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## A PLAN OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION BASED ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM<sup>1</sup>

THE problem of religious instruction has three points of importance. The first question is that of the aim, and it is as follows: Whether or not it is right to identify religious education with, or to make it dependent on, the whole aim of education. If this is to realise an ideal of man, which ideal we get in the way of human thought and philosophy, is it sufficient and appropriate for religious instruction? If so, we have to reckon with the consequence that our religious education and instruction is a mere human work, a part—perhaps a not very important one—of the universal education, as religion is a mere part of values of humanity which education has to communicate. If not, in this case religious education must have an independent aim, something which can not be enlisted among other aims of mankind, produced and fixed by man. So the latest representatives of religious pædagogics are holding the view that religious instruction in reality is a form of preaching the Word of God and its task is to put before the child the command and claim of the Lord. This claim cannot be identified with any of the educational aims, with any purpose of man.

The second question is the relation of religious instruction to the Church. This relation, and the influence of the Church in countries where she has the right to give religious instruction in public schools, has slowly lessened. Firstly, because the school tried to free itself from every kind of interference of the Church, secondly, because the Church herself considered religion as a subject of instruction similar to the other ones. The chief effort was to give the child a religious view of the world which corresponds to modern philosophical thought. The question here is: What relation shall exist between the Church and religious instruction? If we take the Church as a mere human organisation, then our religious instruction must have the task of showing the children her importance and to try to awaken in them an understanding and sympathy toward her. But if we think—and this is what we learn in the Word of God, in

<sup>1</sup> Text books of the Transylvanian Ref. Church for Religious Instruction: 1-2. Text-book for the classes I-IV. 3. History of the Old and New Testament Revelation. 4. Church History. 5. Heidelberg Catechism. 6. How to teach religion? Cluj-Kolozsvár. 1929.

the Scriptures and in the work of the Reformers—that the Church is *ecclesia*, the congregation of the elect, gathered together by the Holy Spirit—in this case the Church has the right and duty to preach the Word of God to the children and this work she is doing in religious instruction, which work cannot be taken away from her.

The third question is: Suppose that religious instruction is indeed preaching the Word to the child, given to the Church as a duty, then this work must be much more than to give religious views, to create sympathy, to teach dogmatical theses or moral principles. It must be a work by means of which the Church is handing over the concrete personal message of God which He gives the child through the Church and in the Church. This means that our religious instruction must be confessional and personal because God speaks to the child personally through the faith of the Church of which it is a member.

These three points have been the principal foundation of the new plan for Religious instruction of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. The plan is based on the Heidelberg Catechism which is the official confession of the Church. The textbooks here referred to are prepared for the pupils of the Grammar School (between 7-14 years of age), at the end of which is the confirmation closing this section of the religious education. This fact, the confirmation, gives the formal unity of the whole course, the material unity being the principle of showing the children the Word of God in the Bible in the history and life of the Church and its claim on their personal faith and life. The whole scheme of the seven classes is divided in two parts, the first of which, classes one to four, contains stories of the Bible, parts of Church history and of the life of the Church and questions of Catechism with relation to the aforesaid. The second part, classes five to seven, resume them so that the fifth class takes the Bible as a whole to give a knowledge of the Scripture with portions of Catechism, the sixth class gives the Church history and the seventh gives an abridged form of the Heidelberg Catechism containing ninety-two questions, and is used as a text book for preparation for confirmation.

As regards the execution of this programme in the books, they are trying to bring three points into connection: the Bible, the history and life of the Church, and the Catechism.

Therefore there are selected from among the Bible stories not only those which are easily understood by the children, but even those which are difficult ones to understand but in which the principal points of the message of God are contained, like the story of the Fall, temptation of Christ, last judgment and so on. Almost each story or portion of the Bible is followed by questions of the Catechism which give the central point of it and the view according to which the Bible lesson is to be seen as the message of the Gospel. For instance the story of Ahab is set under the central point of the 113 question of the Catechism: What does the tenth Commandment forbid? The story about the Judges is followed by the ninety-sixth question, What does the second Commandment require? To the story about the resurrection of Lazarus comes the question fifty-seven: What comfort hast thou by the resurrection of the flesh? This helps the teacher and pupil to find the leading principle of the lesson. This method may be called a dogmatical one but we must not forget that the whole is standing on the principle that the Bible is the Word of God and not a collection of stories with a content for ethical teaching.

The Catechism is taken up in six classes the seventh having it as a special subject. The material of the classes one to four contains—in the way mentioned above—sixty-six questions of the Catechism with repetitions. In the first class they have the text of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Commandments, in the second class the explanation of the second Article of the Creed and of the Commandments. The third class takes the first and second parts of the Catechism and the explanation of the first article and of the Commandments following. The fourth class takes the explanation of the Lord's Prayer and of the three articles of faith. For the confirmation there are taken up ninety-two questions of which sixty-six are already taught in the foregoing classes which makes the preparation easy and gives more time and opportunity for the teacher to bring each question into connection with the Bible lessons.

The material about the life and history of the Church contains the chief events of Church history and the chief features of Church life, its task being to make the children conscious of their Church and show them their responsibility towards her. Psalms and Hymns are also selected for each class so that after seven years of instruction the child is in possession of a good

knowledge of the Church Hymnary. In order to make the book personal and to help the teacher in personal appeals to the children there are also taken up short questions and thoughts for discussion and meditation, and illustrative stories of history. So one lesson looks as follows: Lesson 13, class IV. Zaccheus, the renewed man. (1) The story. (2) Questions. My life as that of Zaccheus can be renewed only by Christ. What was the reason that Zaccheus gave the half of his goods to the poor? What is the meaning of Christ saying to Zaccheus: This day is salvation come to this house? (3) Prayer: My Lord and Saviour come into my heart and make it new. (4) Catechism: Question 116. Which is the fifth petition? (5) Hymn 256. Rock of Ages. (6) Illustrative story: Conversion of Th. Beza.

It is now two years since this plan has been in practice in each school of the Reformed Church of Transylvania. During this time the Church has had many happy experiences that this plan and organisation of religious instruction is a very helpful means not only to introduce the children more to the use and right understanding of the Bible and the faith and work of their Church, but also to deepen their personal faith and responsibility for the Word of God and for the Church.

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