

THE BASIS OF A COMMON PEDAGOGICAL SPACE

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The theme of the Piet Akkermans Lectures 2005 is: "A common educational space to promote mutual understanding between people from various ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds". This theme can further be developed in different directions. This lecture deals with the following 3 issues:

1. What is the basic question in creating a "common pedagogical space"?
2. What are the basic principles of such a space from the Christian point of view?
3. How does such a "common pedagogical space" get public support?

1. Virtues as the Bridge Between Values and Standards

The Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (the WRR) in 2003 published a report with the title: 'values, standards and the behavioural burden'. The report makes clear that the population of the Netherlands agrees to a large extent about which values are important for society. There is barely any talk in our society of a lack of clarity of values, or a conflict of values. The problem is not that we would not know that fundamental issues such as equal freedom for everyone, justice and the thereby belonging solidarity, peacefully cohabitation, at a national and global level, and responsibility require the understanding that our actions have also impact on others and the natural environment in which we live, and that these matters are important. The Dutch people know this, or at least most of them do; and as long as we formulate it in general terms, they agree to a large extent with each other. Therefore, one seldom encounters problems when drawing up mission statements.

But when we have to explain what all these beautiful words and values mean, and when we must act accordingly in our own actions, and moreover when we no longer talk about them but act accordingly – which includes decisions taking, choices making, approach people and agencies, react to events in our daily life – it all become more cumbersome. The translation of general to particular, and of words into deeds, creates problems. Problems which are not solved with 'values and standards' only.

If we did not have anything else than values and standards, then we would in our embarrassment rapidly be forced to fall back on these standards. These standards must help us

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to regulate our actions. It has also been tried in education, more than once to solve problems especially by means of a system of standards. But that offers insufficient solace. Such as the *undervaluation* of standards which we have known for a long time in the Netherlands, it has resulted not in real freedom but in a problematic 'tolerance'. In the same an overvaluation of standards, which has sometimes been insisted on, risks to end up in a 'zero tolerance policy', with probably more rules and more control, more warrants and more severe convictions, but no better people or a better society, or a better school, or an improved education.

It is not without reason that values are in the first place in the twin concepts 'values and standaards. We know that standards are important as land-marks which keep us within the lines, but we want more than that. We want to keep our actions 'correct' not only bound by standards and rules. We want to act *well* and in the service of the good, we pursue the good. This good is always a common good, the '*bonum commune*'. This *bonum commune* is something else than the sum of (more or less occasional) the individual or group interests at a certain moment, and completely something else then the freedom whereby we leave each other a moment of peace so that everyone can do as much as possible his own will; it is a society which shows something of God's Kingdom on earth. In order to realise it, we want more than only standards, codes and associated legal or disciplinary sanctions in order to prevent us from exceeding the limits. More is needed, or rather there is something else needed, namely: the virtues.

In our concern about ' values and standards ' in our society we should realise how Dutch these concepts are. That becomes very clear when the Dutch speak with foreign colleagues in a debate about 'values and standards'. One should try to translate these terms into French, German or English. You can of course literally translate them, but immediately it appears that the message does not come across, and that the evocative look with which you pronounce these concepts, are not answered with the understanding of the foreign partners. I personally can testify this, particularly because of my work at the European level within the commission of the bishop conferences in the EU, the COMECE. Values on virtues have already been spoken about in the English language for a long time. Premier Balkenende also used this expression when discussing the plans of the Dutch government for a debate concerning European values in the autumn of 2004, when the Netherlands held the EU presidency.

When we speak about virtues, we are referring to the tradition of virtue ethics, a tradition which is narrowly interwoven with Christian thinking and still has an amazing subject matter. I want to come back to this tradition of virtue ethics, because in my opinion virtues can form a bridge between values and standards. In the previously mentioned report of the WRR, the

virtues emerge a couple of times, but they then tend always to be removed rapidly. I think that the WRR has left a chance and that virtues deserve an important role in our so-called 'values and standards' debate.

What is Meant by Virtues?

Virtues are *stable attitudes*: they are no standards or rules which appear to be more or less outside our own and force us to a certain degree, neither are they ideals or values which we support as options and which we recommend, but they are convictions of our daily life: dispositions and characteristics which stipulate our actions effectively.

Virtues are coming alive, so to speak, through *education and training*, as a result of which you – to the degree in which you have acquired them – react 'automatically' in certain situations and act *in a correct way*.

Education is more than disciplining and transferring knowledge or rules. Education is from the beginning, and becomes - if it is done well – more and more: a formation of the whole personality in all its aspects. That formation is received primarily from the communities of which you are member: that is on the first place the family and subsequently also the school, but it goes much further and it doesn't stop at a certain age: it occurs also in the sporting club, the industrial insurance board, the trade union federation, the broadcasting association, the political party, the belief community, etc. These all have an educating and forming meaning and responsibility. In all of these community frameworks, people are permanently formed and they form themselves and each other – whether they are aware of it or not. Administrators of a trade union form themselves and their supporters by the way they act; the same is true for journalists and presenters of radio and tv-programmes, sport directors and coaches, politicians, managers, instructors, churchleaders, etc. Virtue ethics calls attention to this forming strength of communities, and she states that the virtue (or likewise the vice - because if we are not careful we form ourselves and each other in a bad way, we deform ourselves and each other) is the product of it. The virtue is therefore a question of continuing exercise and steady increase! Also, in that way virtue ethics is distinguished from a morality of (strict) standards and (ideal) values. Virtue, virtuosness concerns make firmly true the values that people formed personally and in the connections which they form with and for each other.

Virtuous attitudes make that you react and act in the correct manner 'automatically' in certain situations which occur: it concerns therefore not only (rules for) acting, but also a formulation of our spontaneous responses, and therefore of our emotions and of our desires.

The virtue is not a standard by which you can determine whether ascertained cross-border, taboos breaking programmes on TV are detrimental or not for people, particularly for young people (!), or whether a prohibition of it threatens the freedom of speech; on the contrary virtue is an attitude which turns itself 'automatically' away of what is tasteless or detrimental. It is no measuring rod to which you can determine if a certain 'bonus' can be paid, but it is a formed notion that unerringly senses that even if it is not 'rechtswidrig' to give someone a premium of 50 million, it is nevertheless 'unanständig', like the judgement of the court at Düsseldorf which at the time sounded in the mannesmann process.

The correct reaction or behaviour is mainly stipulated by the virtue as a cross between two extremes. Courage, for example, is a cross between daring too much and too little, between overconfidence and cowardice. Here it appears that virtue ethics is an optimistic ethics, which does not condemn human desires on itself, but puts that they must be protected against proliferation or oppression and that they must be cultivated to develop optimally. And that optimal form exists - just like in health, or in nature – at a point between too much and too little, too early and too late, too long and too short. It is clear that this cross is firstly not mathematically the middle, and secondly that it is not mediocrity. Generosity for example, is not mathematically the cross between giving everything and giving nothing; just as little as it means exactly the same for everyone in each situation. And everyone who knows 'generous' people, knows that their generosity is in every way the opposite of mediocrity!

There are a lot of virtues, and each era forms it's own new virtues.

An exhausted enumeration is not possible. But within the many virtues there are some which are more important than other, because they are necessary in all other virtues and cannot be missed. These are the so-called cardinal virtues. That name has nothing to do with 'eminencies'.

It comes from the Latin word *cardo* that means 'spine' or 'hinge': they are the virtues 'where it is all about' in every virtuous attitude. In contrast to what the WRR-report states, these aren't 'large' virtues which would be for contemporary people 'aimed too high', and in consideration of which only 'small virtues' can be placed now. No, these are qualities which are necessary in each virtue - large or small - and in each situation. Even since Plato, the four cardinal virtues have been called, which we find through the whole tradition, and which we also find expressed in one way or another in many churches and government buildings: half-moderation (*temperantia*), courage (*fortitudo*), wisdom (*prudentia*) and justice (*justitia*).

Together with the theological virtues of belief, hope and love the cardinal virtues form the 7 most important virtues. The virtues are indispensable, because they form the bridge between values and standards.

2. The Basis of "a Common Pedagogical Space"

Leading a virtuous life finds its final aim/ideal in the fundament of being of man, this means the fundamental relations which people know, to God and to the fellow man. An evangelical perspective concerns the double commandment of love: the love to God and the love to the fellowman. With this double commandment correspond two tasks: spirituality and solidarity. In practice of work in our diocese Rotterdam we add to the two terms, 'spirituality and solidarity', a third S, the one of 'scantiness', the cardinal virtue of moderation, the 'temperantia'. This third S forms the condition to observe the double commandment, because it prevents that I place myself in the centre, by which no space, time, attention remain for the other. Together the three S-es form make counter-movement out of the gospel possible against the continuously increasing processes in the Western society of secularisation (detached from god), individualisation (every man for himself) and materialisation (possession, pleasure and luxuriously).

For explanation of this basis I discuss the different pillars of this evangelical programme.

With spirituality, something else is meant than what is indicated with that term as a growing vogue under contemporary managers: meditation classes and abbey weekends. There is in itself nothing against it, but it is not sufficient. That is a tool to bring a kind of hygiene to a very busy existence. That hygiene is of importance to exploit one's own capacities optimally. Spirituality in the sense that we mean here goes however a step further: it exercises itself in a life with God, in a personal relation to God, our Father, who calls us into life out of love, who knows, what we need, who looks after us and who waits for us; in the meeting with Christ, the arisen lord, who walks along with us, as He has promised to his disciples; in listening to the Holy Ghost, the Helper, who speaks to us to recollect what Jesus taught us. This is the inspiration source, which we, as a belief community, keep alive, within the catholic education institutions as well.

Solidarity means that the love of Christ opens our heart for the fellow man, especially when he is in need, sick or has been barred. God talks us on our co-responsibility in the service of the other. How can we come to God under his eyes if we have no eye for the smallest ones of our brothers and sisters, with whom Christ identifies himself (Mt. 25)? To these 'smallest

ones' also belong the students who don't find directly their spot in our school system, who cannot learn well, who have difficulties with the going rules, who have no safe home. From this principle catholic schools have, as welfare institutions, a public function to contribute to the realisation of an equitable society.

And finally to frugality/scatiness, which forms the necessary condition to fulfill our responsibility to God and the fellow man. Modern man, and unfortunately also the modern young man, threatens to concentrate on themselves too much, on prosperity, on unrestrained consumption, on more wages, more money, more luxury and comfort, more leisure and holiday, more technical means for transport, for communication, for leisure activities, continually more better and faster. Western man threatens to claim the goods of the earth for himself, for which others have shortcoming, which is now the case with millions of people from other continents, later the coming generations. It is going too well for us here and now in the rich West. The gospel warns us continuously about innate danger that we think exclusively of ourselves. By austerity in all sectors of our life we must and can create more space and time, attention and care for the others.

Within these 3 S-es, lies the essence of the counter-movement which we have to represent from the gospel to our young people. Young people are easily able to spend lots of money on clothes, going out and leisure activities, but likewise they would do well to motivate to share and to do their best, just for that other one, here, as well as in the third world. This ambivalence belongs to their age. To us the task to precede them and to teach them which side the balance has to tip eventually. Do they want to find themselves in service of each other and of God.

Society and politics ask schools to bring students up as responsible citizens in an economic knowledgeable society, but this cannot be the ultimate goal of upbringing and education. The gospel asks for full, humanising formation in which all substantial values and relations are shown to be of an advantage. This means, the need for formation of the entire person.

In the report of the consultation commission "Catholic education 2000-plus" (Dutch Catholic School Council, 1999) this need of formation of the entire person in education is defined as follows: "In the education not only learning performances, skills and intellectual developments are important, but so are personal, social and religious-ideological formation. Our society tends to put a one-sided emphasis on learning performances which are required for a good job, but will also show the indispensability of moral and spiritual formation. The

catholic education has in this formation of the entire person, a tradition which does not belong to the past, but deserves to be continued in the present catholic schools.

3. The Bearing Surface of a "Common Pedagogical Space"

A "common pedagogical space" needs, beside a basis, a bearing surface. I mean, how can that space take shape? How can an education institution provide good work? Confessional education stands for the challenge to develop itself to an education with a contemporary, inspired by the gospel, concept in which particular attention is paid to the ideological development and formation of the young people. That must be the bearing surface for a "common pedagogical space". This bearing surface is mainly formed by an educational concept, a training model and a function conception of the instructor.

Educational Concept

We can let ourselves be inspired by the tale of the two students on their way to Emmaüs. The meeting and the journey with the unknown, in whom they later recognise the arisen Lord, who along with Lucas, is symbolic for the path of life and belief of all students. The same Lucas communicates with us in the Acts of the Apostles and says that the first disciples before they were called 'christians', were indicated as 'followers of the Path' (Acts 9.2; 19, 9.23; 22.,4;.24, 14.22). This path is Christ, and the belief in him asks for a dynamic process of following that develops itself in and through life. In affiliation with the name 'Followers of the Path' we could speak of the 'Pedagogy of the Path'. How can one bring up the gospel pedagogically inviting in relation to every day life? There are five phases which are part of this path: to know the meeting, the accompaniment on the search, the graduality of the process, the connection between one's own experience and the gospel and the substantial relation of the student as a person to the other/Other.

The Pedagogy of the Path 'offers a good angle for the education to react to the current question of morals and standards'.

A conscious rehearsing in the counter-movement, so belongs the educational concept of the Pedagogical of the Path, which is required on the basis of evangelical value- scheduling: live fully your relations with God and with fellow man, in personal experienced spirituality, in effective solidarity and in moderation concerning one's own interests. In this way we can now demonstrate to young people experience that something of the Empire of God can become visible on earth.

Formation model

A virtue ethics is not tangible in books or methods. An educational institute, which has the formation in virtue ethics high in its standards, does not choose the easiest way. All the persons in charge of education and formation are aware of it that they form a community of instructors and students. A 'learning house' in which everyone is aware of the other and in which young people realise that they need each other, in which they learn that one's own self must relate to the other to grow together at each other.

Therefore, not only education, but also formation, in which also the instructors are conscious and inspired discussion partners. The adults carry a particular responsibility for a credible testimony in speaking and acting concerning their own religious attitude and - conviction. In this 'learning house' every student is known and accompanied as a young person who can develop into someone with an adult humane behaviour and way of life.

Conception of the Function of the Docent

Credible examples of concrete people and communities are of eminent, cardinal importance. They turn virtuousness as a dispositive into doing the truth. The attitude to life and the belief of the docent are very important for creating a strong and durable "common pedagogical space".

The today reality is that many teachers are employed because they are, in the first place, a good expert in their field and the institution also respects the philosophy of life of its employees. But on the other hand, every docent forms a necessary part of the mosaic, which makes a school a lively and formative community. And therefore it is a requirement that each teacher respects the basis of the education institution, and that, as far as it lies in his or her capacity subscribes it and promotes it. There will always be to a certain degree pluriformity in the teaching staff, concerning life considerations as well, belief and belief commitment, religious conscience and religiosity. It will however become clear to everyone that a school cannot fulfill its task without a sufficiently strong teaching staff, that can bring in an authentic way the gospel in relation with everyday experiences of his/herself and of the students. For educational institutions that include religion and life consideration in their schoolplan, there is a particular task for the teachers concerned. A condition is that the course gets a serious place within the courses on offer and that it is widely supported by the teaching staff, the Executive Board, the parents and the governing board.

In Conclusion

I have tried to discuss briefly the outlines of a "common pedagogical space" from a Christian point of view. This does not mean that a claim has been laid on the interpretation of this space which should be promoted between people with several ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious contexts. On the contrary, I hope that I succeeded in explaining that the Christian confessionality of an educational institution, particularly on the basis, which it knows and with the social basis which it provides, such a common pedagogical space should be possible. It seems to me that this is a good matter. Because like there are linguistic rights in education and training, so have children and young people a moral right to a space to develop themselves into honest people who can handle differences between people with different ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious background in an affirmative way and who learn in their own life to shape the full dignity of their own human personality and also respect unconditionally this dignity of their fellow men.