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REVELATION AND PAEDAGOGICS

PAEDAGOGICS as science has to deal with four problems which are fundamental questions of any educational work: that of its idea, aim, object and method.

The *idea of education* can be found if we look on the effort common with man even in his primitive state of culture with which he is handing over to the young generation the knowledge and readiness necessary for it in the struggle of life. The elements of the material of this education consist first of all of information about how to keep up and develop the physical life, afterwards elements of rites and traditions till we find later a comprehensive system containing the history, language, religion and art characteristic of the educating community in which system is summed up everything which is necessary for the young. As we find in the whole history of education that one aim is reigning and directing in this whole system of material: the aim which education is going to realise. This aim is the *ideal of man*. There can be no educational system worthy of its name which could be satisfied with an aim weaker and worse than this for it can never give up to look to and to try to realise the perfect aim.

But the difficulty of education is that this aim was never realised. The history of education is a terrible struggle in which the loftiest ideas fall down and crash or lose their way unfulfilled. Each generation is striving towards that aim without being able to realise it and, in spite of this fact, man is not able to give up the efforts to begin again and again seeking newer and better methods, more secure ways. The work of education thus bears in itself a *compulsion* by which man is constrained to try to serve this loftiest aim and to reach it; and although this aim is unreachable for him, he is unable to give up the efforts after it. This compulsion, this law which is above us and which keeps us in its power is felt by every true teacher, and the truer he is, the more he feels it. This urges and compels him in his whole life towards this high but unreachable aim. This makes the life of the great men of history of education so painfully restless and unfinished. And this is the *first contradiction* of educational work: that its aim is impossible to realise and, in

spite of this, we have to keep up this work because we are in the power of a great compulsory will above ourselves.

The second point of question is standing before us regarding the *contents of this aim*. Where can we take from the contents of this perfect aim of education? This question can be answered in two ways. Firstly, we can seek it in *man himself*. This is the point of view of the individualistic, naturalistic paedagogics according to which the aim of education can be found in man and our duty is only to develop it. This means that the aim is in our possession, it is congruent with the essence of man.¹ On the same line is going the way of idealism which tries to find this aim in a system of values. If we try to find the aim of education either in the natural essence of man or in the system of values acknowledged and fixed by humanity, in both cases this aim must be imperfect. As to the system of values depending on and acknowledged by human estimation, we have no certainty whatever that this estimation is absolute and eternal. There have been times in human history when it happened that values considered previously as the highest ones, at once turned out worthless for the next generation. Therefore, if we are trying to find an aim for education absolute and unchangeable, we must look for it higher than any human estimation; we must look for it in something which has its absoluteness and perfectness above every human thought—or we must give up the idea of a perfect aim and be content with relative tasks before us. But this means to give up education as science and to make it a conglomeration of everyday counsels.

Such an aim above human estimation is found by another answer in the *social or historical facts* of mankind. According to this theory the contents of aim of education we have to seek in such realities which, although composed of human individuals, contain something which cannot be conceived and derived from individual man. We can find this reality in the Church, which claims the highest authority for fixing the aim of education, or in society, which is said to have got its power outside of the individual, or in humanity,² in universal spirit,³ whose self-realising activity is to be called education.

¹ Ellen Key: *Das Jahrhunderts des Kindes*. Berlin, 1912. pp. 110, 111, 116. P. Lagarde: *Deutsche Schiften*. Göttingen, 1886. pp. 97, 486.

² P. Natorp: *Socialpaedagogik*. Stuttgart, 1902. 2-7 §§. pp. 86, 89, 101. Edwin Hoernle: *Grundfragen der prolet Erziehung*. Berlin. pp. 6, 12.

³ E. Krieck: *Philosophie der Erziehung*. Jena, 1922. pp. 192-197.

All these theories have two difficulties : either they sacrifice the absoluteness of the aim and give education into the hand of some outward power unknowable and uncertain as so-called humanity or universal spirit, or trying to save the independence of man they make it a prey again to the possession of the relative human thinking.

This leads us to the conviction that we can acknowledge only such an aim for education as, although independent of changeable human thought, cannot become a mere toy of uncertain and unknown powers. If the fact is, as we saw above, that this aim can be found neither in human thought nor in any kind of human societies or realities, this contradiction cannot be settled. We can only keep up this contradiction with the statement that this aim for education is *already fixed*, given us not in our own thoughts or estimation but in the will of God. And here we find the *second contradiction* of education in the fact that its aim given us in the will of God is absolute and independent of our estimation, but in spite of this it is addressed to us and compulsory for us. The contradiction is that this aim is in its contents independent of man, yet it is compulsory for him ; unknowable for us yet addressed to us. It can, because of its unique absoluteness, never be realised, yet we can never escape its constraining power ; it is of an outward source, yet we can never give it up ; it is God's super-individual and super-social, objective, absolute Will.

The third problem is dealing with the *object* of education, with the *child*. In recent paedagogical literature we find a large discussion on this question. However, attention is to a great extent turned almost merely to the physical, intellectual, social sides of the child's life and the chiefest problem, what is the child, is neglected. This shows how deeply recent paedagogics has merged into intellectualism and how superficially it went over the deepest problems. Our question, therefore, must be : not how is the child in his intellectual or social being, but the question is : how is the child, how is man, *in his existence*, in his whole *reality*.

We get two answers to this question. One of these gives the statement that man in bringing the aim of education as a child with him in his birth and education has only the task to develop it in the course of life. To this point of view of the naturalistic paedagogics mentioned already, we have to say that the fact is that the aim of education cannot be found in the child.

Otherwise we could see examples of the aim fulfilled and realised, children brought up to a stage of perfection. In the second half of the last century we find a paedagogical theory: the paedagogics of personality,¹ which we can consider as an experiment of improving the former statement. The aim of education according to this theory is the ideal man: personality. The seed of this is said to be present in the individual as a tendency given by God to man as man's destination. Step by step during the work of education are these features said to be realised in the soul of the child till at the end Christian personality is ready as the fruit of educational work. But this theory fails not only in asserting an aim dependent on human estimation and so giving up the independent absolute aim, but this failure grows with the supposition referring to the nature of the child. So we find here the same optimism, a belief of natural goodness and ableness for a perfect development. Beside this difficulty, we find in both theories that they cannot look deeper than the social and intellectual sides of the child; they cannot look on him in his existential reality. Their method of examination is psychology, which science is unable to answer this question.

This question cannot be answered with any of these solutions. It can be answered only if we see that man is holding in himself *the root of continual contradictions*. His life is a perpetual war against the aim and ideal of education that is against his destination, which he must accept as true, but which he is unable to realise in himself. Man is a battlefield where sin is fighting its perpetual war against the will of God which He gave to be the aim of man; and in this war there is no possibility for a peace. In the measure in which man is unable to conceive and fulfil the aim so is he also unable to see even his real state unless it is made known to him by the *Word of God*. So education in its aim as well as in its object must look to a supposition which is above man and independent of him: it must refer to Revelation.

The last problem of paedagogics is that of *method*. Recent paedagogical systems are very eager to discuss this question and we can say that paedagogics of to-day is spending the most of its time and work on examining the question of the way of education. It is also true that without this question our first three answers are useless. However, if we take a glance at the various ideas

¹ Schneller: Paed. dolg. Budapest. P. Linde: Persönlichkeitspädagogik. Fr. Niebergall: Person u. Persönlichkeit. H. Gaudig: Die Schule im Dienste der Werdenden Persönlichkeit. Leipzig, 1922. pp. 26-27.

which to-day rule in paedagogical systems with reference to the method, we must admit that the best result they could reach is only that we are able to show the child the aim of education, the ideal of human life ; but we have never found the effectual way for him to fulfil this aim. One of the deepest and most sorrowful experiences of our education is the discovery that our work was in vain, if our ambition goes higher than to teach some material or to awake a momentary enthusiasm with our addresses, if we seek to give a decisive influence to the child. This experience, as well as the theoretical study about the method, is in accordance with the foregoing statement about the aim and object of education. Our work is unable to overcome the fundamental and essential contradiction between the aim and the child. And this is the *fourth contradiction* of education : that *its method is hopeless* because the aim cannot be realised either by the teacher or by the child. What we can do is only to remove the hindrances, to recognise the circumstances in the way of education ; to secure its success surpasses our ability and is beyond our powers.

So we see that education in its foundation and in its aim can be built up only *on a condition* which is *beyond every human thought* and human action, which is absolute in its origin and in its existence. Without such a condition education falls into one of the two temptations : that of *Pharisaism* with which it will ascribe absoluteness to human thoughts or that of *Prometheus* with which to humanise, get in its possession the absolute divine aim. This means that we can speak of education as creative action only *under the condition of Revelation*. Revelation can alone make clear to us the true aim of our educational work, only Revelation can inform us about the true reality of the child, and both of them are unknowable for us without the Word of God. The mistake recent paedagogics is always making is the identification of education with Revelation in consequence of which it makes Revelation a mere human ideal, and for human ideals it is claiming in the work of education the absoluteness which is due only to the Word of God. In this mistake the orthodox paedagogical systems are also sharing, since they ascribe to human activities, as to the work of Church or to the letter of Scripture, absoluteness.¹ In this respect the same can be said of the effort which seeks to make the Gospel conform to

¹ Palmer : *Evangelische Paedagogik*. Stuttgart, 1853. pp. 85-99.

the child and to find in him the possibility of understanding for the Gospel,¹ with which principle this theory goes back to the humanistic-idealistic point of view, making Revelation again anthropomorphic and relative.

We can avoid these difficulties only if we keep Revelation in its absolute loftiness. If we, in spite of trying to draw Revelation near to man, try to look to the ways Revelation itself comes near to us without our work and efforts. The Word was made flesh: this means that the Word is always made flesh but not because of our own will but because of the will of God. So in the work of education as far as it is essentially a form of preaching of the eternal Word of God, Revelation is coming near to man. In this case God gives His Word, His call to man, which we hear in faith and in our decision for obedience. But faith and decisions are not fundamental points of education, they are only the stuttering answers, the empty hands which we reach but which are accepted by God in His mercy. To make the faith or decision of faith a fundament of education means to go back to the ground we left: to the ground of human initiative.²

If we recognise Revelation as the only condition for our educational work, we find that this fact *does not remove the difficulties* and does not solve the hopeless contradiction we saw in each problem of education. These contradictions can never disappear, for in the depth of these lies hidden the solitary and fundamental contradiction: *the contrast between God and man*. All the paedagogical systems referred to already, rest upon the supposition that this contrast can be some way or other wiped away. This question, which we answered in the negative, is the great stumbling-block of theology and paedagogics. So all the problems of education go back to the question: is it possible for man to remove the essential difference and contradiction between God and himself? This is, of course, a theological question and this means that the fundamental problem of paedagogics is founded on theology. To this question our Reformed Theology replies with the principle of *finitum non capax infiniti*, and with this answer the foundation of paedagogics are laid against every humanistic and idealistic point of view, on Reformed Theological principles.

¹ Pfennigsdorf: *Wie lehren wir Evangelium?* Stuttgart, 1920.

² G. Bohne: *Das Wort Gottes und der Unterricht*. 1929. Chapter VII. Schreiner Helmut. *Paedagogik aus Glauben*. Schwerin, 1930. pp. 157-153.

If, standing on this principle, we enquire about the *aim of education* we find that this aim can be the only *destination of man* which is according to the Word of God : to serve the will of God on the earth. This conviction of the aim is not a result of human philosophy ; it is given us in the Word. The whole world is the property of God, created for the purpose that His will might be fulfilled in it, and man is also His property to do His will. Man and his world are both subject to vanity in the bondage of corruption waiting with earnest expectation for the manifestation and fulfilment of the will of God. The personality of Christ is the ideal and possibility of education. Its ideal in showing us the features of the aim which otherwise would remain an abstract principle for us ; its possibility because He is working in us with the power of His Spirit without which no education is possible. Education in its work as instruction has the task to give the child information about the world as about the world of God, to show him by faith the world, as a unity under the power of God, the events and facts of the world as understood in this light. Moral education has not the aim to hand over the child some moral principles or to lead him to social activities, but to show him the responsibility which he holds in his personal and social life as the child of God and which are consequences of his relation to Christ. Religious education is preaching the Word to the children, its task is to find out the ways in which they can hear the message of God.

The fact which makes education necessary is the *present state of man*. In contradiction with other paedagogical systems which look on the child as good by nature and able to realise the ideal of education, we see that there is a terrible chasm between the present state of man and his destination given him by God. This cleft is not to be found in the child's intellectual or moral life only : it is in his *whole being*. Education is not able to fill this cleft ; it cannot bring man nearer to God ; this is the work of mercy only. Education's task is to make this fact real to the child, to convince him that the reason of his deficiency is sin itself which endangers his whole life. So we get in this a new light if we try to know the child, which is such a favourite study of modern paedagogics but which gives only superficial facts unless it looks deeper to examine the child in his relation with God. This means that the real knowledge of man can be got again from the Revelation, from the Word of God.

With this is connected the third problem, that of the *method*. One of the greatest efforts of paedagogics was and is still to find a method of education that is secure and infallible. However, if it is true that between the absolute aim of education that is the destination given by God and between man there is no possibility of balance, so it is true also that we cannot speak of a secure and infallible method of education. The cleft cannot be bridged save on the side of God. Therefore paedagogics which stand on the fundamental basis of Revelation is distrustful of every human method and does not dare to refer to any one of them as certain and sure. Only the *Holy Spirit of God is able to do the work of education*. He is able to convince man of sin and to accept the will of God. Of course this does not mean that the method is unnecessary or even harmful. On the contrary, we are called upon to examine the ways and possibilities which are laid in the soul of the child and to get acquainted with the outward frames intellectual, social, etc., which can be used for the better delivery of the message. But we can never identify these frames with the work of the Spirit. So the personality of the teacher on which such a great stress was laid by the modern paedagogics has diminished in importance. The *teacher* is not a "creative personality" who frames the soul and mind with his decisive influence, he is only *a means of God* obliged to accommodate himself to His will and only by his truthfulness and humbleness can he be a true steward in the ministry of the eternal Word.

In our method of education we ask *what kind of ways* we have of knowing the will of God? Three such ways are open to us. The Word comes near to us as *doctrine* in making us acquainted with facts and data unknowable by human intellect. Our duty is here to register these facts, to draw conclusions from them, being always aware that the last principles are laid down in the Word of God. So in the method we get the first way: the way of *instruction* used in the work when the material of education is dealing with facts. The second way on which the Word comes near to us is the way of *perception*. God shows His will in events of history and in human personalities which call our attention to the message. Not as if any human personality or any fact of history could express or hold the Word, but they point to it and the Word gives them light and meaning. This gives us the way of *example* with which we try to show the child

the will of God in events, in personal lives and examples. A third way is the coming of the Word of God in the way of *deeds*. God gives us commandments, laws which are obligatory for us. This way He is leading us in obedience. Even when we do not see clearly His will we can hear and know His commands. So it is the task of education to tell the child the laws of God in his everyday life. This method can be called the way of *practice*, of which we can say that these commandments, although they cannot be identified with the full will of God, contain however what God is requiring from us as our duty.

These are the fundamental problems of a paedagogics standing under the condition of Revelation and on the foundation of Reformed Theology. One thing more we have to say. From the middle of the last century German theology emphasised the claim that the only way for Practical Theology is to learn the methods and way of Paedagogics, for education in any respect, even Christian education, is "paedagogoumenon." Now we have an opinion which is quite the contrary to this. We have found that not only Practical Theology but even Paedagogics is "theologoumenon," therefore Paedagogics must go and learn of Theology and stand upon a theological foundation. And we think that only such a foundation will be safe enough for it.

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