

Education and theology: Two partners needing each other



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Tijd voor verlangen:
Persoonsvorming als
toetssteen voor bevindelijke
pedagogiek

Book Cover:



Author:

A. de Muynck

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partners needing each other

Reviewer:

Marius Nel¹

Affiliation:

¹Faculty of Theology,
North-West University,
Potchefstroom Campus,
South Africa

Corresponding author:

Marius Nel,
marinus.nel@nwu.ac.za

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Driestar Educatief is a college of education in Gouda training teachers from a reformed perspective. The term, *Driestar*, refers to education occurring in the playing field of church-family-community. The college cooperates with the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn and established a chair in Christian Pedagogy that functions in Apeldoorn.

This book contains in an expanded form De Muynck's inaugural speech that he delivered on 2 December 2016 when he accepted the office of Professor in Christian Pedagogy.

The author argues that education has three purposes, namely to qualify learners for societal tasks, to socialise and orient them to the social and cultural order, and to form their personalities. To understand the learners, it is important to realise that persons are determined by a longing to understand the teaching process. De Muynck utilises Augustinus' picture of a seafarer on the way to a harbour to demonstrate the process of character formation.

There are several stumbling blocks in the way of the formation of a person, for instance the present-day emphasis on performance. This makes it difficult to give attention to children with specific needs. Another storm consists of the pressure learners experience to assimilate to the prevailing culture with its distinct values in contrast to Christian values and standards.

'Christian' formation of the person is defined in terms of a person's value as a God-given creation; the purpose is to form the person morally, cognitively and contemplatively to be like Christ (Gl 4:19). *Christian pedagogy* is defined as the clarification of pedagogical practice by way of empirical investigation to provide the practice with theoretical and conceptual material that might legitimate and improve the practice. While *Pedagogy* and *Theology* each has its own sub-context, they need to supplement each other in a suspenseful and potentially complementary relationship. Their field of overlap is the image of the human being and child, its vision on the world and the resultant epistemological implications, and the covenant (p. 33). Entrance for the educator into the theological domain of knowledge is via the biblical sciences, systematic theology, and church history while Pedagogy provides frameworks of understanding for practical theology in its guidance to the pedagogical and didactic needs of candidates for confirmation. Theology and Pedagogy are both normative disciplines providing conceptualisation and guidelines for social practices. For Pedagogy to be Christian, catholic (universal) and reformed, it should be inspired, informed and practiced from a Christian perspective. This can be described in terms of three themes, viz. living from grace, living by the Scriptures, and getting involved in the world as the reality of God. In practise it implies that the formation of a person should be done in terms of the following: the communication of one's dependency on God and the necessity of reflecting on oneself before God; the introduction of the Bible to the learner, not in its petrified greatness but as a speaking and living Word that is authoritative by itself; and the definition of the world around us in terms of compassion for those who are burdened by injustice (p. 45).

Dutch school education takes place in public, religious, neutral and private schools. Public schools are controlled by local governments while religious and neutral (or general-special) schools are also funded by the government. These schools are officially free of charge although they may ask for a parental contribution. Private schools do not receive any public funding and they are highly uncommon. Children attend elementary school between the ages four to twelve and then write an aptitude test (*Cito Eindtoets Basisonderwijs*) to determine the type of secondary education best suited for a pupil. This may be either *voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, *hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, or *voorbereidend wetenschappelijke onderwijs*, implying that secondary education is highly specialised.

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De Muynck's inaugural speech contributes to reflection about education in Christian schools, specifically from a reformed perspective. He illustrates the connection between theology and pedagogy in order to ensure that education and training operates from a biblical perspective and in close cooperation with the church.

In South Africa, students qualify as teachers from distinctly secularised state universities where a Christian foundation is not (or may not be) provided for them. This makes it imperative that the church and parents

(and grandparents) should accept the responsibility of providing a Christian worldview and building a Christian personality in children. De Muynck's book can provide the basis for a scientific consideration of a Christian pedagogy that aims to develop a Christian character in learners. It would benefit theologians and education experts but also pastors, and may serve to stimulate the conversation in the church about the importance of education. The nature of the book, as a short overview, limits its usefulness in the academic field but it will still have utility for the church as such.