

Interactive communication of faith

Experience ordering strategies and the quality of intergenerative communication of faith in the christian community.

An investigation into the possibilities for improvement of intergenerative communication of faith, using Hannah Arendt's historic and philosophic analyses and the insights of epigenetic psychology and extrapolating these to the pedagogy of religion.

Summary

This investigation starts from the observation that communication of faith in our Christian western society is stagnant. It raises the question if there are possibilities for improvement of intergenerative communication of faith, using Hannah Arendt's historic and philosophic analyses and the insights of epigenetic psychology and extrapolating these to the pedagogy of religion.

Communication of faith can be looked upon as a form of human behaviour.

Chapter 1 describes Hannah Arendt's life and work. She studied human behaviour in western society and made a distinction between *action* on the one hand and *labour* and *work* on the other hand. Action she said, is interactive behaviour. Plurality is the essence of human society, for without it no communication or interactive action is possible. It cannot be taken for granted, however, that a given society respects plurality and gives individuals what Hannah Arendt calls *space of appearance*. In totalitarian regimes and in totalitarian relations plurality will be replaced with uniformity of thoughts and actions, doing no justice to humanity. Interactive action, on the other hand, creates the experience of *togetherness* instead of *sameness*, of *in-between* instead of *loneliness* and of *dynamis*, giving the power to face the future with confidence. A shared opinion on the meaning of reality is the basis of each culture. It is called common sense. In the exchange of meanings and *views (it seems to me's)* it is essential that

the arguments are supported by illuminating tales (*story telling*). These tales metaphorically show how certain judgements are arrived at and why. They are about making decisions and choices.

These illuminating tales can make a contribution to the present by showing what reality should look like. Hannah Arendt describes this process as thinking anew the valuable things from the past to serve the future. According to Hannah Arendt: individuals are seriously underestimated until they are given the responsibility for their own choices they are valued properly and justice is done to humanity. Redemption makes an end to the eternal cycle of guilt that follows from all human behaviour so that a new start can be made. The Promise and the Covenant make an end to the paralysing effect of an uncertain future. Hannah Arendt's concept of plurality as *conditio per quam* for human (interactive) action, can be used for the extrapolation of conditions for communication of faith as a form of interactive action.

In chapter 2 the question is discussed whether there is a theory in psychology of development that allows communication of faith as an interactive process. There are numerous views on human development, based on corresponding anthropological views. There has been much study into the determinants of development and behaviour that could make human behaviour predictable and controllable. Classic psychology of development regards the child as a negation of the adult. Like older transactional psychology, recent epigenetic psychology (Nossent, Fogel) has emphasized the relational aspects of human development. Development proved to be a co-regulatory process in which adults and children are partners in a creative process, discovering old and new capacities. Thus development can be defined as getting to know, getting to appreciate and getting to use human capacities. Interactive communication comes to a halt when the co-regulation is failing, blocking the creative process.

The quality of the co-regulatory process can be assured when the human possibility to order one's individual experience is taken into account. This is discussed in chapter 3. The way individuals order their experience is a natural capacity of processing and remembering, facing and organising reality. This organization of experience is translated into human behaviour, co-regulation and human relations. Every human being will organize his personal experience of reality by means of four strategies.

- The body-bound strategy of ordering experience relates to the feeling of safety.
- The associative strategy of ordering experience gives confidence in the relation with the environment.
- The structural strategy of ordering experience is a tool to face reality as an episodic phenomenon and relates present to past and future.
- The creative strategy of ordering experience enables people to solve problems and be flexible, because their own unique creativity is allowed to come out.

Not an authoritarian nor a liberal but an authoritative style (attitude) of education (with its interactive communication) provides the best conditions for getting to know, appreciate and use one's capacities by ordering experience in a combination of all four strategies. If creative and structural strategies are blocked by the environment or if there are too many factors preventing a feeling of safety people will revert to the strategies creating a feeling of safety, that is the associative strategy in which safe routines can be relied upon and the body-bound strategy. An extrapolation of the concept of experience ordering strategies to the development of faith shows its important role in that field.

Chapter 4 asks the questions: what is faith and why should it be so important to communicate faith? In the 1970's, a period of democratization, children had their share of adults' participation process. In a very individualized world, increasingly a mass culture, children had to learn to solve their own problems and make their own decisions. Looking for a purpose in life, a way of living, well-being and happiness many young people opted for a hedonistic lifestyle. Lonesome in the mass, in ever smaller families, in a society that provided nothing to fall back upon, young people became susceptible to depressions and some of them lost confidence in the future. Communication of faith can give young people a perspective on the daily life and the future because it offers the story-telling that provides a guidance in life and into the future.

This chapter continues with a brief overview of the various views on the development of faith. These views have always followed the cultural trends in pedagogy and education. In respect of the development of faith as well, causal relations and determinants of human behaviour have been looked for, which could make the development of faith controllable and predictable. In the mean time, it has always been realised that faith is not only based on teaching and learning. Faith is based on authenticity in communication of faith. Only the light of faith can kindle the light of faith. Getting to know, getting to appreciate and getting to use one's capacity for believing depends on co-regulation between partners in faith. Even if these partners are adults and children. In this co-regulative process every partner takes part in the dialogue, that is the interactive communication process.

Chapter 5 describes the opportunities for intergenerative communication in the Christian community, which become visible when a pedagogic attitude allows communication of faith and religious experiences in the form of intensive co-regulation. In this way communication of faith is transformed into an interactive process in which the participants in the co-regulatory process are each of them unique and equal, and accepted as they are, partners in communication. The quality of communication of faith can be improved when partners of the co-regulative process recognize ordering experience strategies as the basis for knowledge, appreciation and use of the human capacity for believing. Intergenerative communication of faith can be promoted by appreciating the fact that people must feel physically safe in their relation to

God, even beyond death. This will support the body-bound ordering strategy of religious experience with safe information. Communication of faith will be improved if it makes use of the associative ordering strategy of religious experience by means of narration, words, sacraments, rituals and symbols that familiarize the child with faith (that is, if their meaning can still be made understood). Intergenerative communication of faith will be promoted if the structural ordering strategy of religious experience allows individuals to elaborate on familiar associations and sequences of associations (*thinking anew*) so that the meaning of contemporary events becomes clear and today's problems can be solved. The creative ordering strategy of religious experience, lastly, will allow people to respond to their own situation in their own way. In this creative process a human being, adult or child, may know that his humanity, his responsibility and his own unique value are relied on. The Christian community as an interactive community can be an outstanding example of such interactive communication of faith.

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