The ‘other’ Johann Valentin Andreae

“A true educator must be balanced and excel in four virtues: dignity, sincerity, diligence and generosity.”

Text: Dick van Niekerk  Image: Olga Boyarkina

A true educator must be balanced and excel in four virtues: dignity, sincerity, diligence and generosity. Anyone can encourage works, rules, precepts, give and imprint dictates. But to identify the essentials, to support
the efforts, to generate diligence and to teach the proper use of resources, and eventually relate everything to Christ, that is lacking. This is the Christian work that cannot be paid for with treasures from the earth.

It is one of the many pedagogical directions given by Johann Valentin Andreae to provide the young people of his time with a better perspective for the future.

It is widely known that Andreae (Herrenberg 1586 - Stuttgart 1654) owes his fame to his authorship of the *Call* (Fama) and the *Confession of the Rosicrucians* as well as the *Alchemical Wedding*. However, the fact that this exceptionally gifted German theologian, poet, playwright and minister was also a pioneering educational and social reformer has long been overshadowed by the debate on his role in the Rosicrucian manifestos. He was often too modest to present his ideas to the public. He preferred to leave the broad dissemination of his pedagogical ideas to his younger kindred spirit Comenius, with whom he had written contact.

Throughout his life, Andreae endeavoured for the ‘unadulterated transmission of the word of God’ among young people and for a ‘brotherhood-in-Christ’ that would promote the happiness of mankind. He lived for decades with the vision of gathering a Brotherhood of wise friends from all over Germany, who would exchange thoughts and ideas in order to bring the well-being of all humanity to a higher, spiritual level. It is the driving force behind his actions and publications. To his disappointment, he had to conclude at the end of his life that this idea never found fertile soil.

**Education from the seventh year on**

Andreae was a dreaded social critic who, with his sharp pen, advocates, among other things, that children should be educated from the age of seven. He designed a visual method for teaching mathematics, being more than half a century ahead of Comenius with this. Andreae derived much inspiration from the ground-breaking group in Amsterdam, the ‘Broeders in Liefde Bloeyende’ (Brothers in Love Blooming). He studied the works of the cartographers Gerard Mercator and Ortelius, of the historian Van Meteren and of the jurist of world fame, Hugo de Groot. He translated works by the latter, as well as by the Leiden philosopher Justus Lipsius. He also greatly appreciated the founder of the remonstrants Jacobus Arminius, whom he called ‘the athlete of Christianity’.

In 1605 he became friends with the Dutch bookseller and scholar Johannes van der
Linde, who had settled in Tübingen. Van der Linde lent him books that were difficult to obtain in Germany. Andreae was so enthusiastic about developments in the Netherlands that, on the recommendation of the Margrave of Anspach, he decided to settle there. His appointment as a preacher in Vaihingen, Germany, however, prevented this from happening.

Andreae's educational goals did not primarily focus on social education. It was always in the perspective of what came first for him: the inner kingdom, God in man, or in the words of the Fama: the Golden Age.

The human rights activist avant la lettre, Andreae, argued for equal rights for girls and women:

\[ I \text{ don't know why this gender, which is no less inquisitive by nature, is deprived of education in our time. } \]

In his ideal, utopian Christian state, referred to in the book of the same name as Christianopolis (1619), all offices can also be filled by women.

In such a Christian society, according to Andreae, man will ultimately succeed in leaving all the earthly behind. Only then can he consult himself in order to truly understand the reality of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. Those who seek this outside themselves will be disappointed, for it is their being-in-the-world that stands in the way of pure perception.

\[ He \text{ who leaves nature behind him and surrenders to the spirit that has become free of it, will be secured in the one, true and good God. He will see and experience with indescribable joy how the whole world is founded in its centre, not under a cloudy or coloured sky but in crystalline clarity. And so, in the supreme delight of his senses, he will discover the first lines of art, the first starting point of things. } \]

And that starting point for Andreae is love, an all-embracing love for creation, for man as the miracle of creation and for the inner Christ.

**Hair-splitting**
Johann Valentin Andreae was a phenomenon at the university of the southern German student town of Tübingen. At the age of twenty, this child prodigy graduated there as an ‘extremissimo doctus’ (extraordinarily learned). But then he also had enough of the university environment. He only saw small-minded people who tried to beat each other with fussy trifles. Young Andreae appeared to have a broader heart:

_I'd rather be with those so-called heretical Waldenses who have reconciled life and doctrine than with the so-called right-believers here. The latter also believe that they are proclaiming the right faith, but meanwhile they do not realize that they are completely neglecting the simple rule of life of charity._

He looked for his friends outside the university circle and got to know Tobias Hess in 1607.

Hess was an extremely erudite person: a genuine Bible expert, alchemist, and physician in the line of Paracelsus. Another friend became Wilhelm von Wense, a nobleman from Lüneburg, who always loyally and financially supported Andreae and inspired him to continue working on his intended world brotherhood. Von Wense brought Andreae into contact with Christoph Besold, an outstanding writer and lawyer. With Andreae, Besold often rages against moral decay, the gradual loss of territory of pure inner religion, and against lies in science and government. This group of four, together with some other friends, is called the ‘Tübinger Circle’.

**Manifestos**

The Tübinger circle of friends wanted to develop new insights into science with an open mind. But the danger of a too materialistic development of science was also recognised. The Tübinger kindred spirits thought freely and unbridledly, but never without the Christ. They were inspired by the then popular *Four Books of True Christianity* (80 editions!) by the preacher Johannes Arndt, with whom Andreae corresponded for a long time. The titles: *The Book of Conscience; The Book of Life: Christ; The Book of Inner Man* and *The Book of Nature*. The teachings of Paracelsus, for which Arndt's fourth book gave way, were also very appealing to the circle of friends.

It was in this atmosphere that the manifestos of the Rosicrucians were created. The *Fama Fraternitatis* and the *Confessio Fraternitatis* are said to have been written by
Andreae in 1608 and 1609. In his autobiography *Vita ab Ipso Conscripta* he wrote that he even produced the *Alchemical Wedding* in 1605 – so at an improbably young age.

**Calw**

Noteworthy is Andreae's connection with the picturesque southern German town of Calw (23,000 inhabitants, Württemberg), which has a millennial spiritual history. As early as the eleventh century, it attracted attention because the Hirsau Monastery, located in Calw, was the centre of an influential, ground-breaking reform of the monastic system, aimed at the practical completion of the monastic ideal.

From 1620 to 1638, during the Thirty Years' War, Andreae was the main preacher in this same Calw and... he would leave his mark there. He established a charitable foundation with excellent donations, which remained active until 1979. Thanks to this initiative, Calw has always been able to recover relatively quickly from the many acts of war to which it has fallen prey. There is an Andreae-house in Calw that is owned by the Evangelical Church. Andreae's coat of arms can be seen in the Nicholas Chapel on the bridge over the Nagold River, as well as in many other places in the town. In the church of the nearby Bad Teinach there is a unique baroque altar: *Die Kabbalistische Lehrtafel der Prinzessin Antonia*. One of the panels depicts the Universal Teachings with Cabalistic signs and Rosicrucian symbols. Andreae – himself depicted as well – was closely involved in the creation of this panel and would have strongly encouraged the princess to continue with this work of art.

There are even ‘demographic’ influences from the Andreae family in Calw. Two daughters married dignitaries from the city and these connections would start to bear fruit. Eighty years ago, a study found that as many as ten percent of secondary school students were in line with Andreae's ancestry.

And then there is that special Wimberg! The story goes that Andreae climbed this mountain with a few faithful people, when Calw was facing great trials during the Thirty Years' War. There he prayed to God to save the city from further disaster. On the same Wimberg there is now a conference centre of the modern Rosicrucians of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum.
Shining Path

Johann Valentin Andreae must have often felt lonely during his pioneering life due to incomprehension. His heart and head often travelled far ahead of him. Less than four centuries after his death, it turns out that the Future – in hindsight – has become Andreae's best friend. The Shining Path, which Andreae created while often being scorned for it, is still of great salvation to many people on a daily basis.

**Mit Freuden will ich singen**

*Mit Freuden will ich singen in dieser Morgenstund,*

*mein Herz soll auf sich schwingen in Gottes Liebesgrund.*

*Mit Freuden will ich danken für jede Gottesgab’,*

*will stillen die Gedanken, in Gott ich alles hab’.*

*Mit Freuden will ich werken an Gottes Bau und Werk,*

*die schwachen Arme stärken, nicht scheuen steilen Berg.*

*Mit Freuden will ich sterben, auf dass ich hab’ gewinn,*

*die Seligkeit zu erben; zum Himmel steht mein Sinn!*

(Adapted from Johann Valentin Andreae)

**References:**

Ernst Harnischfeger, *Mystik im Barock das Weltbild der Teinacher Lehrtafel*, Stuttgart 1980. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the employees of the City Library in Herrenberg in the cultural centre of the Hofsheuer.