

LAUDATIO MARC DEPAEPE

Frank Simon

Marc, your presence here as the Sarton Medalist provides once again proof of the fruitful collaboration between the historians of education of the University of Ghent and the Catholic University of Leuven. This close collaboration began in 1969 with the pioneering project in our sector on the Belgian educational journals that, under the direction of your promoter, Professor emeritus Maurits De Vroede, the 1989 Sarton Medalist, resulted in the impressive, four-volume *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het pedagogisch leven in België. De periodieken, 1817-1940* [Contributions to the history of educational life in Belgium, the periodicals from 1817 to 1940] (Leuven-Ghent, 1973-1987). I would go so far as to say that we both learned our trade with this project. In the meantime, we have spent many research hours together with other projects. I have come to know you as an extremely loyal and unselfish colleague, a frank colleague who doesn't hesitate to accept full responsibility. I sincerely hope, and I am convinced, that this collaboration can continue for years yet on the same basis.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these qualities of themselves are not sufficient for being honored today. The naming of the Sarton Medalist has nothing to do with cronyism. Our colleague, Marc Depaepe, is one of the top international figures in the field of the history of education. His curriculum vitae and his publications, which I will not go into in detail, provide more than ample proof of this.

Professor Depaepe obtained the diploma of educator at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1977. He was able to commence work immediately as an aspirant of the National Foundation for Scientific Research. He moved up through the entire hierarchy and is now research leader. At the same time, he held a teaching position at the Catholic University of Leuven and, since last year, has been working as part-time

professor. In the unfortunately too small club of historians of education, Professor Depaepe occupies at present the position of chairman of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education, in which he previously saw to the operation of the secretariat. At the same time, he has placed his scientific expertise at the service of *Paedagogica Historica : International Journal for the History of Education, New Series*, of which he has been a member of the editorial board since 1990.

Grosso modo, one could say that the scientific work of Professor Depaepe is being conducted on three levels.

First, the history of primary education, in a certain sense an extension of his licentiate thesis, which dealt with the internal organization of the Belgian primary school, a theme that has lost nothing in topicality. He collaborated in the formation of a number of basic tools for the sector, such as the *Contributions*, which I have already cited, a bibliography of sources, and the publication of the Belgian educational statistics from 1830 on. He is also the co-author of the just published book, *Geen trede meer om op te staan. De maatschappelijke positie van onderwijzers en onderwijzeressen tijdens de voorbije eeuw* [No longer a podium to stand on : The social position of teachers in the last century] (Kapellen, 1993).

Then there is the history of science — and here, of course, we are in Sarton's area — in which Professor Depaepe has succeeded in acquiring a solid international reputation. In his dissertation, he examined the theoretical and methodological aspects of the history of education, which resulted in the publication of *On the Relationship of Theory and History in Pedagogy : An Introduction to the West-German Discussion on the Significance of the History of Education, 1950-1980*, (Leuven, 1983). His special doctoral thesis (1989) bore the title, *Meten om beter te weten ? Geschiedenis van de experimenteel-wetenschappelijke richting in de westerse pedagogiek vanaf het einde van de 19de eeuw tot aan de tweede wereldoorlog* [To measure in order better to know ? The history of the experimental scientific trend in Western pedagogy from the end of the 19th century to the Second World War]. It is a comparative-history

study on the evolution of pedagogy and psychology as a science, primarily in the USA, Great Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and Belgium. This study has just been translated into German and published under the title *Zum Wohl des Kindes ? Pädologie, pädagogische Psychologie und experimentelle Pädagogik in Europa und den USA, 1890-1940* (Weinheim-Leuven, 1993), which is, by the way, the basis for his lecture today. This work is the expression of the present, new kind of self-reflection in the field. It is highly recommended for psychologists and certainly for educators, and it illustrates very well the two faces of pedagogy and psychology at the time. One was, like Decroly, for example, a pedagogue because one was first and foremost a psychologist and vice-versa. The work clearly conveys the evolution in the relationship between pedagogy and psychology and exposes the differences in scientific status. It is sobering, particularly for experimental pedagogy, and shows that this pedagogy served more the professional ethos of the pedagogues than a fruitful interchange between theory and praxis. The book is a challenge for empirically and analytically oriented researchers and also provides one more proof that, as Bourdieu, the French sociologist, has stated, the intellectual field is not an aggregation of isolated elements but a configuration, a network of relationships. It is, in other words, a distribution of power.

Finally, there is the field into which Professor Depaepe has recently entered, the history of education in the former Belgian Congo and more specifically the agogic project of the missionary work. He acquired a taste for it with the critical edition in 1992 of the letters of his Great Aunt, Sister Adonia, who was a missionary. A neat piece of the history of mentalities. Marc, I read in it that your family apparently has the habit of being awarded medals. Your Great Uncle Julien, *primus* of a School in Ghent, was given a gold medal. The congratulations from Aunt Adonia to Uncle Julien I want to make my own and pass them on to you : "Dear Marc, my warmest congratulations : it is the prize for long years of self-sacrifice and diligence ! Had you, like some others, spent your time on Sundays going here and there, this honor would not now have come to you, and you would not have harvested the fruits of your labor. You have made good use of your young years."