular emphasis on Christianity as something shaping Norwegian culture or society. Instead, it appeared that he focused on Christianity as a vital element in contemporary Norwegian society.

The analysis thus indicated that with the exception of the Liberal Party, the opposition MPs appeared to express ideas that were closer to the integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. This was especially clear with the MP Gåsvatn, but also ideas of Christianity as something shaping the nation and as a foundation for the nation were associated with the integrated configuration. The Liberal Party MP was found to be closer to the separated configuration, as he appeared to express ideas that imagined the relationship between the nation and Christianity in a different way.

The other three aspects of the two configurations are the role of the individual, moral language, and religious identity. These aspects were harder to give full accounts of, due to the lack of ideas concerning them being expressed by the politicians in the debate. Therefore, the analysis of these three aspects were more a matter of looking to see whether or not they fit the impression given in the analysis of the first aspect.

For the governing parties, this was found to be so, as there were some analytical indications that individuals and their sovereignty were held in high regard. Furthermore, there was one instance of moral language that was associated with the separated configuration, with morality tied to specific values and only secondly tied to heritage and tradition. Finally, there were no

strong indications concerning religious identity, but the phrasing that was used appeared to fit well with the separated configuration.

Thus, the analytical impression of the Labour and the Socialist Left parties having a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity was strengthened, while the analysis did not find sufficient data to make further conclusions concerning the Centre Party.

Similarly, when the ideas expressed by the opposition parties were analysed with a view to these three aspects, the impression from the first aspect was strengthened. There was one example of attributing religious identity to a group level, with less emphasis on individuals, and moral language that tied Norwegian values to a specific notion of tradition and heritage: Christianity supplemented by humanistic value perspectives. The analysis found the Liberal Party to be more in line with the separated configuration in these aspects as well.

Furthermore, the analysis concluded with a passage on the kind of integration that the majority of the opposition appeared to express. By looking at MP Gåsvatn's statements, this was found to be quite an open kind of integration, which emphasised the freedom of people within the framework, even though belonging to the nation was tied to belonging to a specific religious tradition.

### **Both configurations still present in the Norwegian Storting**

As this recap of the main findings shows, ideas associated with both configurations were expressed in the debate in 2008. Politicians representing the governing parties were in the main closer to the separated configuration, whereas the opposition politicians mainly were closer to the integrated one. The differences were particularly evident in the analysis of the first aspect, concerning the design of the state or society, in which most of the opposition politicians highlighted the role of Christianity in the shaping of the Norwegian nation. Most of the politicians from the governing parties instead cast the idea of Christianity having a special place in society as a thing of the past, emphasising the contrast between contemporary Norway and its history.

The politicians from the Centre Party and the Liberal Party were found to express somewhat different ideas than their colleagues in the government and opposition, but the data were insufficient to make strong conclusions.

### **6.2.3 Ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity in the debates**

As in Section 6.1.3, the comparison of ideas concerning the relationship between religious and national identity is completed by comparing the ideas expressed in the two debates. The intention is to point to main findings from the analysis, and give some observations, as discussed and explained in Section 2.2.

#### **Ideas expressing both configurations found in both debates – only Labour changing?**

The main analytical finding concerning this topic is that both the 1995 and 2008 debates contain expressions of ideas along the lines of both configurations. Thus, there were politicians in the Norwegian Storting that appear to have imagined the relationship between religious and national identity from both separated and integrated perspectives at both these points in time.

Furthermore, concerning the parties that were represented in both debates, the analytical finding is that the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats expressed ideas going in the direction of the integrated configuration in both debates, and perhaps the Centre Party did also. The Socialist Left Party MPs expressed ideas indicating a separated configuration in both debates, whereas the Labour Party politicians expressed ideas indicating an integrated configuration in 1995 and a separated configuration in 2008.

#### **Continuity and change in non-socialist ideas about Christianity's role**

Concerning the first aspect of the configuration, the design of the state or society, there are clear similarities between the two debates. In both, non-socialist politicians express ideas of Christianity as something shaping the Norwegian nation, and something the Norwegian nation was built on. At the same time, it is notable that MP Christiansen's objection to an exclusive focus on Christianity's role in Norwegian history in the 1995 debate perhaps would have been more out of place in 2008, when most of the non-socialist politicians used a version of the label 'Christian and humanistic' to speak of Norwegian heritage and tradition. In that way, the non-socialist position seems to have developed in a way that has a less exclusive emphasis on the role of Christianity.

#### **Human rights as an alternative integration?**

Furthermore, both debates saw expressions of ideas that made it necessary to discuss whether a notion of human rights functioned as part of an integrated configuration. In 1995, these ideas were expressed by MP Djupedal of the Socialist Left Party, and in 2008, MPs from both the Labour and the Socialist Left parties expressed ideas that appeared to go in that direction. In

1995, it was found that Djupedal's ideas about these matters challenged Taylor's concept, but in 2008 it was rather surmised that they fitted well with a separated configuration. At any rate, the debate in 2008 is indicative of how ideas about human rights that were expressed by the Socialist Left Party in 1995 now also came from Labour MPs.

In 1995, the Centre Party was part of the non-socialist opposition to the minority Labour government, whereas in 2008, they were coalition partners with the Labour and Socialist Left parties. While the small size of their contribution to the debate in 2008 made it hard to make strong conclusions, it appeared that they were still closest to an integrated configuration. However, there appeared to be a gap between the strong statements about Christianity's role by MP Holte in 1995 and MP Skjælaaen's more careful comments in 2008.

Finally, a comparison of the ideas expressed by Labour politicians are perhaps the clearest indicators of a development between 1995 and 2008. In 1995, a majority of the Labour MPs were found to express ideas of an integrated configuration, even though for the Minister Hernes this appeared to be more of a historic integration. However, in 2008, the Labour MPs were found to express ideas along the lines of the separated configuration.

#### **Less data for the three remaining aspects in 2008 than in 1995**

The second aspect of the configurations is the role of the individuals. The politicians active in the debate in 1995 could be divided between, on the one hand, the independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party, who emphasised the sovereignty of individuals, and on the other, non-socialist and Labour politicians who placed less emphasis on individuals. In 2008, fewer ideas were found that could inform the analysis of this aspect. Those that were identified and interpreted supported the general impressions of which configurations the different politicians were closest to, but it was hard to make specific conclusions concerning this aspect. It appears that there was a large degree of consensus among the politicians in 2008 concerning this aspect but given the scarcity of the data this cannot be said with much confidence.

Moral language is the third aspect of the configurations, and here the analysis indicates differences between the two debates. In 1995, both the Labour politicians and the non-socialist MPs tied Norwegian morality to Christianity. In 2008, however, the Labour MP tied morality to specific values, and then only secondly brought in heritage and tradition. This is more reminiscent of how the independent MP Christiansen reasoned in 1995. Furthermore, the non-socialist MPs in 1995 almost exclusively spoke of Christianity as a source of Norwegian values and morals, but they often included a reference to humanism in 2008.

The analysis of ideas about religious identity, the fourth aspect of the configurations, shows that no politicians in 2008 expressed ideas which may clearly be associated with French *laïcité* in the way that Christiansen's ideas in 1995 could. Both the non-socialist and Labour politicians active in the 1995 debate associated religious identity with membership in the state church. In 2008, there were much fewer statements about religious identity. This development is especially clear with regard to the Labour politicians. Some of them identified Norwegians as Christians in 1995, but there are no such instances in 2008.

### **A shift for the Labour party – but continuity for the rest?**

The comparison of ideas between the two debates indicates that while the non-socialist parties appeared to be closest to the integrated configuration both in 1995 and 2008, the Labour Party had shifted towards the separated configuration. The Socialist Left Party remained closest to the separated configuration. Furthermore, the non-socialist parties had a less exclusive focus on Christianity as the belief at the core of the configuration in 2008, instead using the label 'Christian and humanistic' in several instances.

## **6.3 The purpose of education**

The analysis of ideas about the purpose of education was prepared in Section 3.3. There, a tension was established between ideas associated with global education policy and the Norwegian objects clause for education. In Sections 4.4 and 5.4, this tension was used to analyse the contributions in the two debates.

In this section, the ideas described in the two debates are compared, first in each debate, and then with a view to both debates. The observations following from the comparison will then be used to inform the discussion of the research question in Chapter 7.

### **6.3.1 Ideas in the 1995 debate**

In this section, the main ideas concerning the purpose of education as expressed in the 1995 debate, which were summarised in table 4, page 142, are recounted and then compared. The recounting roughly follows the structure of the analysis, beginning with ideas expressed by the independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs.

The analysis of the contributions to the debate from MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs described three distinct ideas concerning the purpose of education. Firstly, both Christiansen and MP Holand of the Socialist Left Party underline education's key role in

transmitting values. Christiansen referred to values that are basic to Norwegian society, while Holand listed values that may be associated with coping well with diversity.

Secondly, MP Djupedal of the Socialist Left Party stressed the importance of the unitary school system. From his perspective, having pupils attend the same school system and receive the same teaching is beneficial for society. He argued that to strengthen the unitary school system, the link to Christianity in the objects clause of education (at the time from 1969) ought to be reduced.

The third idea described in the analysis was that the development of religious identity and philosophy of life belonged to the domain of the parents and should not be part of the task of education.

The non-socialist MPs were also concerned with the transmission of values, but contrary to Christiansen and Holand, they associated this task of education specifically with the Christianity subject. The Conservative MP Sanner argued that the link to Christianity in the objects clause from 1969 should include more than a commitment to cultural history and listed specific elements of Christian theology that it also should include.

The analysis also found that, in 1995, MP Holte of the Centre Party expressed the idea that part of the task of education ought to be supporting children in developing stronger ties to Norway's Christian history and tradition. Furthermore, concerning diversity, MP Sanner argued that education had an obligation to provide children of different backgrounds with a common foundation on which they could come together.

Lilletun, MP for the Christian Democrats, argued that the objects clause of education from 1969 was very important, and that Christianity was the most important subject in education. In that way, he signalled that the value transmission he associated with this subject was a key part of the purpose of education.

For the Labour politicians active in the debate, ideas about the purpose of education were tied to support for the unitary school system. From their perspective, the analysis indicated that the unitary school system was a primary resource in the face of increasing diversity. It was intended to pass on the best of the community's knowledge, values, and attitudes, and was a place for exploring one's own identity and understanding of existential matters.

### **Value transmission as a key element of the purpose of education**

Comparing these ideas, it seems that all the politicians in the debate were concerned with value transmission as part of the purpose of education. For the non-socialist MPs, the Christianity subject was given a vital role in this endeavour, whereas for the Labour politicians it was tied to the concept of the unitary school system as a whole. MP Djupedal of the Socialist Left Party drew a contrast between the unitary school system and the reference to Christianity in the objects clause, but the Labour politicians did not appear to join him in describing this as a problem.

Furthermore, the analysis may have identified a contrast between Djupedal and the independent MP Christiansen, on the one hand, and the Labour politicians on the other. The former toned down the development of religious identity and philosophy of life as part of the task of education, whereas the latter presented personal development, including the understanding of existential matters as part of the benefits of the unitary school system.

For MP Christiansen, the transmission of values appeared to be based on values she found to be basic to Norwegian society, whereas Holand of the Socialist Left Party stressed specific values that concerned dealing well with diversity.

### **6.3.2 Ideas in the 2008 debate**

This section recounts and compares the main ideas about the purpose of education as they were described in the analysis of the debate from 2008, as summarised in table 7, page 199. I begin with the analysis of the politicians from the governing parties and continue with the opposition.

The analysis of ideas about the purpose of education in the contribution of the governing parties indicated a tension between two apparently different sets of ideas. On the one hand, education was cast as a value-founded, inclusive, and unifying institution in Norwegian society, more or less in line with the image of education found in the Bostad committee's new proposal of an objects clause. On the other hand, the politicians representing the governing parties, and especially the Socialist Left Party, emphasised the role of curriculum plans and competence aims. Their ideas on this matter seemed close to the principle of accountability as a way of governing education, in line with global education policy.

The same kind of tension was found in the contributions from the opposition parties, albeit between different ideas. Among these politicians, there was, on the one hand, a strong emphasis

on knowledge as an aim of education, and on the other, a focus on specific ideas about what the value foundation of Norwegian education ought to be.

Thus, contributions from both groups of politicians included statements that cast education as something based on values, but the statement from the governing parties listed specific values, while the opposition MPs were more concerned with what the source of values ought to be, namely what they referred to as Norway's Christian and humanistic heritage.

### **A question of ulterior motivation?**

With a view to the known influence of global education policy on Norwegian politicians, it is perhaps striking to see such a large gap between the emphasis on competence aims and an accountability-structured way of governing education by the governing party politicians and the lack of such ideas from the opposition. However, in this specific debate, it seems that these ideas may have been linked with the positions the politicians had concerning other ideas. More specifically, that fact that the Socialist Left Party politicians were the most keen to stress competence aims in the curriculum plans, and the Christian Democrat were their strongest opposition, might be because, at the time of the debate, the competence aims would grant Christianity a third of the time in the subject, whereas the allocation in percentages set it at 55%. Thus, by arguing for the competence aims, it may have been that the Socialist Left Party politicians were most concerned with gaining support for their proposed reduction of the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity, and just the opposite for the Christian Democrats.

### **6.3.3 Ideas about the purpose of education in the debates**

In this section, the key ideas about the purpose of education in the two debates are compared. I will briefly summarise some important differences, and then consider ideas about the objects clause and global education policy.

Looking at the summary of ideas about the purpose of education in the 1995 debate, it appears that politicians from all parties agreed that the transmission of values was a key element. Even though they disagreed about what kind of role the Christianity subject ought to have in such value transmission, they all refer to transmitting values as something that education ought to do. In the 2008 debate, this appeared to be different. Instead of expressing ideas about the transmission of ideas, the politicians instead seemed to be concerned with (and disagree about) what the value foundation for education ought to be. In terms of the results of education, they mentioned knowledge and attaining competency, and not acquiring values.



Furthermore, it seems that the ideas expressed in the 1995 debate to a larger extent concerned the pupils' development as human beings. For instance, a Labour MP referred to the unitary school system as a place for exploring one's own identity and understanding of existential matters. There were no ideas in the 2008 debate that tied the purpose of education to existential matters in the same way.

The concept of the unitary school system was also no longer referred to in 2008. Still, some of the ideas associated with the unitary school system in 1995 were expressed, such as seeing inclusive education – in which all pupils take part – as a primary resource for coping with diversity in society.

Concerning the objects clause of education, the two debates also appear to be different. In 1995, the non-socialist MPs seemed to be very concerned with keeping the phrasing of the objects clause from 1969, while the Socialist Left Party was keen to change it. The Labour Minister Hernes signalled that a revision was not on his agenda. In 2008, however, the objects clause was in political flux, as the majority government made it clear that it would be changed. At the time of the debate analysed here, in June, the outcome of the changes was still being debated, so the phrasing of the objects clause was politically contested at the time of the debate.

Comparing the two debates with a view to the influence of global education policy in Norway, it seems that my analysis matches the expectation that in 1995, these ideas did not play a part, whereas in 2008 they appeared as part of the educational ideas from both sides of the Storting. Amongst the governing parties, this seems tied to ideas such as accountability as a way to govern education, through curriculum plans with competence aims. For the opposition, it seems to be reflected in the emphasis on knowledge as the aim of education.

### **A shift in the role of values in Norwegian education**

The comparison of ideas about the purpose of education expressed in the two debates analysed here indicates that the purpose of education in 2008 to a lesser degree than before concerned ideas about transmitting values to pupils and expecting them to grow as human beings. Instead, the ideas about the purpose of education were more about stressing competency and knowledge as intended outcomes. Furthermore, values appear to a lesser extent as something transmitted to pupils and more as something education is built upon.

## **7 Developments and relationships in ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education**

Having prepared, presented, and compared the findings in the analysis, it is now time to use these findings to answer the research questions posed back in Section 1.1. These were:

- 1. What developments in ideas about RE may be seen based on a comparison of ideas expressed in the two debates?*
- 2. What relationships may be seen between the ideas about RE expressed in the debates and the ideas expressed about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education?*

The first of these questions is answered in Section 7.1 where the findings in Chapters 4–6 are summarised in order to show the developments that appear based on my analysis. The rest of this chapter is devoted to discussing the second research question, about the relationships between the ideas about RE and the ideas about the other two topics.

I open this discussion in Section 7.2 by charting the combinations of ideas expressed in the debates. This presents the sets of ideas expressed by the groups of politicians presented in the analysis, with the aim of clarifying the foundation for commenting on relationships among the ideas concerning the different topics.

In Section 7.3, I present claims about the relationships among the ideas concerning the different topics as they appear according to my analysis, thereby answering the second research question. In Section 7.4, the dissertation is finished by returning to the voices from existing research as presented in Chapters 1 and 3 and discussing how the findings in this dissertation aligns with or possibly challenges existing scholarship.

### **7.1 Developments in political ideas about RE**

As charted in Section 6.1.3, the analysis of the debates from 1995 and 2008 uncovered several changes in Norwegian politicians' ideas about RE. The main finding was a shift from a situation in which almost all aspects of RE were contested, to a situation in which the politicians agreed about nearly everything. In 1995, some politicians wanted confessional RE with a clear commitment to Lutheran Christianity, while others wanted integrative, non-confessional RE.

In 2008, the most hotly debated issue was whether the quantitative share of the subject allocated to Christianity was to be 33% or 55%, and if ‘Christianity’ was to be part of its name. The politicians agreed on nearly everything else concerning the RE subject.

However, the analysis also indicated that concerning the external aims of RE (Kjeldsen, 2016), the development was more complex. In 1995, all of the politicians expressed ideas about the aims of RE that included both social-ethical development and existential-ethical development. The former referred to supporting the development of the ability to live well together in a diverse society, while the latter was tied to ideas about the transmission of values to the pupils. In 2008, there were much fewer ideas about existential-ethical development, and values were considered differently.

Thus, as indicated by the analysis, the politicians in 1995 were more inclined to include ideas of socialisation and upbringing with regard to pupils in the RE subject than those active in the debate in 2008. The 1995-politicians expressed ideas indicating that they imagined RE as a subject where certain sets of values (which they ascribed different origins to) ought to be transmitted to the pupils. Here, the logic seemed to be that values were a beneficial resource to be given to the pupils to help them cope with life in an existential sense; that is, to help them navigate their identities, belongings, relationships, and perhaps also beliefs.

This notion of upbringing or socialisation does not seem to be part of how the RE subject was imagined by the politicians who contributed to the 2008 debate. Instead, nearly all of their ideas about the aim of RE could be interpreted as a form of social-ethical development, oriented towards enabling pupils to live well together.

The aim of social-ethical development was also clearly found in the ideas expressed about RE in the 1995 debate; therefore, the development from 1995 to 2008 may be described as decline in emphasis on existential-ethical development. However, the aim to support social-ethical development remains. Since existential-ethical development was toned down, social-ethical development became more visible in 2008, but the findings indicate that the aim of supporting social-ethical development was there in 1995 as well.

Neither one of the two debates included clear examples of politicians aiming for existential-religious development, but some ideas expressed in 1995 at least warranted a discussion, whereas this was not necessary in 2008. The analysis indicated that, in 1995, it was still politically viable to express ideas that at least left this option open, whereas in 2008, there were

no indications at all that pupils' existential-religious development were part of the aim of the subject.

Concerning the final external aim discussed in the analysis, analytical-critical development, some of the same ideas appeared to be expressed in the two debates — but by different party groups. In 1995, some of the Labour politicians made the point that, by learning about Christianity, pupils were enabled to interpret and take part in Norwegian society. In 2008, similar ideas were expressed by non-socialist MPs. These ideas were labelled 'Christian literacy' as they recall notions of religious literacy; but instead of referring to a familiarity with religion in a broad sense, these ideas are tied to Christian traditions in Norway.

These findings indicate that Norwegian politicians have developed a much higher degree of consensus concerning ideas about RE. In 2008, all the politicians supported non-confessional and integrative RE. Concerning the aims of RE, the main development has been the shift away from including existential-ethical development as part of the subject's aim. Instead, social-ethical development, part of the aim in 1995, became nearly the sole aim in 2008. Furthermore, while the Labour Party saw the development of Christian literacy as an aim in 1995, this aim was supported by the non-socialist parties in 2008. These are the main developments in ideas about RE that may be seen based on a comparison of ideas expressed in the two debates.

In the following sections, I engage with the second research question, asking about relationships among the ideas about RE and the ideas expressed about the two other topics, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education. I begin by looking at what ideas about RE and the other two topics that were combined by the politicians in the two debates.

## **7.2 Combinations of ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education**

In this section, I look at how different party groups combined ideas concerning the three topics in the debates that have been analysed. I begin with the three groups of politicians that the analysis of the 1995 debate was structured according to and continue with the two groups that were used to structure the 2008 debate. For each of them, the aim is to show what kind of ideas about RE went together with which ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, and about the purpose of education. In this way, I provide a foundation for making claims about the relationships among these ideas in Section 7.3.

### **7.2.1 1995: Independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party**

The description of ideas expressed by independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs, primarily Djupedal, indicated support for the following ideas about the three topics:

#### **Religion Education**

- Non-confessional, integrative RE
- Learning about different religious traditions and philosophy in RE, with an emphasis on Christianity.
- Supporting the pupils' existential-ethical and social-ethical development.

#### **The Configuration of the Relationship between Religious and National Identity**

- Separated, with the caveat that Djupedal's ideas about human rights and the nation challenged Taylor's framework.

#### **The Purpose of Education**

- Emphasis on the transmission of values and, for Djupedal, on the unitary school system.

The ideas expressed by these politicians form an example of a combination of supporting non-confessional RE and imagining the relationship between religious and national identity along the lines of a separated configuration. In this line of thinking, no particular belief is bundled together with a sense of belonging to the nation. Looking at the analysis of the contributions from these politicians, it seems that these ideas fit well with supporting non-confessional RE. For these politicians, the idea that RE in public education ought to be non-confessional, in the sense that no religious tradition ought to be given a special role in the subject, seems to follow from the idea that no particular belief is given a special status in the understanding of what makes a person belong to a nation.

From the perspective of having a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, it could be asked if public education ought to include RE at all. Given the ideas expressed by these politicians, this question may be answered by considering their ideas about the purpose of education. For both Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs, education is tied to the transmission of values. As the description of their ideas about the external aims for RE includes supporting the pupils' existential-ethical development, this may

reflect the following logic: given that a key purpose of education is to transmit values, a non-confessional RE subject that includes all the pupils may serve to fulfil that purpose. In this way, the ideas described in the analysis of the contribution from Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party illustrates that RE may be included in public education in a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity when it is tied to the concept of transmitting values.

Secondly, the Socialist Left Party MPs in particular stressed the need for social-ethical development, which concerns supporting pupils' ability to live together in an increasingly diverse society. RE was described as a useful subject for becoming familiar with the different kinds of beliefs and ways of thinking in society. This reasoning also fits well with supporting integrative RE, as it allows for a subject in which pupils sit together and learn about the different religious or non-religious beliefs that may be found among them and their parents.

Supporting integrative RE also appears to match Djupedal and the Socialist Left Party's support for the unitary school system. From their perspective, it is beneficial to society if as many of the pupils as possible receive the same education. Thus, it seems to make sense that RE ought to be integrative instead of separative, to avoid pupils being split up in this subject. In this way, support for the unitary school system may serve as part of the reasoning for non-confessional RE, since confessional RE necessitates full exemption rights, which in effect leads to a separative model.

Christiansen did not hold the unitary school system in high regard (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2405). It appears that, for her, the relationship between religious and national identity played a larger part in the reasoning behind non-confessional RE. According to the ideas described in the analysis of her contribution, she finds it principally wrong for the state to grant preferential treatment to one religious tradition; thus, RE in public education must be non-confessional. At the same time, as noted above, she ties both education in general and RE in particular to the transmission of values, which she argues may be achieved without tying the values to a specific belief.

The ideas described in the contribution from Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs show that imagining RE as non-confessional and integrative aligns closely with having a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. Furthermore, emphasising the transmission of values in the purpose of education ties in well with having RE that aims at supporting pupils' existential-ethical development. In addition, support

for the unitary school system may serve as a key way of reasoning for non-confessional, integrative RE.

### **7.2.2 1995: The non-socialist parties**

The description of ideas expressed by the non-socialist MPs indicated support for the following ideas about the three topics:

#### **Religion Education**

- Confessionally bound, separative
- Learning primarily about Christianity.
- Supporting the pupils' existential-ethical development tied to Christianity as part of social-ethical development.

#### **The Configuration of the Relationship between Religious and National Identity**

- Contemporary integration between Christianity and being Norwegian.

#### **The Purpose of Education**

- Value transmission tied to the Christian objects clause
- Supporting identity development
- Strong connection to Norway as a nation

These politicians combined ideas about RE as a confessional and separative subject that is primarily about Christianity with understanding the relationship between religious and national identity as a contemporary integration between belonging to Christianity and being Norwegian. The ideas described in the analysis include the notion that there is something inherently Christian about that which is Norwegian. Given their belief that Christianity is tied to being Norwegian, these politicians argued that Norwegian pupils ought to learn about Christianity within the confessional framework of the kind of Christianity that is thought of as Norwegian, namely Lutheran Christianity.

According to the ideas expressed by these politicians, giving pupils a thorough education in Christianity is a way of strengthening their identity as Norwegian, and will provide the pupils with valuable resources for interpreting their own identities and dealing with existential matters. From this perspective, social-ethical development is furthered by encouraging existential-

ethical development fuelled by engagement with Christian sources. In other words, the ideas expressed by these politicians include the notion that, by ensuring that as many pupils as possible become familiar with Christianity, they are helping students understand a key element of what it means to be Norwegian. According to the ideas described in the analysis, this is a vital aspect of what keeps society together, or what enables pupils to live well in an increasingly diverse situation. Here, the ideas expressed by the politicians indicate that knowing Christianity will help the pupils remain stable and safe when faced with values and attitudes that are deemed foreign.

When talking about education in general, these politicians emphasised the task of transmitting values from the Christian tradition to support identity development and securing a sense of belonging to Norway as a nation. Thus, their ideas about the three topics seem to reflect a way of imagining education as a place for developing and securing pupils growing up in Norway by providing them with the means to grow into the integration between that which is Norwegian and that which is Christian.

According to the ideas described in the analysis of their contribution, the importance of this task is such that the level of knowledge about Christianity and its commitment to the doctrinal framework of the Church of Norway cannot be reduced. The politicians seemed to be aware that such a way of doing RE necessitates full exemption rights and a separative model. While their ideas included negative aspects of having separative RE, they argued that these negative aspects had to be countered in ways other than making RE more integrative. For instance, they talked about the necessity of learning enough about Christianity in the Philosophy of Life Subject, the main alternative to the Christianity subject. Furthermore, they spoke of establishing new arenas in education that would come in addition to the separative RE subjects. In this way, they appeared to want to ensure that every Norwegian pupil learnt about Christianity, which, as they saw it, was a key component to being Norwegian.

The ideas expressed by the non-socialist politicians in the debate from 1995 serve as an example of tying RE together with an integrated configuration of the relationship between that which is Norwegian and that which is Christian. The work being done in the Christianity subject, where a large majority of the pupils became familiar with Christianity as a resource for their interpretation of their own identities, was cast as important—by some, the most important aspect of education in general.



### **7.2.3 1995: The Labour Party**

The description of ideas expressed by the Labour politicians indicated support for the following ideas about the three topics:

#### **Religion Education**

- Confessionally anchored/associated, integrative RE
- Learning about Christianity, other religious traditions, and philosophy and ethics
- Supporting the pupils' social-ethical development and existential-ethical development, together with Christian literacy

#### **The Configuration of the Relationship between Religious and National Identity**

- Contemporary integration for some, historical integration for Hernes

#### **The Purpose of Education**

- Support for the unitary school system
- Emphasis on ethical development

The ideas expressed by the Labour politicians in the 1995 debate serve as an example of combining ideas about RE as confessional and integrative, an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity, and an emphasis on the unitary school system.

In this case, the ideas about RE may be understood as a reflection of both the ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the ideas about the purpose of education. This observation rests on the tension inherent in wanting RE to be both confessional and integrative. Seeing as human rights legislation gives parents the right to decide on the moral and religious upbringing of their children, it has been assumed that RE must either be non-confessional or come with the option of full exemption. Because giving parents the opportunity to have their children fully exempted from the subject would go against the idea of integrative RE, this model of RE was understood as intrinsically non-confessional.

However, the ideas expressed by the Labour politicians in this debate indicated that RE did not have to be non-confessional to be integrative. Instead, they expressed ideas about confessional

anchoring or association, and argued that it was different from what they saw as confessional binding. In this way, they combined notions of confessionalism and integrative RE.

The analysis of their ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity signalled a special relationship between Christianity and being Norwegian. These ideas may perhaps be reflected in the wish for RE to remain confessional. As discussed in the previous sub-section, when Christianity is given a special role in what it means to be Norwegian, it seems to follow that when religious traditions are on the agenda in public education, Christianity is given a special position.

At the same time, the ideas expressed about the purpose of education, emphasising the unitary school system, may be linked to the support for integrative RE. When it is considered beneficial for society to have as many pupils as possible take part in the same education, it seems to follow that integrative RE is to be preferred over separative models.

Thus, their ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity seem to reflect a desire for wanting RE to be confessional, while their ideas about the purpose of education appear to signal an aim that RE be integrative. The ideas about confessionalism as ‘anchored’ or ‘associated’ may perhaps then be a way of interpreting confessionalism to make it more viable for an integrative RE subject. By rejecting the word ‘binding’ and using words such as ‘anchoring’ and ‘associated’ instead, they appear to reduce the normative implications of having confessional RE.

Another way the emphasis on the unitary school system may be reflected in the ideas about RE is in the aims of the subject. Analysis of the contribution from the Labour politicians uncovered an emphasis on the aims of existential-ethical development and social-ethical development. In their ideas about the purpose of education, the idea of the unitary school system was tied to both ethical development and maintaining togetherness in society and living together in an increasingly diverse nation.

The combinations of ideas about the three topics expressed by the Labour politicians in 1995 may be indicative of a relationship wherein ideas about the configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity and the ideas about the purpose of education led to a tension in the ideas about RE. Their support for having RE that is both confessionally anchored or associated may be understood to be in tension with wanting integrative RE, and these two

aspects of their understanding of RE may be tied to their ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity and the purpose of education respectively.

#### **7.2.4 2008: The governing parties**

The description of ideas expressed by the politicians belonging to the governing parties indicated support for the following ideas about the three topics:

##### **Religion Education**

- Non-confessional, integrative RE
- Learning about all religions
- Supporting social-ethical development

##### **The Configuration of the Relationship between Religious and National Identity**

- Labour and the Socialist Left Party: Separated
- The Centre Party: not clear, perhaps integrated.

##### **The Purpose of Education**

- Education is a value-founded, inclusive, and unifying institution in society.
- Education is about achieving competence aims specified in curriculum plans.

The ideas expressed by politicians from the two governing parties that mainly participated in the debate, the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party, offer another example of the combination of a non-confessional, integrative vision of RE and a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. As presented in Section 7.2.1, these ideas fit well together. When no religious tradition is given a specific role for belonging to the nation, the same may be assumed for RE, which in effect means support for non-confessional RE.

There also appear to be links from the ideas expressed by the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party concerning the purpose of education to the ideas about RE. According to the analysis of their contribution to the debate, these politicians saw education as an inclusive and unifying institution in society, which aligns with supporting integrative RE, in which all pupils take part, and emphasizes social-ethical development as an aim for RE. Furthermore, the analysis also

found that education was cast as a value-founded endeavour, which serves as another example of combining non-confessional RE with seeing values as important for education.

Another finding about the purpose of education concerned the role of competence aims in curriculum plans. In the analysis, the emphasis on competence aims was tied to the influence of global education policy. The ideas described in the analysis of the contributions from these politicians may therefore serve as an example of imagining RE as non-confessional and integrative, supporting social-ethical development, while also expressing ideas associated with global education policy.

The ideas described in the analysis of these politicians show some of the same combinations seen in Section 7.2.1. They support integrative and non-confessional RE and appear to have a separated way of configuring the relationship between religious and national identity. In addition, a link appeared between seeing education as an inclusive and unifying institution in society and stressing the need for RE to be integrative with the external aim of supporting social-ethical development.

### **7.2.5 2008: The opposition parties**

The description of ideas expressed by MPs belonging to the opposition parties indicated support for the following ideas about the three topics:

#### **Religion Education**

- Non-confessional, integrative RE
- Learning about all religions/philosophies of life, yet 55% Christianity
- Emphasis on supporting social-ethical development and Christian literacy

#### **The Configuration of the Relationship between Religious and National Identity**

- For the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, and the Christian Democratic Party: integrated
- For the Liberal Party: less clear, perhaps separated.

#### **The Purpose of Education**

- Education is about attaining knowledge.
- Education ought to have a value foundation tied to Christian and humanistic heritage.

The ideas described in the analysis of the politicians from the non-socialist parties combine wanting RE to be non-confessional and integrative with having an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity. From the perspective applied in Sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3, this finding may appear surprising. There, it was reasoned that when Christianity is given a special role in the conceptualisation of that which is Norwegian, it makes sense to also have confessional RE. Based on the analysis of these politicians, however, this combination of ideas may be worked out differently.

For these politicians, the idea that RE ought to be non-confessional may be tied to two other ideas: firstly, that it is important to have integrative RE in public education, and secondly that integrative RE has to be non-confessional to be within the limits set by human rights legislation. These aspects had been clarified both by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (2004) and the European Court of Human Rights (2007) in the time between the two debates. It is therefore not surprising to see developments among the politicians concerning these ideas. At the time of the debate in 2008, there was general support for integrative RE and that, as a consequence, no qualitative differentiation of the religious traditions was acceptable.

However, three other aspects of the ideas about RE expressed by these politicians reflect the integration of Christianity and being Norwegian: the idea that the name of the subject should include a reference to Christianity, the idea that the quantitative share of time allocated to teaching about Christianity in the subject ought to be 55%, and the aim that RE ought to support the development of Christian literacy. All of these ideas reflect notions of Christianity's special significance for what it means to be Norwegian. Concerning the former, the opposition MPs argued that due to Christianity's special position, all pupils taking part in Norwegian public education had to receive broad knowledge about Christianity. The latter appears to be another reflection of the same notion: due to the significance of Christianity in Norway, teaching pupils about Christianity was seen as a way of equipping them with knowledge that was necessary to interpret and understand that which is Norwegian.

Furthermore, the description of ideas in the analysis indicates that for these politicians there was a link between their ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity and their ideas about the purpose of education. One of the two main ideas concerning the purpose of education is that it ought to have a value foundation tied to Christian and humanistic heritage. This idea aligned well with imagining an integration between what is Christian and what is Norwegian. At least, when such an integration is assumed, it seems logical to want it to

be reflected in the public education system. Here, it appears that the concept of a value foundation for education serves as an alternative way of expressing the integration of religious and national identity, in a situation where the confessionality of RE no longer may be used to such an effect.

The analysis of the contribution from these politicians yields a new combination of ideas. Here, wanting RE to be non-confessional and integrative is combined with imagining the relationship between religious and national identity in an integrated way. The special position of Christianity that follows from the integration is then reflected in the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity and the aim of supporting the development of what I refer to as Christian literacy.

This was also the last group of politicians to be discussed in this section. In the next, the different combinations of ideas presented here are used to discuss potential answers to the second research question, about the relationships among ideas concerning the three topics.

### **7.3 Relationships among ideas about RE, religious and national identity, and the purpose of education**

In this section, I draw on the presentation of different combinations of ideas concerning the three topics to discuss potential relationships among them. In this way, I propose to answer the second research question of the dissertation. Before engaging with the discussion, however, I wish to make two points about the following discussion clear. Firstly, about my approach to discussing relationships among ideas, and secondly a caveat concerning the scope of the claims I intend to make.

The approach to discussing relationships between ideas in this dissertation is based on Mehta's (2011) understanding of how ideas function in politics, as presented in Section 2.2. According to Mehta, ideas may serve either as policy solutions, problem definitions, or meta-ideas. This distinction allows for the following observation: as described in my analysis of the two debates, ideas about religion education, the relationship between religious and national identity, and the purpose of education function differently. Ideas about RE may serve in all three ways, whereas ideas concerning the two other topics always come into play as meta-ideas.

This difference in function is relevant to understanding the relationship between the ideas, as Mehta (2011) elaborates on how meta-ideas affects policy processes. They do so in three ways (Mehta, 2011, p. 42). Firstly, they affect who gets elected and thus what issues come into

political play. Secondly, they serve as meta-problem definitions, providing a perspective on the issues that are on the agenda and a ‘heuristic that tells political actors what aspects of the issue to emphasize and what side to take’ (Mehta, 2011, p. 42). Thirdly, these ideas may provide legitimacy to the policy solutions political actors put forward, as something the political actor appeals to as part of giving reasons for support.

Thus, when asking what relationships may be seen between the ideas about RE and the two other topics, I am asking how the meta-ideas concerning religious and national identity, and the purpose of education, may function together with various ideas about RE. Some ideas about RE, such as whether the RE subject should be confessional or integrative is a matter of policy solution. Others, such as the idea that the Christianity subject should be revised as a result of increasing diversity in the Norwegian population, are problem definitions. Finally, ideas that cast RE as a vital part of the value transmission in Norwegian education may be understood as meta-ideas that provide a perspective on how to understand RE in the larger picture. The structure of the discussion of the relationship among the ideas will therefore be as follows. For both ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity, and the ideas about the purpose of education, I will consider the main ideas that have been described in the analysis. For each of these main ideas I will then discuss the relationship to ideas about RE.

The second point I wish to make clear here, is that when I describe relationships among ideas there is a risk of giving the impression that by doing so, I am also explaining why the different politicians came to support their particular policy solution. Such claims would go beyond what I have evidence to support. Policy processes are governed by a multitude of factors, including tactical concessions for strategic purposes and other kinds of political machinations. Furthermore, my analysis is deductive, in the sense that I have decided on three topics before engaging with the material, and my data are necessarily only a part of the picture that could have been drawn of these debates. I explore possible relationships among the ideas I have chosen for analysis, with the purpose of contributing to our understanding of the ideas, not to reveal the reasons behind political outcomes.

### **7.3.1 Ideas about RE and the relationship between religious and national identity**

The analysis of ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity was based on using Taylor’s concept concerning different configurations of this relationship as an analytical tool. Two of these configurations were operationalised as ideal types, and for each group of politicians I considered whether they were closer to one or the other. Therefore, the

main ideas concerning the relationship between religious and national identity are the two different ideal types, as identified and described in the analysis of the contributions from the politicians in the debates. Here, I will first consider the relationships among the ideas expressed by politicians who were found to be closest to the separated configuration, and then those who were closest to the integrated configuration.

### **Common combination: a separated configuration and wanting non-confessional RE**

The analysis of the debates in 1995 and 2008 described meta-ideas that were found to be in accordance with the separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity in the contributions from two groups of politicians. The first was the independent MP Christiansen and the Socialist Left Party MPs in 1995 and the second was the Labour and Socialist Left Party politicians representing the government in 2008.

All of the politicians who expressed ideas in accordance with a separated configuration supported the policy solution of making or keeping RE as a non-confessional and integrative subject. Therefore, it seems that the meta-idea of separating religious identity from national identity functions as part of an understanding that supports non-confessional and integrative RE.

As mentioned in Section 7.2.1, this combination of ideas fits well. When the meta-idea of separating belonging to a nation from belonging to a religion is assumed, it becomes hard to argue for giving one specific religious tradition a confessional position in the RE subject for public education. Furthermore, when no confession is given preference, the need for separated RE is also reduced. Parents could still want RE in accordance with their religious or non-religious beliefs, but as long as the public education system offers non-confessional RE to all of them, other reasons may support an integrative subject. For instance, ideas about the purpose of education may play a part, as I will discuss in the next sub-section.

Together with a non-confessional and integrative approach to RE, the politicians who imagined the relationship between religious and national identity in accordance with the separated configuration shared similar ideas about what pupils in RE are to learn about. For both of these groups of politicians, the inherent aim of the subject is to learn about different religious traditions and philosophies of life. When it came to external aims, however, they differed. The politicians expressing ideas amounting to a separated configuration in 1995 indicated that supporting both existential-ethical and social-ethical development are aims for RE, while in 2008, RE's only external aim was social-ethical development. According to the analysis, this



difference may be tied to different ideas about the purpose of education, which I will discuss in the next sub-section.

### **Politicians with an integrated configuration see a special role for RE**

Ideas found to be in accordance with the second ideal type, the integrated configuration, were expressed by the non-socialist and Labour politicians in the 1995 debate and by the non-socialist politicians in the 2008 debate. With their ideas about what was Norwegian, the non-socialists active in 1995 expressed a contemporary integration of Christianity. Somewhat similar ideas were expressed by some of the Labour politicians, while Minister Hernes was interpreted as expressing a more historically oriented integration of these matters. In 2008, the non-socialist politicians referred less to a specific religious tradition and more to cultural heritage and tradition, often with the combined label 'Christian and humanistic'. However, when explicated, the Christian aspect of this heritage and tradition was often emphasised. In addition, the Centre Party, which was part of the government coalition in 2008, appeared to express ideas going in an integrated direction, but due to the brevity of their contribution to the debate, it was hard to make a conclusion.

Of these three groups, the two in the 1995 debate supported different kinds of confessional RE, whereas the one in the 2008 debate supported non-confessional RE. Furthermore, the non-socialists in 1995 supported separative RE, whereas Labour of 1995 and the non-socialists of 2008 supported integrative RE. For the non-socialists of 1995, the integration of being Norwegian and having a relationship to Christianity was very important. These politicians supported 'capital-C' Confessional RE based on the Lutheran doctrine of the Church of Norway and argued that this confessional profile was so important that RE had to be separative and not integrative. For the Labour politicians active in the same debate, the confessional profile of RE was expressed in less forceful terms. They also argued that confessional RE, as they intended it, could be combined with integrative RE.

For these two groups of politicians, the integration of being Norwegian with having a relationship to Christianity appears to fit well with casting RE as a vital subject for tying pupils' identities to their country. From their perspective, by engaging with the stories and teachings of Christianity, the pupils received access to the sources of Norwegian tradition and identity. For the non-socialist politicians of 1995, this value was of such great importance that they could not imagine RE being integrative. For the Labour politicians, other ideas were tied in with arguing for integrative RE, as I will return to in the next sub-section.

### **Non-confessional RE for politicians with an integrated configuration as well**

Even as the non-socialist politicians of 2008 wanted RE to be non-confessional, the relationship between the integrative configuration and the confessionality of RE was more complex. As discussed in Section 7.2.5, for these politicians, ideas about education made support for integrative RE stronger. At the same time, integration of the relationship between religious and national identity was found to be different. In 1995, it was tied to a specific form of Christianity, whereas in 2008, it was more general, and often tied to ‘Christian and humanistic heritage and tradition’. It may therefore be asked whether this more open kind of integration made it easier to forego confessional RE. After all, knowledge and familiarity with ‘Christian and humanistic heritage and tradition’ could also be supported in a non-confessional subject, at least from the perspective of these politicians.

When it came to the inherent aims of the subject, the two groups of non-socialist politicians stressed the need for a lot of knowledge about Christianity. The Labour group listed learning about Christianity together with ‘other religions’, philosophy, and ethics. In the 2008 debate, the amount of time allocated to teaching about Christianity was part of the non-socialist parties’ reason for rejecting the compromise with the governing parties. It seems reasonable that politicians who expressed the meta-idea that something Christian is tied to what it means to be Norwegian would argue that it was vital that pupils learn more about Christianity.

Concerning the external aims of the subject, the politicians active in 1995 included aims about supporting existential-ethical development, whereas the 2008-politicians primarily stressed social-ethical development. This is the same development that was seen among the politicians associated with the separated integration. I take this similarity as further support for tying this development more to ideas about the purpose of education than the relationship between religious and national identity.

Further, the Labour politicians of 1995 and the non-socialists of 2008 included an aim I refer to as ‘Christian literacy’, reflecting how they spoke of having knowledge about Christianity as similar to having religious literacy—as something that enables people to interpret and to act in society. This idea seems to have made sense from the perspective of an integrated configuration. If there were something inherently Christian about that which is Norwegian, then learning about Christianity and knowing Christianity would be a prerequisite for interpreting and navigating Norwegian society. Here, the ideas about RE and the ideas about religious and national identity fit well.

Finally, it seems worth mentioning that none of the politicians who expressed ideas found to be in accordance with an integrated configuration argued for supporting existential-religious development—although some statements in 1995 may be interpreted in that direction. Still, the lack of support for existential-religious development signals that the integration between being Norwegian and having a relationship to Christianity is different from requiring people to be Christian in order to be Norwegian. The relationship is more complex than that, as illustrated in the analysis in Sections 4.3 and 5.3.

### **Summary**

The findings in my analysis indicate that the relationship seen between ideas about religion education and ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity may be described in the following way:

- Having a separated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity is tied to wanting RE to be non-confessional and integrative.
- Having an integrated configuration of the relationship between religious and national identity is tied to wanting RE to be confessional, and for some, separated.
- In both debates, some politicians with an integrated configuration also wanted RE to encourage what I have called ‘Christian literacy’.

### **7.3.2 Ideas about RE and the purpose of education**

Instead of being structured by comparison to a clear-cut analytical tool, the analysis of ideas about the purpose of education was approached through an imagined tension between the purposes of education found in the Norwegian objects clauses and in analyses of global education policy. The key ideas described in the debates have been summarised at the end of Sections 4.4 and 5.4 and compared in Section 6.3. For the purposes of this discussion, I have organised these different ideas into three groups. The first group is the ideas about values in education, including the role of values, ideas about value transmission and value foundations. The second group is ideas about education as a unifying institution in society, or as something inclusive and bridge-building, and the third is ideas that have been associated with global education policy. For each of these three groups, I will discuss possible relationships to ideas about RE.

### **From transmitting values to having them as a foundation**

The comparison of ideas about the purpose of education in the two debates (Section 6.3.3) indicated that based on the ideas described in my analysis, values came to play a different role in 2008 than in 1995. In the first debate, ideas about the purpose of education from all three groups of politicians included a notion of value transmission. For Christiansen, it was the transmission of values that were foundational to Norwegian society; for the non-socialists, it was Christian values; and for the Labour politicians, it was important that the unitary school system was a place for ethical development. I interpreted these notions about value transmission as a reflection of a wish for socialising or influencing the pupils with specific values and aiming for the pupils to acquire these values as their own. In the 2008 debate, however, values were referred to more as something upon which education was founded. The notion of influencing the pupils directly with these values seemed less prevalent.

When looking at this development with a view to the ideas about RE, the development in the external aims for RE fits the same pattern. In 1995, all of the politicians expressed ideas about supporting existential-ethical development in RE, whereas in 2008, no such ideas were expressed. Here, then, it seems that there is a relationship between the ideas about the purpose of education and religion education. When education was also seen to be about transmitting values to pupils, the aims for RE included supporting existential-ethical development, and when such ideas were less present in the purpose of education, this aim for RE also became less present.

### **Integrative RE and the unitary school system**

The second group of ideas about the purpose of education include the importance of the unitary school system in 1995 and expressions of similar notions of education in 2008. In 1995, both Djupedal of the Socialist Left Party and several of the Labour politicians underline the importance of education being unitary, in the sense that as many of Norwegian children as possible ought to attend the public education system and that they were to receive the same teaching. This assertion aligns with one aspect of their policy solution concerning RE, namely that they argue for replacing the separative model of RE with an integrative subject. From the perspective of wanting the public education system to be a unitary force in society, it makes better sense to have pupils come together in the same RE subject, where they are to learn about the same things. Having separated RE subjects, whereby pupils attend different subjects in accordance with the religious or non-religious belongings of their parents, instead highlights

difference in society, and may perhaps increase these differences by having the pupils receive different RE content.

In 2008, all of the politicians supported integrative RE, yet it was primarily the governing parties that expressed ideas about education as an inclusive and unifying institution in society. Their ideas matched the pattern from 1995—but what about the non-socialist opposition? How might wanting integrative RE and emphasising the role of Christian and humanistic heritage as the value foundation of education be understood?

This combination of ideas may be understood by drawing on the ideas about the relationship between religious and national identity. For the opposition MPs active in the 2008 debate, ‘Christian and humanistic heritage and tradition’ was imagined to be a common ground for all Norwegians, independent of personal religious or non-religious affiliations. Therefore, having an integrative subject, which they deemed non-confessional in the sense that no specific religious tradition was to be treated qualitatively differently, allowed for a situation in which all pupils attending public education received knowledge and understanding of this heritage and tradition. From this perspective, an integrative RE subject set up in the way that the opposition politicians wanted in 2008 seems to make sense.

### **RE influenced by global education policy?**

Concerning the third and final group of ideas, showing the influence of global education policy in the 2008 debate, it is harder to draw conclusions. On the one hand, it has already been established that such ideas were influential in Norwegian politics at the time. On the other, tying these ideas to specific aspects of the ideas about RE is a challenge. One possibility could be that from the perspective of global education policy, RE is just not that important and for that reason there are few points of contact between these ideas. However, if the influence of global education policy in the 2008 debate is accepted as a starting point, perhaps it could be assumed that the ideas about RE about which there was consensus may be tied to this policy?

The reasoning is as follows: in 2008, all of the politicians agreed that RE ought to be non-confessional, integrative, and teach pupils about religious traditions, philosophies of life, ethics, and philosophy. Furthermore, they concurred that a key external aim for RE was to support social-ethical development, which had to do with enabling pupils to live well together in a more diverse society. The main goal of the international organisations behind what has been referred to as global education policy is to enable as high a sustainable economic growth as possible. Part of their strategy is to encourage liberalisation and economic competition. In an optimistic

scenario for globalisation, in which nations become less concerned with their own borders and more open to participating in a global economy, one could see a demand for the kind of RE politician supported in 2008. Increased globalisation would involve increasing diversity and, in that situation, it could be seen as a prudent investment in Norway's human capital to ensure that all Norwegian pupils become competent in dealing with religious plurality. However, this connection is not present in the material and is, at best, a possible interpretation. If correct, it would be another example of a potential relationship between ideas about the purpose of education and ideas about RE.

### **Summary**

The findings in the analysis indicate that the relationships seen between ideas about religion education and ideas about the purpose of education may be described in the following way:

- Ideas about the role of values in education appear to be reflected in the external aims for RE.
- Ideas about the unifying role of education in society appear to go together with support for integrative RE.
- Ideas about education that reflect the influence of global education policy may be linked to setting up RE as non-confessional and integrative and oriented toward social-ethical development as a way of enabling pupils to successfully navigate diversity in a globalised world.

Taken together, the summaries of the findings concerning the relationship between ideas about religion education and, first, the relationship between religious and national identity, and, second, about the purpose of education, represent the answer to the second research question of the dissertation. In the next section, this answer is used to reflect further on claims brought into the dissertation from former research, as a way of showing the contribution of the dissertation to the field of religion education and other fields of research to which the dissertation may be related.

## **7.4 Former claims and the findings in this dissertation**

The former research presented in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 of the dissertation included several claims that may be revisited and discussed based on my findings. I will begin by revisiting the findings from Tuastad's (2006) and Wingård's (2011) research on the debates analysed in this dissertation. Following that, I discuss findings about the role of values in Norwegian politics,

starting from an observation from Wingård, but primarily in discussion with Iversen's work (2012, 2014). Then, I use the findings from the analysis to discuss data from research on the Core Curriculum from 1993, which has been used as a key source for understanding Norwegian educational policy from the early 1990s. Next, I show how findings from the analysis may be used to further our understanding of the shift towards speaking of a Norwegian value foundation that is 'Christian and humanistic'. Finally, I compare the findings concerning political ideas to what Andreassen (2014b) found when analysing curriculum plans for teacher education and point to new questions that may be raised on the basis of this dissertation.

As presented in Section 1.2, Tuastad (2006) found that all of the politicians active in the 1995 debate seemed to share the idea that RE ought to serve an integrative purpose in society, but the relationship between this purpose and the role of Christianity in the subject could be quite different. This matches well with the findings here. With the terminology of the analysis, it may be said that all the politicians included supporting social-ethical development as part of the ideas about the external aims of RE.

Tuastad (2006, p. 265) described tensions in the group of Labour politicians active in the 1995 debate, found in this analysis as well. Tuastad pointed to the distinction between MPs who saw Christianity as 'the religion for Norwegians' and MPs who abstained from supporting the majority remark in the Recommendation to the Storting concerning Christiansen's proposal. In this analysis, it is pointed to a distinction between the MPs Tuastad referred to and Minister Hernes. The latter is interpreted as expressing ideas about religious and national identity that were more historical and less inclined to see the integration between Christianity and Norwegian society as something current.

Wingård (2011) found that in the Norwegian political discourse of the 1990s, RE was spoken of as a piece in a nation-building project. The same themes have been identified in this dissertation. For several politicians who imagined the relationship between religious and national identity in accordance with the integrated configuration, RE is tasked with giving pupils knowledge and familiarity with the religious tradition tied to the nation.

Furthermore, Wingård found that RE was intended to provide all pupils with what they needed to acquire well-developed identities and cope with contemporary society. Using the analytical terminology of this dissertation, this finding may be rephrased as emphasis on supporting existential-ethical and social-ethical development as part of the external aims of RE.

At the end of her dissertation, Wingård considered the possibility that the discourse of the 1990s was the end of an era, ‘...an era when questions of values were considered a vital part of the political debate about education, and when measuring knowledge and international rankings had not yet become the main focus’ (Wingård, 2011, p. 215). According to the analysis of ideas about the purpose of education, the role of values was different in 1995 and 2008. In 1995, values were spoken of as something to be transmitted to pupils, while in 2008, they were more about what education was to be founded on.

Iversen (2012) analysed the Core Curriculum from 1993 and found that the way values came into play there was as a matter of identity. His observations seem closer to the findings in the analysis of the debate in 2008 than in 1995. This discrepancy may be indicative of how ideas expressed in the Core Curriculum eventually came to be influential in Norway. At the time of the debate in 1995, values were still referred to by most politicians as tied to ethics and morality and were to be transmitted to the pupils. In 2008, values were tied to the foundation of education, in a way more similar to what Iversen found in the Core Curriculum.

Section 1.2 also presented other research analysing the Core Curriculum from 1993. Andreassen (2014a, pp. 276–277) found that the Core Curriculum mobilised a notion of cultural Christianity for the purposes of strengthening national identity, as a response to forces of globalisation. Similarly, Bygstad (2007) and Skeie (2003) observed that the concept of Christianity in the document was ‘culturalised’, referring to how Christianity was presented without many of the traditional theological concepts and instead set up as a part of national heritage.

In the first debate analysed in this dissertation, which took place two years after the Core Curriculum was passed through the Storting, this culturalisation of Christianity was politically contested. MP Sanner of the Conservative Party criticised the Labour Party for being too soft in its commitment to Christianity. Sanner spoke of how the reference to Christianity in the objects clause of education had to operate as a commitment to more than cultural history: ‘The Christian view of human life, the idea of loving one’s neighbour, and the ten commandments must be at the centre.’ (S.tid. (1994–95), p. 2408). Thus, at the time of the debate in 1995, the very concept of Christianity to be used in educational policy was being contested.

In 2008, however, the analysis indicated that the non-socialist parties referred either to ‘Christianity’ or to ‘Christian and humanistic’ when talking about the foundation of education. At that point, there were no instances of politicians listing elements of Christian tradition in the



way Sanner did in 1995. I take this difference as an indication that the ‘culturalisation’ of Christianity found in the Core Curriculum had become, in 2008, a shared idea among Norwegian politicians.

The finding that the debate in 2008 saw a ‘culturalisation’ of Christianity that was still contested at the time of the debate in 1995, also illustrates the development in how Norwegian politicians referred to notions of shared value foundations found by Michalsen (2014) in the second paragraph of the revised Norwegian Constitution, referred to as ‘the value paragraph’. There, ‘Evangelical Lutheran’ was replaced with ‘Christian’, thus decoupling the notion of Christian heritage from theology.

The objects clauses of education have also been a site for debates about values, heritage, and national identity. Iversen (2014, p. 119) interpreted the Storting’s changes to the objects clause proposed by the Bostad committee (NOU 2007:6) as a reflection of the kind of rhetoric that ties values to an imagined shared identity. The 2008 debate was held before the compromise concerning the new objects clause had been finalised. The findings suggest that the value rhetoric that Iversen described is closer to the ideas identified in the contributions from the opposition parties. The Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party expressed ideas about the value foundation of education that were akin to what the Bostad committee had proposed. If this is correct, it is somewhat surprising that the ideas expressed by the opposition came to dominate the compromise, especially since the government had a majority in the Storting. However, this development may reflect different policy positions within the government. The third member of the majority coalition, the Centre Party, was not very active in the debate I analysed, and it could be that it was more in line with what the opposition was proposing.

I also wish to draw attention to the links between my findings and Andreassen’s (2014b) analysis of curriculum plans for RE in Norwegian teacher education. He found that in the 1990s, after the introduction of the first Norwegian iteration of integrative RE, the KRL subject, RE teachers were to be trained as experts on identity, prepared to guide pupils to existential maturity. Then, in 2010, the teacher was cast as a bridge-builder in a diverse society. On the one hand, the analysis indicated the same development as Andreassen, as the politicians in 1995 wanted RE to support existential-ethical development, while this aim was not expressed in 2008. On the other, however, the analysis indicates that all of the politicians from 1995 agreed that RE ought to support social-ethical development. In this way, the findings indicate that the emphasis on social-ethical development was not something new in 2008; rather, the key

development concerning the external aims of RE was how supporting existential-ethical development no longer was tied to RE. Thus, as far as the politicians who contributed to the debates I analysed were concerned, dealing with diversity was already an aim for RE back in the 1990s.

The findings in this dissertation also point to new questions to be asked. For instance, both the observation that in 1995 the closest political ally for the liberalist Christiansen was the Socialist Left Party, and that the Conservative party was more concerned with Norwegians as a national collective invites a closer study of the political negotiation of their ideological position (or meta-ideas) at this point in time. This may be a reflection of the negotiated nature of political debates, where meta-ideas come to play different roles in specific situations, but further study of what politicians from these parties express in other debates is necessary to fill out this picture.

Another avenue to explore could be to draw lines between Roos' (2016) study of debates in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the findings in this dissertation. An analysis of political ideas about RE that looked closer at historical debates in the Storting concerning RE could provide a rich backdrop to our understanding of contemporary debates and how these ideas have been negotiated in Norwegian political history.

On a different note, it would be interesting to compare the political ideas expressed about these topics with ideas expressed at other levels of the education system, for instance by teachers, pupils, or parents. In what sense is the political level representative for the ideas expressed in classrooms?

Finally, the findings in the dissertation invites international comparative perspectives. The ideas analysed here are all expressed with a view to the situation in Norway. How would this differ from a study of debates in Sweden or Denmark? Looking further afield, it would be interesting to compare the findings from Norwegian debates with political negotiations in states that have a different political history, for instance such as the Baltic states.

In this way, the dissertation invites further study of political ideas using a hermeneutical idea analysis of proceedings from parliamentary debates, by illustrating how this approach highlights the way in which politicians also negotiate ideas about religion education, the relationship between religious and national identity and the purpose of education.

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## Appendix I: Overview of the politicians in the debates

The biographical information presented in this appendix has been collected from the personal entries in the official biographies of the Norwegian Storting.<sup>29</sup> When information about birthplace is omitted, it is because it is not listed in the official biography.

### Politicians in the 1995 debate

#### **Christiansen, Ellen Chr. (1964 –)**

Independent MP. Born in Oslo, in the east of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was one speech and three replies.

#### **Djupedal, Øystein (1960 –)**

MP for the Socialist Left Party. Born in Oslo, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and six replies.

#### **Hernes, Gudmund (1941 –)**

Minister of Education for the Labour Party. Born in Trondheim, in the middle region of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and two replies.

#### **Holand, Lisbeth (1949 –)**

MP for the Socialist Left Party. Born in Vikna, in the middle region of Norway

Her contribution to the debate was one reply.

#### **Holte, Jørgen (1944 –)**

MP for the Centre Party. Born in Volda, in the west of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and one reply.

#### **Kvalbukt, Inga (1949 –)**

MP for the Centre Party. Born in Alstahaug, in the north of Norway.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Representantene/Biografier/> Accessed on January 30, 2019



Her contribution to the debate was one speech.

**Lilletun, Jon (1945 – 2006)**

MP for the Christian Democratic Party. Born in Vossestrand, in the west of Norway. Leader of the Standing Committee and spokesperson in the debate.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and four replies.

**Mathisen, Trond (1953 –)**

MP for the Labour Party. Born in Nøtterøy, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was two speeches and two replies.

**Nybakk, Marit (1947 –)**

MP for the Labour Party. Born in Nord-Odal, in the east of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was one speech and two replies.

**Ravnåsen, Sigbjørn (1941 – 2016)**

MP for the Christian Democratic Party. Born in Herefoss, in the south of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech.

**Sanner, Jan Tore (1965 –)**

MP for the Conservative Party. Born in Bærum, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and three replies.

**Starrfelt, Oddbjørg Ausdal (1948 –)**

MP for the Labour Party. Born in Klepp, in the west of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was one speech.

## **Politicians in the 2008 debate**

### **Anundsen, Anders (1975 –)**

MP for the Progress Party. Born in Stavern, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was two speeches and five replies.

### **Chaudhry, Akhtar (1961 –)**

MP for the Socialist Left Party.

His contribution to the debate was two speeches.

### **de Ruiten, Freddy (1969 –)**

MP for the Labour Party. Born in Arendal, in the south of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was two replies.

### **Dørum, Odd Einar (1943 –)**

MP for the Liberal Party. Born in Oslo, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was two speeches and four replies.

### **Elvik, Åsa (1979 –)**

MP for the Socialist Left Party. Born in Bø, in the north of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was three replies.

### **Eriksen, Dagrun (1971 –)**

MP for the Christian Democratic Party. Spokesperson for the issue in the Standing Committee.

Born in Kristiansand, in the south of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was four speeches and seven replies.

### **Gåsvatn, Jon Jæger (1954 –)**

MP for the Progress Party. Born in Drøbak, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and three replies.

### **Jensen, Lena (1973 –)**

MP for the Socialist Left Party. Born in Tromsø, in the north of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was one speech and six replies.

**Kjernli, Gorm (1981 –)**

MP for the Labour Party. Born in Oslo, in the east of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was two speeches and four replies.

**Skjælaaen, Rune J. (1954 –)**

MP for the Centre Party. Born in Bergen, in the west of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech and five replies.

**Solhjell, Bård Vegard (1971 –)**

Minister of Education for the Socialist Left Party. Born in Kristiansand, in the south of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was two speeches and five replies.

**Søreide, Ine M. Eriksen (1976 –)**

MP for the Conservative Party. Leader of the Standing Committee. Born in Lørenskog, in the east of Norway.

Her contribution to the debate was two speeches and seven replies.

**Sørensen, Unn Therese Omdal (1977 –)**

MP for the Labour Party.

Her contribution to the debate was one speech and one reply.

**Sørfonn, Ingebrigt (1950 –)**

MP for the Christian Democratic Party. Born in Fitjar, in the west of Norway.

His contribution to the debate was one speech.

## **Appendix II: The objects clauses from 1969 and 2009**

### **The objects clause for Norwegian primary education from 1969**

*The purpose of primary and lower secondary education shall be, in agreement and cooperation with the home, to help to give pupils a Christian and moral upbringing, to develop their mental and physical abilities, and to give them good general knowledge so that they may become useful and independent human beings at home and in society.*

*The school shall promote intellectual freedom and tolerance, and strive to create good forms of cooperation between teachers and pupils and between school and home (Primary and Lower Secondary Education Act (1969)).*

### **The objects clause for Norwegian education from 2009**

*Education and training in schools and training establishments shall, in collaboration and agreement with the home, open doors to the world and give the pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and anchorage.*

*Education and training shall be based on fundamental values in Christian and humanist heritage and traditions, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights.*

*Education and training shall help increase the knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and our common international cultural traditions.*

*Education and training shall provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual's convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking.*

*The pupils and apprentices shall develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can master their lives and can take part in working life and society. They shall have the opportunity to be creative, committed and inquisitive.*

*The pupils and apprentices shall learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness. They shall have joint responsibility and the right to participate.*

*Schools and training establishments shall meet the pupils and apprentices with trust, respect and demands, and give them challenges that promote formation and the desire to learn. All forms of discrimination shall be combated (Education Act (1998), §1-1).*