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Religious instruction and education in Finnish teacher training from 1863 to 1895

1. Introduction

Actions originating from the initiative given by the Emperor Alexander II in 1856 were aimed at creating an elementary school system in Finland and led to the establishment of the first training institute for elementary school teachers in Jyväskylä in 1863. The language of instruction was Finnish. The next two institutes were established in 1871 and 1873, for training Swedish-language elementary school teachers. The second Finnish-language institute was established in the city of Sortavala in Karelia in 1880. Its speciality was giving training in both the Lutheran and Orthodox religions as Karelia had a large Orthodox population.

In this paper I will be looking at religious instruction and education at four Finnish teacher training institutes between the years 1863 and 1895. The Finnish teacher training institutes based their curricula on national culture, which meant religion, patriotism and mother tongue. Except for the Sortavala institute, the curricula contained no training in foreign languages such as Swedish or Russian. Training institutes for elementary school teachers faced great demands, and their activities were carefully monitored. Special interest was given to religious instruction and religious education in general.

2. The position of religious instruction

When the Jyväskylä Institute was opened in 1863, religious instruction was one of the central subjects. Only mother tongue, mathematics and natural science were allocated more hours in the curriculum. Religious themes were discussed not only during lectures of religious instruction but also during didactics and history lectures. Lectures on religious instruction were supplemented with other religious activities. A student at the institute was expected to participate in the services of the closest parish or in the hours of devotion at the institute (Ohjesääntö 11.5.1866 § 7; Kuikka 1973: 70-71). However, some scepticism was voiced over the religious instruction given at the institute. Many religious families felt that Cygnaeus's institute was too secular, and that their students were in danger of losing the sacred religion of their fathers. Sometimes teacher trainees would ask for leave from singing practice in order to concentrate on practising devotion (Kuikka 1973:71).

In the 1870s the clergy were generally happy with the religious instruction given at the training institutes for elementary school teachers. It was emphasised at the ministerial conventions that the instruction ought to follow the confession of the Church. At the same time, cultural radicalism was emerging. Helsingfors Dagblad, a newspaper published in Helsinki, demanded that religious instruction be altogether removed from school syllabuses, or at least be separated from the rest of the teaching, and be arranged by the Church. It was also stressed that everyone had the right to receive instruction according to their own confession. A newspaper in Turku expressed the opinion that religious tolerance ought to be practised towards people who confessed other than the Lutheran or Orthodox religions (Kuikka 1973: 128). The position of religious instruction, as well as the disposition of the instructors, began to be questioned. At the end of the 1870s theologians raised criticism against the Jyväskylä institute: they found that the institute produced self-righteous teachers after the German model. Therefore it would be better to establish elementary

schools that would stand on a firm religious ground, and where religious instruction was given by teachers who were in every respect decent and patriotically minded (TYT ptk 29.3.1876 HYK; Kuikka 1973: 131). Some members of the clergy perceived that contemporary thinking, liberalism and rationalism had gained ground amongst elementary school teachers. There was also the issue of the co-operation between school teachers and the clergy in arranging the parish catechetical meetings. Suspicion between the two parties increased. This was partly due to the fact that, alongside the clergy, state officials had begun conducting school inspections to a growing extent. The clergy were beginning to lose their power within the elementary school system. Moreover, there was already an on-going public debate over the legislation on freedom of religion that would ensure the rights of other than Lutherans and the Orthodox to practise their religion (Kuikka 1973: 128-132).

The position of religious instruction entered a new phase in the 1880s; now the revivalist movements, which had not affected teacher training institutes in the previous two decades, became an issue. The institutes, however, kept strictly to the confession of the Church. Students who belonged to the evangelical movement were not allowed to receive their final certificates from the institutes. Those participating in the meetings of the Laestadian revivalist movement would need special permission from the Board of Education before they could get their certificates. The Free Church movement gained some popularity in the Jyväskylä and Ekenäs institutes. The question arose whether a confessional member of the Free Church could be given the certificate. Opinions were divided over the question of confessionality. On the one hand it was deemed important that such state institutes as teacher training institutes should practise tolerance and not prevent any trainee from receiving his or her certificate merely on religious grounds. On the other hand, it was a requirement of an elementary school teacher to follow the doctrine of the Church, which meant that only Lutheran or Orthodox students could be accepted in the institutes. The Free Church movement also had an impact on elementary school teaching in Sweden (Kuikka 1973:241-242).

In the 1880s the clergy took a sterner attitude towards religious education. They criticised the low amount of religious instruction given at elementary schools, as well as the teacher training institutes, where they felt an un-Christian atmosphere prevailed. There was a marked tension between schools and the Church on the question of the Catechism. This tension resulted in various conflicts. The clergy impeded attempts to change the religious instruction in the schools. Simultaneously, the Church improved its own teaching system by training teachers under the supervision of the cathedral chapters. In fact, this system had by the 1900s turned out to be very effective and it became the most common form of popular education; in the course of the 1890s the tension among the clergy gradually calmed down. The school authorities held a positive opinion of the parochial schools, and the Senate allocated funds for them. Co-operation between the cathedral chapters and the Board of Education increased (Kuikka 1973: 245-247). At the same time, however, political tension grew in Finland. The Russian authorities tightened their control, and the attention of the Finns was now directed more towards the contemporary political events.

3. Teachers of religion: ministers or humanists?

Uno Cygnaeus had a central role in the selection of lecturers to the Jyväskylä teacher training institute. When it came to the selection of the lecturer for religious instruction, he contacted an undergraduate of Helsinki University called Nestor Järvinen, who studied theology and Finnish language. Cygnaeus expected the future lecturers of the institute to approach their new task with great enthusiasm, and he held it paramount that each lecturer acquaint themselves beforehand with some of the leading foreign teacher training institutes and the didactics of their specialist subjects. He directed the future lecturers to different institutes in Europe to acquire this knowledge. Nestor Järvinen was one of those chosen to receive a grant for this purpose and was selected

as the Lecturer in Religious Instruction at the Jyväskylä institute. He went on his study tour in 1862 and travelled for nine months, during which time he familiarised himself with German and Swiss teacher training institutes. Järvinen supported the confessional view and held certain reservations towards the contemporary pedagogy based on the thoughts of Pestalozzi and Diesterweg. He felt that these theories were built on "quicksand" (Kuikka 1973:40-50; Kuikka 1974).

The Jyväskylä training institute for elementary school teachers was opened in 1863. The lecturers had relatively free hands to plan the curricula of their respective specialist subjects. The curriculum drawn up by Järvinen showed distinctive signs of influence from the Waldenburg teacher training institute in Germany where he had spent two months of his study tour. Neither Järvinen, nor any other lecturer in Jyväskylä, had the benefit of textbooks, and therefore they had to use a substantial amount of the students' time for writing down notes. Uno Cygnaeus paid close attention to Nestor Järvinen's methods and was not entirely happy with them or with Järvinen's religious devotion. In 1866 he wrote to F.L. Schaumann, the Bishop of Porvoo, asking him to undertake serious discussions with Järvinen. A conflict of this kind harmed the working atmosphere at the Jyväskylä institute. However, the letter resulted in no actions and Järvinen was ordained in 1867 and continued to hold his post at the institute until 1881 (Kuikka 1974: 50-57).

The educational background of the lecturers in religious instruction at teacher training institutes became more heterogeneous in the 1870s. The lecturers were no longer by default graduates from the Faculty of Theology but also from the Faculty of Philosophy. For example the lecturer of the teacher training institute in Nykarleby had a Master's degree but had supplemented it with studies on pedagogy and thus qualified as a lecturer for teacher training institutes (SD 134/ 16-1872 KA).

The question of the educational background of lecturers in religion was crucial in the 1880s, and the Lutheran Church paid close attention to the activities of teacher training institutes and to the

religious education given in them. Several lecturers at the institutes had degrees from both the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Philosophy, and not all of them were ministers any more. They developed religious instruction through study trips to Sweden, Germany and Switzerland. Despite their heterogeneous educational background, the lecturers had a common denominator in their connections to various contemporary revivalist movements. For instance the German-originating Beckian thinking, which saw the Bible as the supreme guide, gained a foothold in Finnish teacher training institutes. The Renqvistian revivalist movement spread through Karelia, and consequently influenced the Sortavala institute (Kemppinen 1969: 146-147). The Free Church movement also had supporters in the teacher training institutes. This is illustrative of the newly emerged situation where novel liberal thinking prevailed alongside strictlytraditional confessional Lutheran thinking. In the 1880s it was common for lecturers in religious instruction to take active part in the contemporary idealistic debate, where a central issue was the relation between religion and natural science. Some of the lecturers wrote textbooks for the elementary schools.

The teacher training institute in Sortavala differed from the rest in that it also trained Orthodox students. The objective was to produce teachers for the Orthodox areas of Karelia. In this respect the Sortavala institute can well be called an ecumenical teacher training institute. The lecturer of religion was an Orthodox priest, who put similar weight on the confessional aspects of the Orthodox religion as Lutherans did on their own religion (Asetus 5.3.1883; Merikoski 1944:41, 47,48, 62-69; Kemppinen 1969:75-76).

4. The objectives of religious instruction

The School Act of 1863 defined the framework within which the Jyväskylä teacher training institute was to function, but took no position on the curriculum. Therefore the lecturers of each special

subject were to plan their respective curricula for one year at a time. As Lecturer in Religious Instruction, Nestor Järvinen had several options from which to choose. The first was the proposition made by Uno Cygnaeus in 1860, which could be characterised as a pedagogical curriculum, where the religious education and Christian attitude of the teacher trainees were valued. The second alternative, the 1862 proposition of the Inspecting Committee, reiterated the general policy of Finnish religious education, namely that the objective was to cement the pupils' membership of the Church and attachment to its confessional doctrine. The third alternative for the curriculum was one following German school regulations of 1854. According to them, the teacher training institutes ought to train teachers for the Evangelical schools so that these would be able to guide the youth into Christian and patriotic thinking and into abiding traditional virtues. The objectives of training teachers of religion were similar to those of the Church. This required close collaboration between the Church and the elementary school system. Nestor Järvinen had come across these ideas on his study trip to Germany (Kuikka 1973: 12-32). The fourth possibility for a curriculum was stated in the Act of 1866. It brought little new, and in general followed the guidelines laid down in the Act of 1863 (Asetus 11.5.1866). The common denominator between these alternatives was that not only did they all emphasise the knowledge and skills, but also the Christian and ethical disposition of the future elementary school teachers.

How were the objectives formulated in the final curriculum?

The first essential objective from the very beginning was the confessional trend which stressed the teachings of the Bible as well as the Symbolical Books. Martin Luther's smaller Catechism was a central work for teaching dogma, but church history and the didactics of religious instruction also reflected similar objectives. The confessional approach meant that it was compulsory for a teacher of religion to be the member of the same Church as the children he or she was teaching. It was a much debated point whether the lecturers of religious instruction at teacher training institutes should be ministers themselves.

This confessional trend continued into the 20th century.

The second objective was didactic in nature. The didactics of religious instruction was included in the last year of the curriculum, together with teaching practice. During the first three years, the lecturers did, however, already deal with some didactic aspects of teaching religion at elementary schools, for instance in connection to biblical stories or the Catechism course. Because of this, teacher training institutes would use elementary school textbooks where appropriate. Similar practice was in fact followed in teacher training institutes in Sweden and Germany as well. Swedish-language training institutes used Swedish-language textbooks, but the contents of the stated objectives were generally similar to those of the Finnish-language institutes. Their basis was on the aforementioned ecclesiastical and confessional policy.

The third objective was the teachers' personality and their sense of vocation. According to the Act of 1866, the institutes were to train future teachers as Christianminded personalities (Ohjesääntö 11.5.1866 § 1). This type of teacher ideal was reiterated throughout the 19th century pedagogic literature, and it was apparent in the 1860s and 1870s in the didactics of religious instruction. First of all, teachers were expected to be strong Christian personalities. They needed to be teachers with a strong vocation, who felt that they were called by God and were responsible to God. Secondly, they should know their Bible, and the truth expressed in it, according to which they were to lead their lives. This is why the institute curricula allowed as much as three years for biblical studies. Thirdly, teachers were expected to be members of the Church, and due to their position as the ones responsible for the education of schoolchildren, always had to bear in mind that the pupils were members of the Church. Therefore teachers were expected to collaborate closely with the Church. Fourthly, it was the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the Christian faith penetrated the teaching of all subjects. But their primary responsibility was religious instruction, and to guide pupils' religious development, although this objective started to gain prominence a little later, in the 1890s.

The objectives of religious instruction changed gradually in such as way that the emphasis shifted from stressing doctrine to guiding pupils in the Christian way of life- an objective that became manifest in the changing teacher ideals as well.

5. Catechism or not?

A key issue in the curricula of teacher training institutes, and later in the syllabus of the elementary schools, was the question of teaching the Catechism. This presented a conflict for the different religious-pedagogic trends. Teaching the Catechism had its own problems. As it was an integral part of the teaching tradition of the Lutheran church, it therefore followed that the religious instruction given at schools had similar objectives to that given by the Church. The Church defined the religious instruction syllabuses and supervised their implementation in the schools. On the other hand, however, the pietistic tradition had since the 1700s concentrated on the Christian way of life instead of the doctrine represented by the Catechism.

The Catechism had been an issue in the general public debate of the 1840s on religious education, which had followed four distinct lines of argument. According to the confessional Lutheran point of view the objectives of the Church and the schools were identical, and therefore teaching the Catechism belonged inseparably to teacher training institutes as well as to the elementary schools. In contrast, according to the opinion represented by the German A. Diesterweg, the religious instruction given at schools ought to be non-confessional, i.e. it should not follow any particular Church but concentrate solely on the Bible. According to a third view, religious instruction was important mainly for the sake of moral development. The fourth opinion stated that religious instructionshould be altogether removed from school syllabuses. All these four lines of argument were to some extent reflected in Finland as well (Schumann-Sperber 1890: 82-85. Iisalo 1969: 53-60).

The controversy over the position of the Catechism began all over again after 1856 when plans began to be made for popular education and teacher training. These plans followed the same lines of argument as before. The confessional point of view, represented by the cathedral chapters and the clergy, stressed the elementary school's duty to prepare the pupils for confirmation. This required that the Catechism be taught in the teacher training institutes. The other opinion, held by Uno Cygnaeus among others, saw the matter from the point of view of pedagogy. He maintained that the teacher training institutes and the elementary schools should be kept as independent systems. This incorporated the idea that the starting point for the syllabuses should be the development of the pupils. As regards religious instruction, the clarity of the contents of the teaching was important. Pupils were expected to comprehend what they were reading. This entailed that the religious instruction would concentrate on biblical material. In addition to the Bible pupils would also read textbooks on natural, biblical and world history, and learn about the presence of God in nature and history; according to this view, the teachings of the Catechism were no longer seen as essential. Another, partly overlapping contemporary opinion saw that the main task of the elementary school was to give a good general education. The idea was to bring up good citizens. Religion was deemed to have a crucial role in achieving this goal (Kuikka 1973:4).

The curriculum suggested by Uno Cygnaeus was not implemented in respect of the Catechism., which was retained and was studied in Jyväskylä from the very beginning. The title of the course was 'Christian religion and ethics'. Lectures took place during the third year, and a subject with the same title was also part of the elementary school syllabus. Why did this happen?

Although the teacher training institutes and elementary schools were administratively independent, they were compelled to take public opinion into account. It followed that all students at the teacher training institute were members of the Church. Without Church membership it would have been impossible in late 19th century Finland to be

accepted as a student at a teacher training institute or receive a teaching post. Teacher trainees were expected to know the doctrine of their Church, and the Catechism was the key to this. Ministers acted as elementary school inspectors in the 1870s and to some extent continued to do so over the next few decades; the teaching of religion was keenly supervised by the Church. There was some debate on the appropriate extent to which the Catechism should be adhered to in teaching, but nonetheless the Catechism maintained its position as part of religious education in Finland.

5. Summary

Religious education became an academic subject in its own right at the training institutes for elementary school teachers in Finland between 1863 and 1895. Religious instruction maintained its position as one of the central subjects of the institute although in publicity criticism was raised against it. The Lutheran and Orthodox churches exercised their influence strongly in the debate. The clergy also acted as inspectors of religious education. Revivalist movements were prominent in the 1 800s and furthered the position of religious instruction and education. The lecturers of religious instruction at teachertraining institutes were predominantly ministers, but from the 1870s onwards a growing number of them were humanists.

The objectives of religious education remained unchanged from the 1860s to the 1890s. The main objective was to give confessional Lutheran or Orthodox religious instruction. This meant that the Church and teacher training shared largely the same objectives. The second objective was didactic, and its goal was to secure sufficient levels of knowledge and skills for the teacher trainees to give religious instruction at elementary schools. The third objective was to educate the future teachers as vocational Christian personalities.

A problem area for religious education was its attitude towards the teaching of the Catechism. Its position had been a matter of

discussion from the 1600s, but the issue became controversial again after 1856. Representatives of the Church considered the teaching of the Catechism paramount, whereas the contemporary pedagogues wished to stress the importance of the Bible itself. In teacher training institutes the Catechism was included as a part of Christian religion and ethics and thus maintained its position. The future teachers were expected to know their Catechism, because they were expected on becoming elementary school teachers to work in close collaboration with the Church. This aspect was also related to the parish catechetical meetings and confirmation classes.

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