

Compassion as a Key to Education for Sustainable Development in the Future?! – Mission and Advancement of a Theological Concept

Since Christian values have been anything but a matter of course in contemporary European societies for many years, a diversity of worldviews from the most various areas of life has been able to develop. At the same time, however, one value concept seems to be establishing itself as a new social consensus: sustainable living: Every action and every area of life is seemingly examined in terms of its sustainability and analysed for possible potential for improvement. Such developments make the task of agreeing on a common set of values that extends beyond sustainability increasingly challenging. This problem cannot only be observed in general political debates but also becomes a great challenge for children and young people in educational contexts: In particular, school as a place of learning can be understood as a reflection of society, in the context of which the most diverse ethical-ideological currents are represented. It is important to do justice to this initial situation as much as possible.

Particularly with regard to future (crisis) challenges, it is worth noting that the paradigm of compassion, which was fundamentally coined by Johann Baptist Metz in the sense of empathic sympathy with others, can not only appeal to Christians, but implies more diverse or interdenominational possibilities of reference: As a pre-theological and non-ideological quantity, an empathic and compathic spirituality can point the way for the future of human beings, because it can unite people of faith, spirituality and even non-religious people. This unifying and communication-promoting potential could also be brought to bear in the context of school leadership. Where the classical performance principle is exchanged for a subject-oriented view of the human being with the goal of a good future, both the idea of compassion and sustainable development in the human being itself are realised. Here, (religious) teachers have a special role model function, because they deal professionally with existential questions, with spiritual-religious patterns of interpretation and reflections on a good future for the world and human beings.

For this reason, the theological idea of compassion can, for example, contribute significantly to social learning and illuminate its spiritual-religious dimension against the background of a Christian ethic of love. If reflections in this regard are further developed beyond the genuinely religious or religious education context, it is possible to establish a mental link to the Sustainable Development Goals of Unesco, which represent the concern outlined above. This leads to the fundamental question of whether the idea of compassion in its further development can contribute to the achievement of the 17 SDGs or possibly even form the actual starting point of these goals.

The intended lecture examines the relationship between Education for Sustainable Development in connection with the concept of compassion, and thus develops a further development of Metz' original idea adapted to current needs and the spirit of the age (Zeitgeist). It is based on the anthology published by the authors, which opened up new research approaches and discourses to the aforementioned discourse.