

**THE WIND BLOWS WHERE IT WISHES... (John 3:8)
Towards a Pneumatological Religious Education**

Bert Roebben
Technische Universität Dortmund
Germany

Siebren Miedema
VU University Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Abstract

In this contribution the authors reconstruct the different possibilities of a renewed theological reflection on the working of the Spirit within the framework of religious education. In contemporary practical theology and religious education (in praxis as well as in theory) elements and even building blocks can already be found for a contemporary pneumatological religious education. Some selected contributions are outlined, discussed in an in-depth way, and reframed in the light of (post)modern pneumatological theologies. A prolegomena for an outline of a comprehensive pneumatological religious education is supplied.

1. Introduction

Context

Within the European tradition of religious education (RE) there is an explicit or implicit strong anchoring of RE in the life of the churches and their theology/ies. Both within the Roman-Catholic church as well as in Protestants churches there has always been a responsibility for education and edification of children and youngsters in denominational and/or state schools ('Bildungsauftrag') and last but not least through the school subject of RE. Teacher training was and quite often still is related to religious foundations, and sometimes there is an intensive relationship and embedding in theological faculties and institutes.

It is also striking to notice that even strong religious educational stances which find as it seems their 'natural' niches in pedagogy, philosophy of education or educational sciences, are heavily loaded and influenced by outspoken theological trains of thought. For instance Wolfram Weisse's pedagogical plea for a 'Religious Education for All' in Hamburg turns out to be directly inspired by the work and ideas of the Hamburg and World Council of Churches theologian Hans Jochen Margull who published and advocated publicly in the 1960s and 1970s.¹ But even for his colleagues who are really versed in his work, this theological

¹ Wolfram Weisse is dealing with the theological source of inspiration for his pedagogical credo 'Religious Education for All' in a for the authors of this paper very insightful chapter under the title 'Religious Education as Encounter with Neighbour Religious' (in Miedema 2009, 116-132).

background and input remained ‘hidden’ under his well articulated pedagogical discourse in which inter-religious education is propagated.

Quite often religious educators are focusing that much on the educational, didactical and societal side that they are even at the educational forefront. But this may go at the detriment of articulating and underpinning their practical-theological and theological views and ideas. The practical-theological language game is implicitly included in the educational talk – that is the language of curriculum and pedagogy – and often their theological stance is only present in veiled terms. The challenge for many religious educators to legitimize their contributions in RE in a secularized society leads to a societal adjustment often implying that not a theological but only a societal, an educational or a didactical vocabulary is used.

It is our contention that in RE the pedagogical/didactical and the theological component need each other.² In a picture, RE can be drawn as an ellipse with as its two focal points pedagogy and theology which stand in a complementary but tensional relationship to each other. However, seeing the underdevelopment of the theological component in religious education we want to emphasize in this contribution this neglected theological side, and in doing so we want to strengthen the elliptical equilibrium. It is our view that we are in need of new and up to date theological language games too for the benefit of RE that is adequate to time and context.³

Content

In this paper we are dealing with a particular theological issue as well, that is we investigate the different possibilities of a renewed theological reflection on the working of the Spirit within the framework of RE.

It is definitely *not* our aim to provide a pneumatological treaty in which the concept of the Spirit is outlined as one of the divine persons of the Trinity, and then in a second step apply these insights to practical theology and religious education⁴. What we are doing is, on the contrary, to scrutinize in what way the working of the Spirit in RE today could be described in a plausible way on the basis of human experiences.⁵ We will follow a three step approach:

(Step 1) we will distinguish ‘Spirit rich ’experiences in religious educational actions, acting and practices;

(Step 2) we will confront these experiences with the newest insights in pneumatology;

(Step 3) on the basis of the results of step 1 and 2 we try to reinterpret religious educational actions, acting and practices while also being attentive to forgotten dimensions in religious education.

2. Pneumatologically relevant experiences in religious education

The Holy Spirit is an often neglected dimension in contemporary theology. In many treatises of systematic theology mostly the existence and presence of God at the one hand and the impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our world on the other hand are central elements in the theological discourses. When it comes to the working of the Spirit, which Taylor has aptly

² See the title of the book of Roebben and Warren (2001): ‘Religious Education as Practical Theology’.

³ See along this line the plea of strengthening the theological discourse in RE in Roebben (2008).

⁴ See the second ‘conviction’ of M. O’Brien (2009).

⁵ See the subtitle of the book by B.J. Cooke (2004): ‘Toward an Experience-Based Pneumatology’.

characterized as ‘the Go-Between God’ (Taylor 2004), many theological scholars are reticent and their sources for reflection and action in the field of RE remain dry.

In our exercise we investigate the different possibilities of a renewed theological reflection on the working of the Spirit within the framework of RE itself. In stead of waiting for a renewed pneumatology, we want to explore existing Spirit-related pathways in RE. We believe that in the practical theological and educational discourse of RE already solid elements and building blocks can be found for a comprehensive contemporary pneumatological RE. In a globalised world in which children and young people learn to be resilient and learn to deal with the complexity of ‘identity and involvement’, new theological concepts are practiced or more adequately expressed old ones are newly practiced. We believe that the Spirit is one of them.

A few selected contributions in the domain of the teaching and learning of religion are clearly sensitive to a deeper reflection on the Spirit as an agency in an up-to-date, so called ‘powerful learning environment’. We will first briefly describe these contributions and will respond to them theologically.

(1) In the (inter-)religious dialogue outlined by Mary Boys the idea of ‘learning in the presence of the other’ (Boys 2008) and perspective change could be reframed as being lead by the spirit of communion and communication. According to Mary Boys, the prerequisite for the inter-religious and inter-spiritual dialogue is a *hermeneutics of affection*. This is the willingness at the side of the partners in dialogue and encounter to listen to the views and opinions of the other person, but to listen especially to and trace the commitment, the spirit of the other person as expressed from within that person’s own life perspective or worldview in his or her views and opinions (Boys 1997, 353).⁶

A beautiful expression of this idea of ‘learning in the presence of the other’ and now in terms of what we want to characterize as a ‘pneumatological praxeology’ can be found in Jean-Jacques Suurmond’s book ‘Gifts of the spirit are ordinary people’ (Suurmond, 1995; see for a review of this book written in Dutch, Miedema, 1996). Suurmond states that the experience of transcendence or God’s reality is a fruit of the Spirit. This presence of the Spirit comes to light in the encounter of people in ordinary life situations and relations. Within the space of a real face-to-face, heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul, spirit-to-spirit encounter the partners also experience the Holy. In the encounter partners can become spiritual gifts for each other. They experience the anthropological structure in reality that people need other people in order that their uniqueness as persons could flourish and could be fostered. In openness and reciprocity the source of tears, the vulnerability, and dependence in the persons’ lives can become transparent, and the fear of death and the urge of self-preservation may disappear. In Christianity we point here to Jesus, the man anointed with Spirit. In his life the permanent indwelling of the Spirit of God has come to life in an exemplary way. The point of departure for Suurmond is that every other person, regardless her or his particular religion or worldview can potentially become a gift of the Spirit for Christians to become more and more truth, which is transparent up to God.

(2) Enthusiasm (in Greek: being indwelled by God, ‘en-theos’) is an important teaching and learning dimension which relates to the indwelling of the Spirit within the teaching ministry.

⁶ See M. O’Brien (2009, 234-235): “Religious education is (often, even if implicitly) theological. Religious education is sometimes done in settings, such as secular schools, where students are taught ‘about religion’ and care is taken to avoid indoctrination. Even so, I maintain that it is not possible to learn about religion without openness to an encounter that acknowledges others’ deeply held beliefs and seeks and ‘imaginative sympathy’ with them” (with reference to Duffy).

Children who have to chance to encounter stimulating and enthusiastic teachers, learn better, because they are challenged to take up the role model of inspiration and ‘joi-de-vivre’ represented by the teacher at stake. For Saint Augustine the teacher is a mediator of the Word of God, translated and transferred to him/her by the Holy Spirit. In his beautiful treaty ‘De catechizandis rudibus’, on the first contact of interested people with the Christian tradition, he supports his friend Deogratio to continue his efforts, although the latter is not sure whether or not his teaching is efficient and interesting enough (Steinmann & Wermelinger 1985). The most important thing is that the one who teaches believes in what he/she says. If this is the case, the rest will follow. Burn-out is a radical contrast experience of despair and discouragement, not only concerning the disinterest of the learners, but also about one’s own interest in the subject at stake. The German religious pedagogue Englert reflects on possible ways of helping colleagues in finding courage in (religious) teaching again (2007).

(3) Teaching is about providing light of insight so that people can rejoice in a perspective of hope. Enlightenment and clarification open the horizon for more connectedness and engagement, with oneself and others, with the world and the complexity of that world. Only when there are vision and illumination, something new and creative can happen. This creative power of light within the learning process could be reconsidered from a pneumatological perspective.

(4) The renewed attention for the old educational concept of ‘mystagogy’ is grounded in the positive anthropology that the human being is radically open for the mystery (from the Greek: *mysterion*) of existence. The soul after all is susceptible to the mystery of reality as it unfolds itself in the life of the human person. In the learning process the soul can be encouraged to reveal itself to the learning person. In this perspective the teacher is acting (from the Greek: *agogein*) as a midwife who time and again helps the learner to give birth to new insights (pedagogical), to new life (theological). This process could be reconsidered from a pneumatological angle.

These four contributions are understood as ‘signals of the working of the Spirit’. The theological, but at least spiritual or religious pre-supposition – in the sense of Gadamer’s ‘Vorurteil’ – is the willingness and openness for the reality of the Spirit. It is also based on the ‘desiderium naturale’ of the human person for transcendence in the midst of late-modern border experiences and experiences of vulnerability in everyday life (see for example Joas, 2004; Habermas, 2005). Other ways of dealing with the modern openness for the Spirit in new educational language, can be found e.g. in:

Competences	Charismata
Transformative learning	Wisdom
Beyond didactical planning	Teachable moment
Enlightenment	Vision/illumination
Didactics	Discernment of the Spirit/s
Pedagogical Eros	Beauty of God
Atmosphere/good vibrations in the classroom	Ruah of God
Enthusiasm of the teacher	Being indwelled by the Spirit
Burn-out of the teacher	Despair as a sin against the Spirit
Back to basics/elementarisation	Mystagogy/initiation in religious practices
Self-reliant learning	Transcendental openness/‘capacitas infiniti’
Learning in the presence of the other	Encounter of spiritually gifted persons
Communication	Communio

3. Pneumatology and dialectics

In this paragraph we want to confront the practical-theological findings with regard to pneumatologically relevant experiences in RE (par. 2), with recent systematic-theological insights in the field of the study of the Holy Spirit. This will help us to better understand our experiences and to reframe them in a theological way. It can also contribute to a new way of dealing with the pneumatological dimension of theology in general.

After reading some new endeavours in the field of pneumatology, the least one can say is that *dialectics* plays an important role in the definition of the status and working of the Holy Spirit. He/she is considered to be the centrifugal dynamic power of love and life that emanates out of the intimate relationship of the Father and the Son. He/she makes it happen that people can participate in this relationship. He/she is radically rooted and present in this relationship. At the same time however he/she is present in the human world to re-present this salvific dimension of the Trinity. He/she is reaching out to human beings and asking them to become smoothly convinced of the loving and living power of the Trinity – of the personal virtues that are part of it (Rom. 8) and the new mode of human community that evolves out of it (Acts 2:1-13). This dialectics of presence and absence, of emanation and abstention, of ‘Here I am, you can count on me’ and ‘It is up to you now’ is typical for contemporary definitions of the Holy Spirit. It is also typical for the new approaches to theology in which the anthropological turn of the seventies and eighties is reconsidered as radically related to the contemporary new longing for transcendence, for a global and universal perspective on God and humankind. Or in other words, where contextual theologies radically are reconsidered within new global theologies, liberation meets soteriology and liberating praxis meets eschatology.⁷ The reconsideration of the role and the working of the Holy Spirit plays an important role in this new theological fabric.

Biblical testimonies about the working of the Spirit confirm this dialectics (Tigcheler 2004). The transcendent power of God is undefined and vague like the wind, but becomes concrete when it is poured out upon human beings, “poured out upon all flesh” (Joel 3:1)⁸ – eminently as enthusiasm poured out upon prophets or as a permanent power of wisdom resting on the Messiah and later more specifically on Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 1:35 and 3:22). In the New Testament Jesus doesn’t refer much to the Spirit, but the early gospel tradition has attributed this spiritual element of godly presence to him (Tigcheler 2004, 619). He has to withstand the devil in the desert, the seduction to disobey his life project, and the Spirit is leading him in this; he is referring to a new life in God when people are baptised with Spirit and fire (and not anymore with water); his disciples have to be reborn and become ‘spiritual’ people (cfr. Nicodemus in John 3:8)⁹; Jesus is stepping back at the end of his life to give floor to the Spirit, so that people can become inspired by his message and lifestyle – that they can experience his presence even in his absence (Moltmann 2001, 117-118). The story continues when the group of disciples is gathered after Jesus’ death and becomes radically enflamed by the Holy Spirit: they take over Jesus’ presence in the world, Gods incarnated presence, and they speak a universal language of salvation and grace, that every one could hear in his or her

⁷ Just to mention only a few European examples: Erik Borgman, *Metamorfosen* (2006) – Johannes-Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluraler Gesellschaft* (2006) — Hans-Joachim Sander, *Europas Heterotopien* (2007) – Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology* (2002).

⁸ Joel 2:28 in the King James Bible: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.”

⁹ John 3:8 in the King James Bible: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

own particular mother tongue. This is not occurring in a sort of dogmatic ‘catechism for the whole world’, but in a radically contextualised, narrative and therefore practicable salvation perspective. It refers to the idea of a ‘vision’ as biblical genre as this was the case in Joel 3:1. People become enlightened and give birth to a new future, a vision on how things can become radically different (Tigcheler 2004, 620). “Jesus did not bring a new religion into the world, but new life” (Moltmann 2001, 119): a life of particularity and commitment, so that the world can become one and healed. The new identity of the believer – ‘metanoia’ or turning to the world – is a ‘received identity’.

In contemporary pneumatology this dialectics is reaffirmed. It doesn’t help us any further to make strong distinctions between free will and divine grace, between Gods presence and Gods absence, between the inward bound and outward bound character of the Trinity, between incarnation and justification, between a theology of creation and a theology of redemption, between the cradle and the cross... We should take the “incarnational dynamics” and the “unfinished character of Christian identity” serious, argues the American theologian Amos Yong (2004, here 240).¹⁰

In the bipolarity of ‘presence and absence’ of the Holy Spirit in human experiences this dialectics is represented at its best. The coming of the Spirit is in front of us and at same time already working in us now – between longing and fulfilment, between already and not yet. “We then experience God the Spirit as both counterpart and presence, as any child experienced the mother as both encompassing presence, in which it lived, and as counterpart, to which it cried” (Moltmann 2001, 116). Let us shortly describe the two dimensions of this bipolarity.

For many authors (both in the Roman-Catholic and Protestant tradition) the dimension of ‘counterpart’ or absence plays an important role. Human beings are craving for transcendence as something which is missing, because they are human. They are – with Saint Augustine – “homo absconditus in Christo” (Confessiones X, 17), concealed for themselves and others. Their deepest identity is eschatological and will become visible at the end of times. “Our groaning for self-encounter and self-experience arises from our concealment, the mystery we are to ourselves and others, and will find fulfilment in the apocalypse of our selves in the “seeing God from face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). ‘Then I shall know even as also I am known: homo revelatus’” (Moltmann 2001, 117). This has radical consequences for our theological epistemology, for the ways we (learn to) know God. Diversity and complexity are radically characteristic for Gods presence through the Spirit in the world. Discourse and reflection within the community are the only access to interpret this diversity and complexity. People need to take their contemporary and particular religion and religious experiences seriously, but they also should be open for the coming of God within other particular experiences (cf. Miedema & Biesta 2004, 35-36, inspired by the theological thoughts of Jacques Derrida). The Spirit is poured out upon all flesh (cf. Suurmond 1995); all are participating in His/her power. Amos Yong (2004, 235-266) describes eminently the epistemological work that needs to be done, the ‘discernment of the Spirit/s’ (in plural – the spirits – and in singular – through the work of the Holy Spirit). This encompasses: a) analysing the background factors in our encounter with others (how we are ‘there’ in the dialogue with others), b) critical reflection on the contribution of the other(s), which is always fragmented and provisional, and c) controlling if we are already living in the new Spirit, looking at what we are doing and not so

¹⁰ Every theology should therefore be formulated in this dialectics, within the complexity of different models of religious experience and community. Inculturation is therefore always about working with ‘dirty hands’ and being compromised to development in acting and thinking. According to Yong (2004, 240) theology should therefore always be a) multidisciplinary, b) multiculturally and c) multiperspectivistic.

much at what we are saying (cfr. the Good Samaritan, did we ask ourselves to whom we should be the neighbour?)

Our perception therefore needs to be trained and shaped through the lens of the Spirit. In their theological reflection people should at the one hand listen to their particular tradition, but at the other hand dare to get disconnected from their 'old' theological agendas and ways of looking and interpreting. The 'incarnational dynamics' of faith ('God created the human person, because he/she loves stories', Elie Wiesel) receives a 'kenotic' undertone in Christianity: this is the typical way in which God wanted us to know him, in which he was revealed to us, as becoming almost assimilated within culture, as becoming part of human life, as 'being in love' with the human person (Edward Schillebeeckx). One of my students in Tilburg (the Netherlands) once asked me (BR), when I was disqualifying certain forms of vague and post-modern faith too heavily, whether or not I had enough confidence in the Holy Spirit.¹¹ This student critically argued that I was not able to perceive new forms of presence of God in the absence of the old forms of institutionalised religion, because my lens of faith (of belief and of confidence) was not clear enough.¹²

On the thin line of *a too negative (or apostatic) and a too affirmative (or kataphatic) theology*, new ways of dealing with theology, with the work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore with religious education, need to be explored (cf. Miedema & Biesta 2004, 31-33). At the opposite site of counterpart and absence, there is the experience of the fulfilment and presence of God in contemporary culture. Within the dynamics of inculturation, incarnation and kenosis, God deeply wants to become familiar with us and present to us. The metaphors of embrace (Cooke 2004, 179-189), friendship (McFague) and relationship (Boschki 2003) are excellent vehicles to re-define this delicate way of Gods presence in contemporary culture and our permanent interpretation of it through the Holy Spirit. In the embrace there is both presence and absence, fulfilment and longing for more, clarity and unclarity.¹³ It would be an interesting experiment to learn from contemporary literature, to explore these kind of metaphors.

4. Back to the RE classroom: practical theology as introducing the missing link¹⁴

In this final paragraph we want to crystallize our ideas emerging out of the clash of educational actions, acting and practices at the one hand and theological discourse at the other hand. Religious educational practice is open for theological reflection, and theological

¹¹ Or in the words of Amos Yong (2004, 235): "But most important, with the Christian conviction that the Spirit is ever active in the world, even that of the religions, who knows whether a determination of the Spirit's absence today in a given religious phenomenon may not produce a determination of the Spirit's presence tomorrow in a phenomenon that is now both the same and yet different?"

¹² This was also one of the important findings of the Tilburg Summer Academies for young adult ministers: theology should become more kenotic, open for the unexpected yet fulfilling coming of God through the Holy Spirit in contemporary culture(s) – in the humble and modest voices of ordinary people, craving for the good life (see Roebben and Zondervan 2008, 268-271).

¹³ The third line of doing theology, beyond the mere 'via positiva' and the mere 'via negativa', is the 'via eminentiae': learning to perceive Gods presence through the 'vestigia Dei', through the always concealed and provisional but at the same time striking evidence in the traces of his presence, for instance in aesthetics, in the human longing for the common good, in human love and understanding, etc. This tradition has very old roots in Christian theology: Saint Augustine, the Franciscans, Thomas Aquinas, the Jesuit tradition, and the 'nouvelle theologie' in Western-Europe (De Lubac, Congar, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, etc.)

¹⁴ Cfr. the proposal of David Tracy during the last meeting of the International Academy of Practical Theology (Chicago, August 2009) to bring theoretical and spiritual theology together again within practical theology; see also Veling 1998.

reflection should ‘learn’ from the practice of the classroom. ‘Theory and praxis’ and ‘theology and RE’ should include one another. It is our contention that practical theology can be considered as the discipline that introduces the missing link between theory and praxis, between theology and RE, between academia and the ordinary classroom...

The richness of this exciting confrontation however is without end – because of its own nature, for it is a Spirit driven confrontation and needs permanent ‘distinction of the Spirit(s)’ within the broader learning community (of the RE classroom, but also of theology departments or seminaries). We want to give the reader the chance to catch a glimpse of our reflections on this encounter of ideas, by referring to the hymn ‘Veni, Creator Spiritus’ of Rabanus Maurus (Germany, 8-9th century A.C.). We present here briefly three of the seven verses of this song:

1. Veni, creator Spiritus mentes tuorum visita, imple superna gratia, quae tu creasti pectora.	Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, and in our hearts take up Thy rest; come with Thy grace and heav’nly aid, To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.
2. Qui diceris Paraclitus, altissimi donum Dei, fons vivus, ignis, caritas et spiritalis unctio.	O Comforter, to Thee we cry, Thou heav’nly gift of God most high, Thou Fount of life, and Fire of love, and sweet anointing from above.
4. Accende lumen sensibus, infunde amorem cordibus, infirmi nostri corporis, virtute firmans perpeti.	Thy light to every sense impart, and shed thy love in every heart; thine own unfailing might supply to strengthen our infirmity.

The Holy Spirit is here considered as the Comforter, the ‘Advocatus’, the one who helps the faithful with insight and adequate action (first verse). Life and love are His/her tools to stimulate people to act accordingly (second verse). In the fourth verse the implications of His/her presence in daily life are described in a threefold way: there is light (‘lumen’) for the mind, there is love (‘amor’) in the heart and there is strength or virtue (‘virtus’) for the body. Mind, heart and body are closely related in this process of care for the ‘soul’. The cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions of the human person in general and of human learning in particular are stressed in this verse and are coming together in the one comprehensive dimension of the human soul, enflamed by the Spirit. He/she is the one who can stimulate and encourage human beings to ‘learn by heart’, to ‘know in the way they are known’ (1 Cor 13:12), to know ‘relationally’ and not solely ‘rationally’.

This form of learning is ‘relational learning’, this form of knowledge is ‘loving knowledge’ (Alexander 2001), focusing on the wellbeing of others and the self, on human dignity for every human being, on the value of tradition and the good life for future generations alike. It is ‘the Spirit poured out upon all flesh’. It makes a difference in life and learning when I am expecting my identity from ‘elsewhere’ instead of ‘realising my own life project’ (often at the detriment of the life projects of other people). Out of this well of wisdom new knowledge can emerge, according to Hanan Alexander: “Life is to be celebrated, not merely lived” (Alexander 2001, 195). This has deep implications for learning processes: in my particularity I am important for the wellbeing of all. ‘Learning in the presence of the other’ (Boys 2008) implies ‘learning in difference’ (Roebben 2009a, 127-149). What I contribute to the ‘bonum commune’, how I communicate to the ‘communio’ with others, is of great value. My voice is needed and therefore I have to cultivate that voice so that the process of the discernment of

the spirits can take place in its full vigour. With the very expressive words of Hanan Alexander: “Living up to an ideal was not the product of some external force, some hand other than my own; rather it was a result of a decision I made, a discipline I imposed upon myself, a behavior I learned to perform. There may have been other hands in the mix – parents, friends, teachers, lovers, even God. But all the help in the world could not force me to do good if I choose otherwise. In the final analysis, I was the one who measured up. What I do and think matters. I make a difference. I can make an impact on the world. When I stray from the path I believe to be right, even when the price is high and very little appears to be in my control, all is not lost. I can learn; I can return; I can repent; I can change (...). Not only do I matter; I matter just the way I am. This is the source of our deepest joy and greatest reason for celebration” (Alexander 2001, 155).

First tentative conclusions

Three elements are characteristic for the above sketched relational learning and need further consideration, but here we briefly point to a particular further direction by using the terms: life, search and courage.

Life

Human beings are called passionately to affirm life – the good life for themselves and others. “We are alive as human beings to the degree in which we accept life and affirm it, animated by that interest in life we call love (eros) (...). But the more unreservedly we love life the more intensively we also suffer the pains of life and the death of beloved ones. This can be called the paradox of human life: the more living the experience of life the more deadly the experience of death”. This all has educational implications, because of so many Young people who lost the meaning of life. Their “apathy is death before life” (Moltmann 2001, 119 *passim*).

Search

The Spirit helps us to find the heart of the matter and to realize in an ongoing process the ‘fides *quaerens* intellectum’, not the ‘fides *habens* intellectum’ – faith in search of reason, not faith that already has been dogmatized in its own rationale. It helps us to avoid two aberrations: too much religion (fideism and loosing autonomy) and too much rationality (‘Hineinterpretierung’ and self-deception). The Spirit is a compensatory mechanism that only works creatively and effectively in a real community of discourse.¹⁵

Courage

To dare to see the Spirit blowing wherever He/she wishes (John 3:8) implies educational courage, openness for the environment and the future, sensitivity for the gift of religiosity, trust in life, and to see religious education not as a depository or banking act (Paulo Freire), but as a co-constructive relational practice. So many pedagogical and didactical efforts are based on anxiety about what ‘could possibly happen’ when children and youngsters ask nasty and difficult questions – and they try to avoid this feeling. What would possibly happen when we dare to believe that the promising ‘beauty of God’ (White 2004; Roebben 2009b, 72) is coming to us through the work of the Spirit in children and young people? What would happen with us, if we could be fully aware of this new life poured upon our exhausted schools, communities and world?

¹⁵ Cfr. in the Roman-Catholic tradition the idea of the ‘sensus fidelium’, the teaching authority of the whole community and not solely of the magisterium. The Holy Spirit is present in both instances and effective in the communication between the two.

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