

Markus Müller:

Das Deutsche Institut für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik 1922–1980

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The »Deutsches Institut für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik« (German Institute for the Science of Education) in Münster, Westphalia, was founded in 1922 by Catholic teachers' associations and Catholic academics, with the objective of establishing an independent Catholic science of education.

In continuation of the *paedagogia perennis* of the Catholic philosopher and educator Otto Willmanns (1839–1920), a Catholic science of education was supposed to rest on the »bedrock« of the Catholic worldview and Neo-Scholasticism, while repudiating all liberal relativism. At the same time, however, such scholarly findings within the modern humanities and social sciences that proved compatible with Catholic dogma were to be taken up by a Catholic education science and thereby ensure that Catholics received a sympathetic ear in the expanding university education departments.

Under the guidance of the Münster philosophy professor Max Ettliger and his colleague, the moral theologian Joseph Mausbach, the Münster institute was expanded in the 1920s, through considerable financial means, into a fully equipped modern facility for research and advanced training. It possessed an extensive specialist library as well as a laboratory for experimental psychology, and also published the journal *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik*. Since Catholic educators also saw themselves as a bastion against »immorality« and »cultural Bolshevism,« some of the institute's employees briefly hoped to be able to play a leading role in the »völkisch revolution« in 1933, including the Münster-based philosopher of religion and director of the institute Johann Peter Steffes. Disillusionment soon set in, however, and the institute came into conflict with the National Socialist *Lehrerbund* (Teachers' League) and the Gestapo on account of more or less veiled criticism of the Nazi regime. In 1938, the institute was closed for political reasons.

From 1945, the institute was rebuilt by former employees under the direction of one of its former lecturers, Kurt Haase, and with the support of the Catholic teachers' associations. They attributed the catastrophic path that the German people had taken to »de-Christianization« through Nazism and consequently hoped to be able to promote the re-Christianization of Germany through confessionally oriented education policies organized along Catholic lines.

Yet the institute was never able to regain its past greatness. Financial difficulties prevented its expansion. The far-reaching social changes of the 1950s and the »empirical turn« in the education sciences crowded the Catholic pedagogical approach ever farther to the margins. Neither the educator and neo-Kantian Alfred Petzelt nor the Münster church historian Bernhard Kötting, who succeeded Haase as directors of the institute, were able to stem this creeping marginalization.

The onset in 1959 of a national debate over education reform turned up the pressure on the state confessional school, on whose behalf the Catholic education community had al-

ways provided arguments. The theological aggiornamento in the context of the Second Vatican Council fostered personalistic thought patterns that had been all but nonexistent at the German institute. Under the direction of Josef Speck, the personalistic approach to education – which eschewed close conformity to the Catholic worldview, in contrast to the older Catholic pedagogical concepts, and was much better positioned to respond to societal pluralization – came to prevail at the institute by the mid 1960s.

The Diocese of Münster – in particular its schools coordinator, Josef Homeyer – promoted this paradigm change while expediting the supersession of the state confessional school through a »free Catholic school,« which was supposed to achieve the aims of the educational reforms in an exemplary and at the same time genuinely Catholic fashion. The Deutsches Institut in Münster would provide the scholarly accompaniment to this fundamental change from a »Catholic school« to a »school by Catholics.« As a result, the bishops followed a concept developed by the curriculum specialist Doris Knab and, in 1968, resolved to completely revamp the institute in terms of personnel and organization. Following its reconfiguration in 1970, the Deutsches Institut für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik conducted elaborate empirical studies and engaged in practice-oriented curriculum development for Catholic religion classes. These activities were of great relevance for the new orientation that the Church was undergoing at the Würzburg Synod, as well as in the area of education policy.

When the euphoria surrounding educational reforms slowly receded starting in the mid-1970s, the number of voices questioning the utility of such »neutral« scholarship for the Church's own purposes increased. The German Bishops' Conference had the »efficiency« of the institute reviewed and admonished its staff to stand up for »Catholic« points-of-view on education in the future, in ways that aided public relations, which the institute's employees rejected as a constraint on their academic freedom. A labor law-related conflict hardened the differences of opinion by the late 1970s, so that the bishops decided to close the institute in early 1980.

On the basis of the history of the Deutsches Institut für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik, the present study follows a trajectory from the genesis of the institutions, personal networks, and thought patterns of a »Catholic science of education« in the early 20th century to their transformation into an »education science by Catholics« in the context of the political, cultural, and theological upheavals since the end of WorldWar II.