

Christian pedagogy? A research report on the Christian profile of an educational institution in Germany

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The article reports about an empirical study among the educational staff of one of Germany's biggest Christian educational institutions, the 'Christliche Jugenddorfwerk Deutschlands e.V.' (Christian Youth Work of Germany, CJD). It tried to find out what ideas and attitudes the respondents had concerning the Christian profile of the institution and their own educational work. To this end, a questionnaire with mainly closed-ended and some open-ended questions was administered to the 6000 educational staff. The 934 responses are not representative but still give illuminating insights into the chances and problems of a 'Christian pedagogy' as proclaimed by the CJD. They show that a Christian profile of education is approved of by most of the CJD staff, even by many of those who do not believe in God. The results are interpreted and discussed in the context of current developments in Germany's denominational private school sector, but imply perspectives for an international context as well.

Keywords: Christian education; theology of education; faith schools; empirical research

Starting point

Do Christian private schools in Germany have a distinctive profile? Debate on this question has recently reignited. Though always important within the churches, changes in society since the 1980s make it increasingly relevant now, too, for society as a whole – a situation which seems to show parallels between Germany and Britain (cf. Cairns 2009; Gardener, Cairns, and Lawton 2005). What are these changes? Firstly, there has been, in my estimation, an epistemological contribution to a more acute awareness that the proclaimed 'ideological neutrality' of state schools and secular pedagogies is just one among other world views. In consequence, schools with distinctive world views no longer appear so 'ideologically suspect' as in the 1970s (cf. e.g. Francis and Thatcher 1990). Secondly, social theory shows increasingly that a pluralistic society cannot only be based on the lowest common denominator

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of general rationality and basic human rights. There is a need for multiple, 'dense' contexts of plausibility and concretion (cf. Schoberth 2002, 261). Thirdly, developments in society such as pluralism, anti-traditionalism and accelerated change have created an increasing demand for guidance about the meaning of life, values and education. More than ever, parents in Germany seem to look for educational institutions with a strong ideological profile, and denominational private schools are extremely popular.

On a theoretical level, the discussion on the profile of church schools can be focused in the question, if a characteristic and distinct Christian profile of education is possible, what might its specifics be? In the German context, this discussion centred around the notion of 'Christian pedagogy' (Christliche Pädagogik) with special intensity in the 1960s and 1970s. However, this concept of a 'Christian pedagogy' must be treated with caution on at least three counts. The *first* is that the Protestant tradition, in particular, has traditionally held education to be a secular matter, which casts doubt on whether a Christian pedagogy is either possible or meaningful; so it is understandable that the idea and the notion of a Christian pedagogy is more likely to be expressed in Catholic publications. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness in the current debate that pedagogy is necessarily founded on 'indissoluble ideological and religious premises' (Nipkow 1998, 108) and that theories of education cannot exist 'apart from an ideological and religious pluralism' (Dressler 2006, 60). The *second reservation* may come from the impression that a Christian pedagogy advocates a closed system in the sense of nineteenth century world-view pedagogies. To counter this, Christian pedagogy, as I understand it, stresses multi-perspectivity, fragmentarity and endorsement of pluralism. The *third reservation* may question whether it would not be more appropriate to talk of a Protestant or Catholic pedagogy rather than of a Christian pedagogy, especially when holistic education is the goal, with emotional and social experiences playing a central role, and when attention is focused on the reality of denominational faith schools. Though the denominational perspective certainly has its own right, we can point to considerable interdenominational discourse and consensus, and to schools and other educational institutions operated by non-denominational Christian agencies.

The largest of these in Germany is the Christliches Jugenddorfwerk Deutschlands e.V. (CJD), a charity for youth, education and social work, with schools, training establishments and other forms of educational provision at over 150 sites throughout Germany (see www.cjd.de). The CJD views itself as a non-denominational but distinctive Christian organisation and for a number of years has held regular seminars on the core challenges for a Christian pedagogy, addressing the question of a Christian dimension in education theory and practice.

Accordingly, the CJD's Academic Advisory Board was tasked with drawing up 'Guidelines for a Christian Pedagogy'.¹ The committee concluded that such guidelines could not be developed solely theoretically but should

also have an empirical basis. This led to a CJD-funded research project. Unlike other recent empirical research in Germany which has looked primarily at student attainment (e.g. Standfest, Köller and Scheunpflug 2005) this project had a dual aim: to involve CJD staff in the development process of a Christian profile, and to learn *from them* about the reality of such a profile in the educational work of the CJD as a whole. To this end a questionnaire seemed a sensible and practical means of eliciting the ideas and experiences of the 6000 CJD educational staff working in its various educational establishments. The results of the survey would allow consultation among staff, discussion with principals, and would generate ideas to be fed back into the development of the guidelines. The whole project and the resulting guidelines are documented in a book published in German (Pirner 2008).

Prior theoretical considerations

The state of research on the attitudes and ideas of teachers or educators in Christian educational institutions is rather unsatisfactory. Apart from the pioneering work of Leslie Francis (summarised in Francis and Robbins 2010), some American studies (overview: Sikkink 2010) and an interesting insight into Dutch perspectives (van der Zee 2010), there is little evidence especially on the question of how educational staff view the Christian profile of their employer (for recent German studies, see Pirner, Scheunpflug, and Holl 2010).

Theoretical considerations preceding and informing the present empirical study drew on the academic discourse as well as on the official papers circulating within the CJD organisation such as mission statements, guidelines, school concept papers and relevant issues of the CJD's journal *Hirsauer Blätter*.

- (1) A Christian pedagogy conceptualises pedagogical theory and practice to be informed by Christian theory (theology, religious education theory) and practice. Whether this is both possible and legitimate could be assumed to be – not least among CJD educators – contested. The Protestant tradition referred to above, in which education is a 'secular matter', invites the question of whether a Christian pedagogy is not simply the same as a 'good' pedagogy; in which case, fundamental doubts had to be faced about whether a 'Christian pedagogy' exists at all. After all, we do not refer to a 'Christian motor mechanic apprenticeship' or a 'Christian butcher', and not all practising educators in the CJD necessarily have an understanding of education underpinned by ideology.

In a theoretical, theologically informed perspective, a pedagogy with a Christian profile definitely *will not only, or primarily, ask about the difference between a 'Christian' and a 'secular' pedagogy*, but about the shape the liberating message of the Gospel can take in education. In such a quest general insights from education, psychology, etc. may be important; there may, for example, be social, rather than specifically

religious, emphases; themes or perspectives of learning in a 'Christian' pedagogy may often be hard to distinguish from a 'secular' pedagogy, or one from a different ideological or religious angle.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that in the empirical study, more general questions on the major educational goals CJD employees see as important (questions 1–3) should precede more specific questions on the Christian profile of their educational work (questions 4, 5 and 17).

Question 1: Educational work is informed by objectives. We offer you a list of educational objectives. Please tell us (a) how important this objective should be for educational work in the CJD, and (b) how well you can put this objective into practice.

Question 2: Should the following educational areas be important in the CJD? Please choose between 'extremely important', 'very important', 'important', 'less important'.

Question 3: The CJD understands itself as a Christian institution. Please judge in which of the following characteristics Christian institutions should differ from non-Christian institutions. [see Chapter 4]

- (2) The 'Christian' dimension in a Christian pedagogy can basically be localised in different areas or aspects of education, which may be: the *reason* for education (why educate at all? what is the purpose of education?); the *foundations* of education (for example, the Christian image of man); the *goals* of educational practice (for example, fostering religious development); pedagogically mediated *content* and associated *methodology* (for example, understanding the nature of creation; forms of meditation and spirituality). It may focus on the *motivation* of the teacher, or on a *quality of relationship* and '*atmosphere*' within the education process. Or it can be seen as a *consequence of the personal religious commitment* of the educational staff.

This categorisation was transformed into a question in the study asking explicitly, which kinds of understanding of 'Christian pedagogy' the CJD staff agreed with (question 4).

Question 4: What is your idea of a 'Christian pedagogy'? Please judge the following suggestions. – For me, a 'Christian pedagogy' is primarily ... [see Chapter 5]

- (3) In the normative passages of official CJD papers the notion of a 'Christian image of man' is used repeatedly to characterise the most important foundation on which a 'Christian pedagogy' is built. Sometimes,

however, the aspects of such a concept of man explicitly mentioned in such papers seem rather unclear and few, judging from a theological perspective. It therefore seemed advisable to ask in more detail about the, theologically developed, aspects of the Christian image of man which for the CJD staff are most relevant to their educational work (question 5).

Question 5: We would like to learn, if there are any propositions of Christian faith which inform your educational work or seem helpful for you. – This basic statement from Christian belief gives me direction in my own educational work . . . [see Chapter 5]

- (4) One crucial question about a Christian pedagogy is how open it is to non-Christians. This is a question which has its parallel in the field of Christian ethics: is Christian ethics only for Christians or can it also be helpful and provide moral orientation to non-Christians? Official public statements by Christian churches on socio-ethical problems and the involvement of theologians in public ethics commissions indicate the latter. And from philosophical as well as sociological perspectives it seems quite clear that many ethical concepts rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition have gained acceptance and influence far beyond the group of believers. It is from this point of view that one may assume that the same goes for a Christian concept or Christian perspectives of education.

This theoretical question has, of course, eminently practical implications. In a pluralistic Western country such as Germany, there is a high probability that even in a distinctively Christian organisation like the CJD, which requires church membership from most of its employees and offers spiritual courses for them, many of the staff will not be believing Christians. What will their perception and attitude towards the CJD's Christian profile and its claim of a 'Christian pedagogy' be like? Will they be able to identify with this part of their employer's corporate identity? In order to address these questions it seemed necessary to include items about the respondents' religious beliefs into our study. We chose the two questions which are most frequently used in representative survey studies as indicators of a religious belief.

Question 14: Do you believe that there is a God?

Question 15: Do you believe in life after death?

As the CJD is closely linked to the YMCA – which in Germany has a clearly evangelical profile – we included a set of questions on the respondents' understanding of the Bible in order to find out, if they show an evangelical or fundamentalistic tendency in their Christian belief.

Question 16: What does the Bible mean to you?

The Bible is for me ... [see Chapter 3 below]

Project design and basic data

Key research questions of the study were: 'What, in the view of CJD staff, is the characteristic (Christian) profile (or proprium) of their educational work?' and 'What do CJD education staff understand by "Christian pedagogy"?' By using open, heuristic questions the investigation was explorative and reconstructive in character; it did not set out to test pre-determined theoretical hypotheses, although the items were constructed on a theoretical basis. It was also not the main aim of the survey to give a representative description of the attitudes of all CJD staff, but rather to delineate typical argumentation patterns and types of experience connected with the concept of a Christian pedagogy, and the impact that a Christian profile might have on the educational work of the CJD.

In order to gain a detailed understanding of employees' views qualitative elements were integrated into the mainly quantitative research: almost all questions of the questionnaire allowed for individual supplementary answers; one open-ended question required a personal written statement. The questionnaire was largely drawn up at the meetings of the academic advisory committee and on the basis of discussions and a pre-test among staff of the Arnold-Dannenmann-Akademie, a vocational training institute of the CJD. Consequently, the questionnaire was refined and revised and sent out in June 2004 to 6000 CJD education staff all over Germany. Nine hundred and thirty-six questionnaires, or 15.6%, were returned – a response rate which, of course, does not allow the results to be regarded as representative. Most of the evaluation was carried out at the University of Education at Ludwigsburg under my direction, with the assistance of other members of the academic advisory committee. The quantitative data analysis was supported by the SPSS software, and the analysis of the open-ended question no. 17 employed Mayring's (2003) approach of qualitative content analysis. Data analysis included factor and correlation analyses. In the process of interpretation the research team also tried to triangulate the quantitative data from the closed-ended questions and the qualitative data from the open-ended question.

The sample: a greater percentage of the 936 responses are from women (53.3% compared with 45.0% men), the majority in the age range of 36–50. The two most represented professional groups are social education workers (23.4%) and teachers (22.4%). Next come pre-school teachers (17.0%), trainers (12.7%) and managers (9.0%); supervisors and psychologists are in the minority (2.0 and 2.2%). More than half of the respondents are members of the established Protestant churches (59.9%), only 28.4% are Catholic,

and a small number belong to free churches; at least 5.8% of employees are not members of any church or religion.

The results from the questions about personal faith are revealing. The first was, 'Do you believe there is a God?', and the second, 'Do you believe in a life after death?' The proportion of those answering 'yes' to belief in a God was only slightly higher than the average among the general population in Germany; it was actually slightly lower for the question about belief in a life after death. According to the 2005 survey conducted by the market research company Emnid on behalf of *Reader's digest*, 65% of Germans believe in (a) God (for CJD respondents the figure is 67.6%), (b) 58% in a life after death (CJD respondents: 51.1%).² The answers to the question, 'What does the Bible mean to you?' showed that about a quarter of the respondents hold a biblical understanding on the spectrum 'evangelical' to 'fundamentalist' (endorsing 'For me, the Bible is a book literally inspired by God' and 'For me, the Bible is God's word, free of any contradictions'), compared with a large majority favouring a more liberal understanding of the Bible (approving of items such as 'For me, the Bible is a book, through which God can speak to people although it contains many contradictions and tensions', or 'For me, the Bible is a very good book written by humans').

Key outcomes 1: is there a Christian profile?

As indicated above, the first two questions did not ask directly about a Christian profile, but asked which educational objectives and areas were important to employees. Interestingly, social aspects ranked highest, while religious aspects remained peripheral. For example, 'tolerance towards others' was ranked as the highest educational objective, and a factor analysis showed goals connected with 'solidarity' to be of central importance. The two pedagogical goals of 'faith' and 'religious orientation' were generally held to be of lesser importance, even by the 'believers' in the survey – those who believe that there is a God and that there is a life after death. Similarly, among the pedagogical areas, religious education was ranked lowest, while the top three were ethical–moral education, language education and physical education. The ranking, together with the combined scores for the categories 'extremely important' and 'very important', are given below:

- (1) Ethical–moral education (729)
- (2) Language education (702)
- (3) Physical and sports education (545)
- (4) Political education (485)
- (5) Mathematical education (461)
- (6) Historical–cultural education (440)
- (7) Fine arts–aesthetics education (419)

- (8) Science education (411)
- (9) Technological education (410)
- (10) Business education (390)
- (11) Religious education (379)

However, *the respondents who are 'believers' ranked religious education higher, in fourth position* (the first three remain unchanged). The results are more understandable when we remember that the major target group for the education provided by the CJD is *socially disadvantaged* children and young people, whose priority is to learn independence and living in social groups. Nevertheless, a certain tension exists between the overtly Christian organisation of the CJD and the generally low value placed on religious education by the responding employees.

Question 3 asked specifically what (given) features make a 'Christian educational institution' (such as the CJD) particularly distinctive, and whether such distinctiveness should be more highly developed than in a 'non-Christian-oriented institution'. Social characteristics were predominant here, too (e.g. esteem and unconditional acceptance of those in their care or those seeking advice, commitment to the disadvantaged, respect for colleagues and cooperative attitudes) showing few obvious differences from a non-Christian institution. An initial interpretation of these results is that the ethical-social dimension of being 'Christian' is seen to give the work of education its Christian profile (compassion, helping the disadvantaged). On the one hand, this brings into focus the overlap between Christian and non-Christian viewpoints, in that there is little fundamental difference between a Christian profile and general social-humanistic ideas. On the other hand, from a purely Christian viewpoint, Christian pedagogy primarily has a community welfare and social role, its principal concern being for what children and young people need in their lives, rather than a programme of religious education. The higher value placed on religious education by 'believing' respondents may be because, for them, religion is indeed one of those things adolescents (may) need in their lives. Nevertheless, the results do seem to confirm the preliminary impression that in many areas we can expect little differences between a Christian and a non-Christian pedagogy. So, does a Christian pedagogy, at least from actual experience, have no special profile or proprium?

Key outcomes 2: what is Christian pedagogy?

In question 4, prior theoretical considerations were translated into propositions to be assessed on a four-point scale (applies fully, mostly applies, mostly does not apply and does not apply). The statements receiving the highest approval rating are shown below (each figure combining the categories 'applies fully' and 'mostly applies').

For me 'Christian pedagogy' is primarily ...

- (1) ... a pedagogy whose *objectives and methods* are guided by the Christian image of man (831).
- (2) ... a pedagogy with a special concern for the *disadvantaged* (735).
- (3) ... a pedagogy which values highly the *personal relationship* between teacher and young person (692).
- (4) ... a pedagogy *justified* by Christian values (e.g. education has the duty to foster young people's God-given gifts) (614).
- (5) ... a *good* pedagogy. 'Christian' is essentially about the *quality* of education (604).
- (6) ... a pedagogy *motivated* by Christian values: educators educate from a Christian motivation (561).
- (7) ... a pedagogy practised by Christians. In a Christian educational institution educators *should therefore themselves be Christians* (532).
- (8) ... a pedagogy in which the teaching of religious content (e.g. stories from the Bible) and religious practice (e.g. prayer) plays a central role (387).

The two top-scoring statements clearly reflect the emphasis the CJD gives to its programmes and public image, namely, the Christian image of man and concern for the disadvantaged, under the mottos 'None shall be lost' and 'Everyone should have a chance'. The Christian image of man evidently represents a significant, even 'secular-religious', consensus: 71.6% of 'non-believer' respondents agreed (compared with 92.1% among 'believers'). Somewhat less important are Christian justification, motivation and one's own Christian conviction; the teaching of religious content and behaviours is considered least important. For the overwhelming majority Christian pedagogy has a specifically Christian profile, whereas the general definition of 'good' pedagogy was given only a median value.

The relatively low rating for personal Christian belief is reflected in comments under the option 'your own thoughts'. One person writes, 'In the work with disabled people you can put into practice a Christian image of man without being a Church member'. Another thinks along the same lines, 'You don't need to be a Christian to follow a Christian pedagogy'. These and similar opinions also appear in personal statements in the open-ended question 17 (see below). It is true that the opposite view, too, is given: that conviction in one's own Christianity and living one's faith are indispensable for a Christian-based education. Still, it is clear that 'non-believing' employees accept the central ideas of a Christian pedagogy and can value them for the direction they give to their own educational work.

The concepts 'Christian image of man' and 'Christian values' frequently occur in official CJD papers, but usually remain rather vague. So, a further

question asked respondents to assess more concrete statements on the contents of Christian belief. Once again, the statements below are listed according to the frequency of positive responses, but this time only for the category 'applies fully':

This basic statement from Christian belief gives me direction in my own teaching.

- (1) All people are equal in the sight of God (640).
 - (2) People are creatures of God (480).
 - (3) People are responsible before God for their actions (349).
 - (4) The Ten Commandments (345).
 - (5) God knows everyone and has a purpose for everyone's life (337).
 - (6) Experiencing God's loving concern gives the believer the strength to show concern for others (291).
 - (7) God stands beside the disadvantaged, the outsiders and the lost (287).
 - (8) You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and your neighbour as yourself (248).
 - (9) The believer is reconciled with Christ through God (God accepts the sinner) (230).
 - (10) Believers will not die but will rise again (213).
 - (11) The believer lives in the anticipation of God's kingdom, where there will be no more sorrow or tears (173).
 - (12) People are created in the image of God (170).
 - (13) People are sinners (152).
- (Additional statements:) _____ (60)

Using systematic theological categories to interpret these results we can say that a definite preference is shown for creation or natural theology (all people are equal in the sight of God, people are creatures of God). Next come ethics or 'law' theological aspects (people are responsible before God for their actions, The Ten Commandments). Only then come grace and redemption theology aspects (God knows everyone and has a purpose for everyone's life, experiencing God's loving concern gives the believer the strength to show concern for others). This suggests again a 'compromise result' between 'believers' and 'non-believers'; however, the former group by itself makes no significant change in the order (8 becomes 3, and 5 comes before 4). It should be observed, of course, that this was not a question about personal belief *per se*, but it asked which statements gave a real sense of direction *to the person's own educational work*. From a theological point of view it is perhaps disconcerting to perceive that the respondents evidently find a more powerful sense of direction in the ethical and the generally prevailing common sense statements about equality and the human being as creation than in the central

Christian promise of grace (the 'Gospel'). The lower rating of the eschatological statements and statements relating to sin perhaps expresses a general social trend: that most people today have a considerable problem with these beliefs. On the other hand, given its importance in the history of education, it is hard to understand why the 'image of God' statement is held in such low esteem.

Key outcomes 3: personal experiences

The open-ended question no. 17 asked CJD employees for their personal views and experiences: 'Does your teaching for the CJD have a particular (Christian) profile? Have there been situations where you have been particularly aware of, or concerned about, this profile? Please describe'. Of the 936 returns 343 (36.6%) responded to this. Of these, only 283 were considered usable; the others were, for example, too discursive or too general on the importance of Christian faith, and some were incomprehensible. For instance, some respondents would just describe how wonderful it is to be a Christian or how good God is, without making any connections to their educational work; such general statements were not included in the analysis. In what follows, only a rough outline of the most significant outcomes can be given.

The most common themes concerned the tension between organisational structure (financial efficiency, management structure) and a (Christian) pedagogical ideal. Typically, 'I often feel it's all about money, the Christian angle goes by the board'. This confirms a prior consideration that institutional structures and an entrepreneurial culture must be compatible with educational aims. However, a larger number of those questioned believed they were, and thought there was a more human atmosphere in the CJD than in other non-Christian establishments. The analysis of the texts showed that something like a 'culture of communication' was crucially important: depth, clarity and humanity in communication between managers and staff, and among staff themselves.

The Christian profile of the CJD itself is quite often mentioned, and respondents frequently stress the importance to them of this profile, and their satisfaction at working in a 'Christian' environment. Against this, a number of employees would like a clearer definition of the Christian profile, while an equal number feel that it is too prominent. It is claimed that in order to be effective in the practice of education an employee's *personal life* should live up to the Christian profile – or run the risk of appearing hypocritical. Many respondents require that the Christian-oriented and the non-Christian-oriented staff show more tolerance towards one another, so that they can work together successfully for the welfare of the young people in their charge.

Discussion: outline and problems of a Christian pedagogy in a pluralistic society

This empirical study has revealed possible contours as well as characteristic problems of a Christian pedagogy. A majority of the respondents were sure *that* a specifically Christian profile in education practice is possible and that it offers value and meaning in our pluralistic society. As expected, the responses stress, in their various ways, that Christian pedagogy is itself pluralistic – there can and need be no ‘uniform Christian pedagogy’. It became clear that for the majority of Christians a consensus can be reached on the definition of baselines for Christian-oriented education, and these can be comprehensible, acceptable and helpful, too, to the ‘religiously unmusical’ (Max Weber). In the first place there is an overwhelming consensus on the priority of Christian pedagogy for *social and charitable aims* – something, I believe, to be welcomed unreservedly; as a topic for programme development it rightly forms a regular part of discussions on the profile of church schools: it is in line with the altruistic core of Christian love.

Then, there is the overwhelming, if broadly superficial, approval given to the ‘Christian image of man’ or ‘Christian values’, often interpreted according to the norms of humanism, democracy and human rights. These aspects may be categorised under what my Tübingen colleague Dietrich Rössler used to call ‘civil Christianity’, distinguished from ecclesiastical and individual Christianity (Rössler 1986).³ ‘Civil Christianity’ means those ideas and aspects of Christianity which are still present in our culture today and which most people – including non-Christians – are aware of as being somehow ‘Christian’. As the empirical results indicate, it obviously is difficult in our pluralistic, partly secularised society to convey the pedagogical relevance of Christianity regarding many core statements of the Christian faith (justification, eschatological hope, sin). I suggest that one promising way of doing so is to *start* with the strongly approved aspects of *civil Christianity* and to develop such ways of disclosing the educational meaning of other Christian aspects which also make them understandable and approvable for non-believers.

Furthermore, our empirical study indicates that *the place of religious education within a Christian pedagogy* needs clarification and explanation, even for ‘believing’ educators – a problem that has recently also been uncovered in academic discourse (e.g. Nipkow 2006, 29).

To what extent should those who embrace the basic principles of a Christian pedagogy themselves be believing Christians? Responses in our empirical study show this to be controversial, and it is a crucial issue for Christian pedagogy in a pluralistic society in general. The *material* aspects of Christian pedagogy, its aims and content can, in principle, be accepted by and offer guidance to non-believers as well. But if linked to the educator’s individual stance on religion, which we can call the *personal* aspect of Christian

pedagogy, this suggests a not unproblematic form of exclusiveness. Going beyond the empirical study into the field of educational and theological discourse, there are at least two important arguments in favour of the educator's personal religious commitment. The one is, that the example of one's own life is an essential and effective element in teaching and educating; the other, that the pedagogical contribution the educators are called to make to the educational process through their individuality will be bound to reveal their personal motivations and the spiritual basis of their life – whether or not they want it. But for theological, psychological and social reasons, 'faith' cannot be a precondition for a Christian-based educational institution, and external signs, such as church membership, may not be reliable indicators.

A solution to this tension can, I believe, be seen in an educational concept of Christian pedagogy which is approvable both for believers and non-believers and which can therefore constitute a common basis for common educational work in a Christian establishment. Our empirical findings indicate that such an open, yet clearly Christian concept is possible. As to employment conditions, an applicant's personal commitment to the concept of a Christian pedagogy, *together with* a positive attitude to the Christian faith (which membership of a church at least indicates), could be an acceptable precondition for employing that person.

A result that clearly emerged from the open-ended question no. 17 is that the *connection between educational practice, social cooperation and organisational structure* is of enormous importance to a Christian educational institution. These three areas should all be taken into consideration by a Christian pedagogy programme or concept. Pedagogical, social and psychological, organisational or entrepreneurial-ethical perspectives will then relate to each other, as well as to theological perspectives, but also take into account the specific rationality of each individual domain.

One concluding suggestion here – again going beyond the empirical study – is that broad initial criteria and perspectives on all three topic areas would emerge from an *orientation towards communication*, which would allow the discourse about humane, Christian communication in the Protestant and Catholic churches and theologies to be drawn on (e.g. Bedford-Strohm 1999; Huber 1985; Kos 1997). Such communication can be described in the words of Lachmann (1980) as 'agape communication', some core aspects of which are:

- 'communicative freedom' or freedom in community as starting-point and goal (for example, both individuality and sociality, autonomy and solidarity; freedom is realised by experiencing the other as an enrichment of the self and as a life-task for the self),
- greatest possible access to social communication,
- greatest possible subjective consent and absence of coercion,

- greatest possible primacy of consensus discourse, including accommodation of dissent,
- greatest possible acceptance of the equality of the communication partner (aspiring to reciprocal, symmetrical communication including humane structuring of unavoidable asymmetries),
- emphasis on communication across borders (ultimately, love as a horizon in a theological–ethical sense is the horizon of a universal community of humanity) and
- particular sensitivity towards the weak, and those with inhibitions or disabilities in communication.

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Notes

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2. In the following, those who answered the questions on the existence of God and a life after death in the affirmative will be called the ‘believers’, those who answered in the negative will be called the ‘non-believers’.
3. I owe thanks to Karl Ernst Nipkow for this hint.

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