BOOK REVIEWS

Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization. New Perspectives on the United States and Germany

This book is primarily written for religious education practitioners and scholars. However, the insights on the relationship between youth, religion and post-modern culture are so thought provoking and praxis related, that I found them worthy of being presented in the Journal of Youth and Theology. Two renowned scholars from the universities of Princeton (USA) and Tübingen (Germany) allow the reader a glance through their 'research dialogue' and make you part of their findings and perspectives. In doing so they present the international scientific community a benchmark for comparative research.

The book is divided in three parts: an overview of the problems of modern religious education (RE), an analysis of paradigmatic texts and figures of the history of 20th century RE in both regions, and a proposal for a constructive reformulation of tasks for RE in the 21st century. Four aspects are recurring in the book: RE in the public field (the public school or education in general), RE in the congregation, RE and the modern self, RE and the family. The authors gather as much historical material as possible, try to denude the leading discourses in these histories, examine how these were influenced by societal changes and come to coherent conclusions. Remarkable is the fact that in the US especially the congregational studies and in Germany (and one could say in Western Europe in general) the school related praxis, theory and research have been developed most extensively. RE in the family and in the life of the individual (an important topic in the search for meaning of young adults) have been relatively neglected areas and require new attention in the public arena.

A general 'loss of audience' is noticed by the authors, under the influence of modernization, globalization and post-modernity, and this inspires them to examine how the attention for transcendence-in-education can be reformulated, exactly within a post-modern society that has become 'questionable to itself'. RE is a matter of rhetoric or persuasiveness, aiming at breaking open post-modern circles.
of knowledge for new (read: transcendence-sensible) learning horizons. One could argue that also youth ministry has such 'witness character'. Standing within the mainline protestant tradition the authors make theological assertions on the destiny of humankind. However, there is still a lot of work to do, according to them. There is a huge need for a (systematic) theology that is able to address the cultural resources of modernity in light of the Christian tradition, without leaning over to a mere ecclesiastical or a mere academic position.

The central concern of the book seems to be: post-modern individualization will, even on the regional level, be caught up by the globalization issue. Religion cannot remain simmering in the private atmosphere but is a topic that needs to be broached in the public realm. For the authors, this implies a 'recovery of the audience' (p.213). Education is a suitable medium for this enterprise. Schweitzer is clarifying outstandingly how moral and religious education can be part of the general curriculum of the school. And Osmer is indicating eloquently how the congregation should resist to the temptation of the 'small Christian community', because this is causing damage to the missiological dimension of the gospel. Youth ministers can attach to these insights, when they relate to the school field and to the traditional parish life. Parallel to the description of the social-critical dynamic of the 'founding fathers' of early 20th century RE theory in the USA and Germany vis-à-vis the industrial revolution, both authors now promote a comprehensive and critical vision on the new changes in culture and society, for instance from 'manufacturing' to 'mindfacturing'. Good RE should be ready to tackle these shifts intellectually (cognition). Good youth ministry should be ready to tackle them in action (feeling and will).

I have been reading this book on my way from Belgium to the USA. I felt in good company on the plane; I was in a way consorting with these people and with their ongoing search processes. They convinced me of the idea that, although there are deep cutting cultural differences between regions, important generative themes can arise out of the dialogue worldwide. This option has also been made by our organization. A global network for the study of youth ministry (IASYM) does not exclude but rather include regionalization. The burning question is how this can be organized in such a way that we can stay in dialogue globally without become subjugated to the negative aspects of globalization, such as the worldwide spread 'market anthropology'. The proof of the pudding is probably in the eating? The proof of the viability of IASYM can probably found in being an IASYM?