



**Stand on a foundation** - *W. van Vlastuin, lecture for the European Conference on Christian Education in the Netherlands, 28-30 September 2016*

Europe is going through a time of unexpected changes. Cultures are in motion. Millions of people with different cultures and religions have arrived through the gates of each European country. We are experiencing tension between the cultures and religions in our society; uncertainty caused by terrorist attacks and economic crises.

These developments touch us and make us think: What does this mean for the future of the next generation and what implications has this for our Christian education today? What values are important for our young people? What does the great commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves mean in this context?

Whilst I don't have a magic formula to help me to answer these questions, I'd like to share some basic Christian concepts which have to be applied in different ways and in different circumstances. I think it is very important to realise that Christianity implies being a stranger in this world (1 Pe 1:1). Being a stranger wasn't just a reality for some suffering Christians in history, but is a reality for all times and all cultures. In the Netherlands being a stranger is often understood in a sociological way, because of the pillarization of religion in our country. This fact reminds us first to think in a theological and spiritual way. Being a stranger is a characteristic of real Christianity.

Being a stranger is connected with the mystical union with Christ. In Christ, we do not live our own lives, but Christ is our Head and our life (Ga 2:20). In Him we are dead to ourselves and to the world (Ga 6:14). This implies that being a stranger in this world is not a doctrine or a duty, but a spiritual reality. It is the positive reality that our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Our lives are not determined by European contexts and developments, but by the heavenly kingdom of Christ. We expect Him and his immovable kingdom with strong desires.

Living this reality makes us open towards strangers of other cultures because in Christ we are priests and we share some of his passion for all people. Jesus was not a rich king with great power, he was a poor man. He was tempted in all infirmities, as we are, and he was touched by our suffering. So we really listen to our students, we try to understand their personalities and we are really interested in them. This attitude of compassion is at the very heart of the Christian school, and we need wisdom and care to behave in a righteous way on a day to day basis.

Union with Christ means sharing in his prophetic office too. Our whole life is one confession of his Name and the reality of his coming kingdom. Our prophetic task is not only fulfilled in our Bible classes or our prayers, but also in witnessing his wisdom by leading our students in the reality of mathematics, geography and the English language. The prophetic office is also fulfilled in understanding our times in the perspective of the recreation of heaven and earth.

Union with Christ also means sharing in his kingship. This reality brings with it the duty to fight against sin and the sinful mood of our times. We train our students to distinguish between the one truth and the many lies. This distinction also makes us aware of the bad influences coming from inside and outside of the school and we try to protect our students wherever and whenever we can. We are conscious that the greatest struggle we have is with ourselves and this humbles us. Above all, we are conscious that Jesus was not an earthly king who came to be served, but a heavenly King who



came to serve others. This attitude makes our calling a privilege in which we experience that is more blessed to give than to receive.

### **Questions**

1. How does Christian hope function in your school and your education?
2. Respond to the statement: We cannot approach our pupils in general from the reality in Christ.
3. Try to develop the three offices of priest, prophet and king in your situation.
4. We have to understand the school as a glass house in which we protect young children against worldly influences. This implies that we are unwilling to receive children of other cultures and religions in our schools. Agree, or not? Why?
5. Our postmodern culture offers new opportunities to share the Christian faith.