

# Bernard Overberg and the Educational Tradition of the Coesfeld Sisters of Notre Dame

## Who Was Bernard Overberg?

### *Early life*

Bernard Overberg was born on May 1, 1754, in the village of Höckel, Diocese of Osnabrück, in the present German state of Lower Saxony. He was the fourth child and second son of farmer and peddler Eilard Bernard Overberg and his wife, Maria Gertrud Kerck. According to early accounts of his life, the future “teacher of teachers” started out developmentally handicapped, unable to walk until he was five years old, learning his ABCs only with great difficulty.<sup>i</sup> As he put it later, “on the whole, I found school very boring and I would rather go out the school door than come into it.”<sup>ii</sup>

Around the age of nine, a remarkable turnaround occurred that has been variously attributed to the motivation created by his desire to be a priest (plus some divine help)<sup>iii</sup> or by a new teacher’s threat of punishment.<sup>iv</sup> Whatever the cause or combination of causes, the young Overberg not only experienced a breakthrough in his own mental development but was soon able to help other children.<sup>v</sup> His having had to struggle to learn while experiencing the negative effects of poor teaching<sup>vi</sup> would have an impact on his future life work.

For example, it was not in school that Overberg learned to read. There, as he later recalled, “we read without bothering at all about a period or a comma, just keeping on word after word in one tone as long as we had breath. We understood not one word of it.” However in the evening the schoolmaster (who was later replaced) usually came to the Overberg house, which was next door to the school, and told stories of witches and goblins. These stories caught young Bernard’s imagination, so that when a traveling salesman brought a book from Holland that had many such tales in it, the boy found the motivation he needed. “From this book I learned to understand what I read.”<sup>vii</sup> From out of his own experience, then, Overberg could years later tell his teacher trainees: “As much as you are able, do not let your pupils read anything that cannot yet be made understandable to them . . . they will become accustomed to mouthing words without considering meanings. Eagerness to read often is lost this way.”<sup>viii</sup>

And again: “Fashion your instruction in a way that is entertaining and delightful to the children.” How? By using stories to engage their interest, questions to engage their ability to observe and to think.<sup>ix</sup>

At fifteen, Bernard began the study of Latin with the Franciscan associate pastor at the parish church of Voltlage. A year later he entered the gymnasium of the Franciscan Fathers at Rheine, in the neighboring diocese of Münster. With his limited educational background, Bernard began his secondary schooling near the bottom of his class, but by the end of the first year had worked his way to the top. Upon completion of his gymnasium studies, Bernard was invited by the Father Guardian to enter the Franciscan community in Rheine. But Bernard believed his vocation to be to the diocesan priesthood, and so in the fall of 1774 began his philosophical and theological studies in Münster.

### *Vocation*

Once, when Bernard was home during vacation, some neighbors asked his help for their teenaged children who had not been yet been admitted to Holy Communion because they could not learn the catechism. Bernard found the usual method unworkable because these young people just could not memorize questions and answers. So he began telling stories from the Bible and talking about things from everyday life and from nature. In a conversational way, he drew out the meaning in these and related it to the doctrine. The young people brightened up, listened, caught on, and could easily answer his questions. The approach discovered in this way became a key element in Overberg's catechetical method, rooted as it was in the dialog between God and humankind that pervades salvation history.<sup>x</sup>

Ordained on December 20, 1779, Father Overberg completed his last year of theology with distinction and in the fall of 1780 began his first priestly assignment in the parish of Everswinkel, southeast of Münster. The pastor having agreed to his request to be given complete charge of the religious instruction of children, the young curate soon became widely known as a remarkable catechist. As such, he came to the attention of Franz von Fürstenberg who, as the person chiefly responsible for the government of both the diocese and the principality of Münster, wanted to begin work on the reform of elementary education just as he had done at the secondary and university levels. Von Fürstenberg had earlier become aware of Overberg's abilities as a seminarian and, after having himself observed the young priest catechize, decided that he was the one to help with the project of school reform.

### *Teacher of Teachers*

On March 1, 1783, Rev. Bernard Overberg (1754-1826), barely three years ordained, undertook the mission for which he is best known, the reform of the common elementary schools in the diocese and

principality of Münster and the training of teachers for these schools.<sup>xi</sup> He started by reading everything possible on education and by visiting the schools to see for himself the condition of the buildings and the quality of the teaching, both of which were often deplorable. To train and to establish standards for the teachers, Overberg instituted an annual “normal course” which lasted from August 21 to the beginning of November. Teachers who passed the final examination were certified to teach and received an increment in pay. In that limited amount of time, all Overberg could do was lay a foundation upon which the teachers would have to build, something they often did by keeping in contact with him and even repeating the course after a few years. The fact that women as well as men attended his normal course was so much a departure from traditional ways, that Overberg is often credited with creating the profession of female lay teacher.<sup>xii</sup>

In all the years (1783-1826) he spent preparing teachers for their mission, Overberg’s program had no institutional “home.” There was no “normal school,” just the “normal course” of about ten weeks each fall. The men trainees were taught in a room at the priests’ seminary, the women in a classroom of the convent school run by the *Schwestern Unserer Lieben Frau*, as the Augustinian Canonesses of the Congregation of Our Lady<sup>xiii</sup> were known in Münster. One of the reasons Overberg published his lecture notes under the title *Anweisung zum zweckmässigen Schulunterricht (Directives for Purposeful School-teaching)* was to give his students a reference to fall back on once they got out into the field. Overberg had wanted to establish a regular two-year training program in a “seminary” for teachers just as there was for priests, but in the years of turmoil following upon the Napoleonic invasion and wars, no government was ready to provide the money for such a venture.

Overberg published his *Anweisung*,<sup>xiv</sup> the book for which he is principally known, in 1793. Later he wrote and published a Bible history, including both Old and New Testaments (1799),<sup>xv</sup> catechisms for younger children and for older students (1804),<sup>xvi</sup> a religion handbook to accompany the catechisms (1804),<sup>xvii</sup> and more. In order to maintain his link with the classroom and with students, Overberg taught reading, writing, mathematics, and religion at the convent school of the Augustinian Canonesses, going three there times a week from 1784 until 1811, when Napoleon’s secularization forced the sisters to leave. There is evidence that Overberg also picked up from the Canonesses something of the spirit and the educational approach of their founder, St. Peter Fourier.<sup>xviii</sup>

But Overberg was more than an educational and catechetical reformer. He was sought out by both rich and poor as a confessor and spiritual director. It was in this capacity that he was associated with

Princess Amalia Gallitzin, first helping her return to the Catholic Church and then becoming her advisor, confessor, spiritual director, and friend from 1789 until her death in 1806. Overberg, with his capacity for going to the heart of the matter and expressing profound ideas in a simple way, became a key member of the “Münster circle” of Catholic intellectuals who gathered around Amalia and von Fürstenberg and who, through regular meetings to discuss contemporary religious, philosophical, and social questions, stimulated a renewal in Catholic life and thought. Overberg was also the devoted ecclesiastical superior and spiritual director of the Augustinian Canonesses from 1785 until their forced departure from Münster in January 1812.<sup>xix</sup> In 1809 he agreed to become rector of the diocesan seminary, assuming a responsibility for the spiritual formation and catechetical training of future diocesan priests that lasted for seventeen years.

### *The work continues*

Bernard Overberg lay dying on November 9, 1826, at the very time that the last of his students to complete the annual normal course were taking their certification examination. Some of his former students had just brought to reality his long-held dream of establishing a regular two-year “seminary” for male teachers. In 1832 it became possible to offer the same opportunity to women when the Royal Female Teacher Seminar was founded in Münster. In 1852, in a move initiated by their priest director Reverend Theodor Elting working with the Diocese of Münster, the Sisters of Notre Dame opened a similar teacher training institute in Coesfeld for their own members.<sup>xx</sup>

## Overberg’s Link to the Coesfeld Sisters of Notre Dame

### *Diocesan and congregational perceptions*

In writing to the congregation for its Golden Jubilee in August 1900, Münster’s Bishop Hermann Dingelstad recalled that a half-century earlier some Sisters of Notre Dame (a reference to the Amersfoort sisters) had been called to the diocese so that “a community might be formed there in the spirit of the teachers educated by Overberg.”<sup>xxi</sup> Bishop Dingelstad’s words regarding the congregation’s origins have special weight because of his own connections with the Coesfeld Sisters of Notre Dame going back to his childhood.<sup>xxii</sup> He was writing as someone who knew the congregation very well.

The Coesfeld community's Overberg connection still seemed significant to the diocesan leadership and to the sisters themselves seventy-five years later. Auxiliary Bishop Johannes Scheifes, addressing the sisters gathered in Mülhausen for the congregation's anniversary celebration in October 1925, recalled that seventy-five years had elapsed "since the two foundresses in Coesfeld, under the direction of Reverend Father Elting, brought into existence this German congregation. They were Misses Wolbring and Kühling, who, imbued with the spirit of Overberg, consecrated themselves to the service of God . . ."<sup>xxiii</sup>

The congregation itself, in the introduction to its seventy-fifth jubilee book, stated that the dear God could hardly have prepared the ground better for the Sisters of Notre Dame than to have them begin in the Münsterland. There a centuries' old, true Catholic tradition remained unshakeable even in an age of materialism and socialism and Bernard Overberg's works were an immeasurable blessing especially for teachers and for youth.<sup>xxiv</sup>

#### *Personal and individual connections*

Personally and individually, the Coesfeld sisters had their first exposure to the Overberg legacy when they were children. Even if some may have had elementary teachers who were not Overberg trained, at least they were exposed to his spiritually formative catechesis through his catechisms for younger and older children, used in the diocese until 1887.<sup>xxv</sup> Hilligonde Wolbring's own involvement with the Overberg tradition began at the latest when she started going to school in Bocholt at the age of seven. It was not only through her teachers, Miss Kösters and Miss Laumann, or the parish priest, Father Schütte, that she was to know a loving and provident God. Since Hilligonde's relatives lived too far from Bocholt to allow her to attend school every day, she boarded for seven years with the boys' teacher Hermann Hüsener and his wife, who had no children of their own. Trained as a teacher by Overberg himself, Mr. Hüsener knew how to open a child's mind and heart to seeing God's world through God's eyes.<sup>xxvi</sup> "Uncle Hüsener, my good foster-father," as Sister Maria Aloysia called him later, became a trusted friend and adviser with whom she corresponded even from the United States.<sup>xxvii</sup>

At the Royal Female Teacher Seminar in Münster, Hilligonde Wolbring, Elisabeth Kühling, Gertrude Perger, and others who later entered the Coesfeld Sisters of Notre Dame were trained by educators formed years earlier by Overberg himself. Among these were Henrietta Buchholz, principal teacher at the Seminar who had been associated with the "Teacher of Teachers" for years, first as a child

in school then as a teacher trainee and then as colleague; her assistants Katharina Buckhorn and Magdalene Tiemann; and Director Gröning, the priest who had charge of the Seminar.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### *The institutional connection*

The *Präparandie* of the Sisters of Notre Dame, a “preparant” school modeled after the Royal Female Teacher Seminar in Münster, was officially established in 1852, only two years after the Coesfeld community began. In a sense, Sister Maria Bernarda Perger, who directed the program,<sup>xxix</sup> and the other Coesfeld sisters who taught with her in the *Präparandie* represented a second generation of Overberg teachers beginning to train a third. It was Bishop Müller himself who secured the Prussian government’s permission for the establishment of the *Präparandie* in Coesfeld, approved its course of studies, and sent examiners to check on progress. The Coesfeld students took their teaching qualification examinations in Münster with the students from the Seminar there. Canon Caspar Franz Krabbe, first director (1832-1842) of the Royal Female Teacher Seminar in Münster, early biographer of Overberg, and a major educational force in the Münsterland, was instrumental in getting the *Präparandie* off to a solid start and in establishing its good reputation.<sup>xxx</sup> Thus the Coesfeld program was actually part of a larger diocesan and governmental teacher education effort with a strong Overberg orientation.

At this point the question needs to be addressed of what the possible impact may have been of the Namur-Amersfoort educational tradition as it was carried to Coesfeld by the Dutch sisters. It is known that the three sisters who had re-founded the Amersfoort congregation in 1841, including Soeur Marie Brigitte Hans who served as superior and novice mistress in Coesfeld during the first ten weeks after the arrival of the Dutch sisters 1850, had visited Namur in August, 1844, to get help in consolidating their community spirit and perfecting their method of education.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Bishop Müller had been intent on bringing into the Münster diocese a congregation that would be suitable to the purposes of the new foundation in Coesfeld.<sup>xxxii</sup> The overall mission of the Amersfoort congregation as stated in its Rule, promoting the salvation of souls by prayer, by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and “especially by the instruction of youth, to which it gives itself wholly and with entire devotedness”<sup>xxxiii</sup> was certainly compatible with the apostolic role envisioned for Coesfeld. Furthermore the Amersfoort Rule dealt with education in broad terms and in a way consistent with the goals of the Coesfeld community. Its provisions, for example, that instruction “must be grounded in the

unchangeable truths of holy religion and be closely adapted to the conditions of the time in which we live and to the status of the children who are entrusted to us”<sup>xxxiv</sup> and that “although the congregation has schools for the education of girls of every social class . . . yet it preferably concerns itself with the education of poor girls”<sup>xxxv</sup> were compatible with the Overberg tradition and with the intentions of the Coesfeld founders. Thus the Rule brought from Amersfoort could provide a canonical framework for the mission entrusted to the new congregation by the diocese.

It is difficult to know to what extent a more detailed knowledge of the Namur-Amersfoort educational tradition was actually imparted to the Coesfeld community. While the Dutch sisters would have given instructions on the Rule, notes that would indicate the content of those instructions as they concerned educational matters have not surfaced. Furthermore the teaching in the *Präparandie*, as far as can be discerned from the early sources, was done by Sister Maria Bernarda, Sister Maria Ignatia, other Coesfeld sisters, and Father Elting, not by the Amersfoort sisters.

As Sister Maria Servatia Döring notes in the 1855 *Jahrbuch*, following the separation from Amersfoort, the proper purpose of the *Präparandie*, the formation of religious teachers, became more clearly evident. With the bishop’s permission, novices could take their teacher examination; talented novices and postulants could study. For the lay students, studying together with those who were already members of the congregation was in every respect stimulating and beneficial.<sup>xxxvi</sup> It appears that Father Elting and others involved with founding the Coesfeld *Präparandie* believed that the integrated spiritual and pedagogical development that Overberg had attempted with the teachers he trained and that was carried on by his students for the next generation of teachers at the Münster Seminar<sup>xxxvii</sup> was also possible when working with women religious.

From Overberg’s perspective, learning about the world and developing one’s human capacities were not inherently antithetical to the spiritual life. Rather he taught that one of the best helps for calling God frequently to mind was to accustom oneself to contemplate his presence and attributes in creation,<sup>xxxviii</sup> a mirror of God’s glory.<sup>xxxix</sup> The qualities and abilities of the soul that Overberg considered to be the most noble of the gifts God has given to human beings (understanding, free will, memory, self awareness, conscience, and thirst for happiness) were understood and presented as actually orienting people to God if used rightly.<sup>xl</sup> The development of these gifts was also a principal focus of Overberg’s pedagogy. From that point of view, teacher formation would have seemed complimentary to religious formation

and not antithetical to it. The observations about the *Präparandie* found in the congregational annals suggest the effort at integration could be pursued more readily once the Coesfeld foundation became an independent congregation under the Diocese of Münster.

### *Continuing the linkage*

Even though the Coesfeld foundation clearly began its apostolic mission in the tradition of Bernard Overberg, the question may be asked whether the congregation was still working within that framework in the 1870s, when political circumstances at home led the sisters to move their center of operations for the time being to the United States. There are a number of pieces of evidence that suggest that as the Coesfeld sisters came to America they did bring the Overberg spiritual and pedagogical tradition with them.

For example, Overberg's *Anweisung*, already a basic text for teacher education in Germany and elsewhere, was the "core of the pedagogical system" at the Coesfeld *Präparandie*.<sup>xli</sup> The sermon that Reverend Heinrich Kiküm, ecclesiastical director of the congregation since 1870, gave on the first Sunday of the new (and final) school year at the Coesfeld *Präparandie*, October 22, 1876<sup>xlii</sup> echoed Overberg's own motivational words to his teacher trainees in his opening lectures as reprinted in the *Anweisung*.<sup>xliii</sup> Coming as it does twenty-four years after the founding of the Notre Dame normal school in Coesfeld, the sermon suggests that Overberg's vision of education was still the guiding spirit there. Likewise, input from the Overberg tradition was still being put to use even beyond the teacher training program. Reverend Mother Maria Anna Scheffer-Boichorst, who guided the congregation until her death in 1872, always had a copy of Overberg's catechism on her desk.<sup>xliv</sup> This was probably the *Catechism for the Use of Older Students* that Overberg had purposely made quite substantial so that Catholics would continue to use it as adults.<sup>xlv</sup> In 1878 and 1879, Münster's Bishop Brinkmann referred to this catechism in answering questions addressed to him by the superiors in America regarding the sisters' confessions.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Another indication that the Overberg legacy was carried over from Coesfeld to America is that at least some of the sisters who immigrated brought with them their own copies of his principal published works. Sister Mary Thaddea Thien, who came from Mülhausen in 1892 as a twenty-year-old newly professed sister and died in Cleveland in 1954, wrote a short essay on Overberg that was shared with the

sisters sometime after her death.<sup>xlvii</sup> In it she related that some of the “old Sisters,” who when she was young were those from Coesfeld, had Overberg’s handbooks,<sup>xlviii</sup> catechism, and bible history in their possession. A few very old copies of the *Anweisung* remain in the provincial archives of Chardon and Covington. In addition to the secular name of the sister who had used the book as a lay student, one finds a number and stamp suggesting that the copy had become part of the sisters’ education library. One of the copies in Chardon belonged to Josephine Heck, later Reverend Mother Maria Chrysostoma. Its pages on the teaching of reading are especially fragile and worn.

Perhaps one of the best indicators that the approach to mission and ministry that had characterized the congregation in Coesfeld was the base from which it started its apostolic work in the United States is the pivotal role of Sister Maria Bernarda Perger on both sides of the Atlantic. As directress of the *Präparandie* she had borne the principal responsibility for educating the young sisters as teachers. As school prefect she had exercised a supervisory function over their work in the schools and had arranged for in-service courses and conferences during the long autumn vacations. From her arrival in the United States in July 1877 until her return to Germany in September 1892, Sister Maria Bernarda was again entrusted with responsibility for teacher education and supervision. She did not discard what had been done in Coesfeld, but adapted it to new circumstances so that, in the words of her biographer, “the spiritual heritage of Coesfeld could burgeon anew here in the New World.”<sup>xlix</sup> The care she took adapting to the new without losing the value of the old was actually one more way in which the Coesfeld congregation reflected the approach of Overberg himself.<sup>1</sup> And the handing on had to be in English.

In the United States, the standard school subjects had to be taught in English. Only in parishes established for immigrants from a particular nation could some instruction be given in a language other than English, namely, when teaching religion and the language of the home country. Therefore teacher education for the young sisters, American and German-born, was carried on in English. Sister Mary Girolama Lehmkuhl, who had a major responsibility for teacher formation, prepared a *Handbook of Pedagogy* sometime between 1885 and 1898 that drew directly from Overberg as well as on some more recent English language authors whose ideas on education were in harmony with his.<sup>li</sup>

Overberg’s works themselves were never translated. There may have been more than one reason for not doing so. German remained the language within the community in the United States until 1918

and American candidates had to gain at least a conversational knowledge of it. Even the Rule and the Community Prayerbook were not translated until then. Furthermore Overberg had never found time to

do a thorough revision of his *Anweisung* to reflect the new material and insights he had incorporated into his normal course over the years. Therefore as time went on, this 1793 book became dated in some

respects, though not in all. Whatever the reason, Overberg's actual writings remained available to the American sisters only in German and as a result English speaking Sisters of Notre Dame gradually lost reading contact with the sources of their educational and catechetical tradition.<sup>lii</sup> Nevertheless, basic elements of that tradition were handed on in a living way over the years by the community school supervisors as they carried out the in-service education and supervision of the teaching sisters.<sup>liii</sup>

A question needs to be asked at this point regarding whether and to what extent the Coesfeld sisters, once they had by 1880 learned of their connection to St. Julie, drew from the Namur tradition of education in the years following. A letter that Sister Julia McGroarty, S.N.D. de N., the Namur provincial in Cincinnati, addressed to Mother Maria Chrysostoma on February 12, 1892 indicates that the Coesfeld superior general, back in the United States for visitation at the time, had requested information about the Namur school curriculum and methods. In her reply, Sister Julia described, among other things, a kind of achievement test given in all Namur schools twice a year.<sup>liv</sup> Receiving that information about what the Namur congregation had been doing may have led the Coesfeld sisters to try out their own program of semi-annual examinations for all Notre Dame schools during the years 1892-1894.<sup>lv</sup> Whether in conscious imitation of Namur or not, the experiment did not last even though the plan for it was included in the school regulations published in Cleveland in August 1893.<sup>lvi</sup>

However as the Coesfeld sisters in subsequent years became able to read more about Julie Billiart, both in English and in German, many began to look to her as a source of educational principles for their own congregation as well. This development is exemplified in the paper given by Mother Maria Irmingard Schürmann, provincial superior in Ahlen,<sup>lvii</sup> at the start of the 1950 Educational Institute held in Rome. After mentioning St. Julie frequently and spending seventeen pages (in the English proceedings) giving a more detailed account of her educational legacy, Mother Maria Irmingard noted that we are "Mother Julie's daughters, but not directly."<sup>lviii</sup> She continued by observing that:

We may rightfully call Overberg the father of our educational tradition, since all of

those who built up our school and our educational methods in the beginning in Coesfeld had been trained in his school and since his on the whole was the standard for all Catholic schools in Münsterland in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>lix</sup>

Nevertheless, believing that a full development of the connections between Overberg and the Sisters of Notre Dame was beyond the scope of her presentation, Mother Maria Irmgard went on to devote only about four pages to Overberg's educational approach.<sup>lx</sup> For a fuller explanation, she referred the reader to a few German biographies and to the *Anweisung*.<sup>lxi</sup> The one biography that had been translated, that by Krabbe,<sup>lxii</sup> had made its English appearance in Great Britain in 1842 and so was not easily acquired. That left most English speaking sisters still with only minimal reading contact with the primary and secondary sources needed for an in-depth understanding of Overberg's work.

The present study of Overberg is an outgrowth of research into the history of the Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States. In order to get a better idea of the influences that shaped the thinking of the sisters who brought the Coesfeld congregation to America, the present writer sought out and read German works by and about Overberg and then arranged for translation into English of the most relevant among these. The reading and study involved in that process are the basis for the following summary.

## The Essential Overberg

In order to understand the Overberg legacy it is important first of all to have a clear idea of what it is not. The Overberg legacy is not simply a philosophy of education or an educational methodology as those terms might be used in a modern university's school of education. Rather it is a particular way of bringing faith, spirituality, and an understanding of human capacities and experience together in the process of helping the young grow into the kind of human beings they are called to be. To get a complete picture of what Overberg was about, including the theological and spiritual underpinnings of his work, it is necessary to be familiar not only with his *Directives for Purposeful School-Teaching*, the famous *Anweisung*, but also at least with his *Catechism* and *Religion Handbook*.

Teachers who studied Overberg's writings and were formed in his spirit were getting more than educational theory and methods. They were being led into a way of seeing God, a way of relating to God, to others, to creation itself. It has been recognized that Overberg's spirituality is "imprinted" on his theological and pedagogical practice and writings.<sup>lxiii</sup> Even today in his catechetical and pedagogical works one notes the pervasive presence of Sacred Scripture and sees reflected the thoughts of Augustine,

Ignatius Loyola, Francis de Sales and others who were the sources of his own spiritual reading and reflection. The interrelatedness of spirituality and pedagogy in the Overberg legacy becomes apparent

when one tries to spell out such aspects of his pedagogy as its characteristic note, its goal, and the qualities expected of an Overberg teacher.<sup>lxiv</sup>

***Characteristic note: love***

One of the things that people most noticed about Bernard Overberg was how much he loved everyone and loved God above all. The memorial card issued upon his death in 1826 paraphrases the words of Sir 45, 1 in stating that he was loved by God and by people because he loved God and people.<sup>lxv</sup> Likewise among the inscriptions on the monument above his original burial site were the words “To numberless persons he has given consolation, advice, and help. He excluded none from his love.”<sup>lxvi</sup> Even today that love is apparent in his writings as a dominant, consistent note of his pedagogy in regard to its source, its result, and the way it is to be carried out.

Overberg’s way of teaching *began* from an understanding of God as our loving Creator who has made and called us to union with himself and whose providential care is always with us. God *loves* his creatures, *all of them*, and not only those who, like human beings, can make a personal free response of love. Creation was seen as an ongoing, sustaining outpouring of love always working to bring everything to its best state.<sup>lxvii</sup> In the largest sense, this is what Overberg meant by God’s providential care.<sup>lxviii</sup> Our own work, at which God “lends us a hand,” is part of this care for creation.<sup>lxix</sup> It was in this context that Overberg viewed the mission of parents, pastors, doctors, and teachers.<sup>lxx</sup>

Love should be the *result* of the right kind of teaching as well. He told the teachers that they should

first and foremost develop love in the children as the seed of temporal and eternal happiness: love for God which gives consolation and peace in the hope of the love of the Father; a well-ordered self-love, which in the search for all that is lastingly good and beautiful becomes an unending source of freedom and joy; love for others that conquers jealousy, hate and all other passions.”<sup>lxxi</sup>

This love does not cast a grim pall over our life in the world, but makes it better.<sup>lxxii</sup> Faithful love “opens in the heart of God’s servant a fountain of joys which are far purer and sweeter than all the joys known

to the one who does not serve God.”<sup>lxxiii</sup> What are those joys? A good conscience, the certain hope of eternal happiness, and holy love.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

Overberg’s view of the teacher as an instrument of God’s own providential care probably accounted also for the *way* he wanted them to go about their work, with love. Indeed the quasi-parental love the teachers should have for their students and the love those students return to their teachers was something Overberg regarded as good and holy.<sup>lxxv</sup> He told his teachers that they must “always come into the school with a happy and bright face. Let the children read on your face that you are happy to see and to teach them.”<sup>lxxvi</sup> That positive relationship with the teacher would make the students more eager to learn.

Overberg’s typical approach to catechesis reveals his conviction that love is as important in the process of faith formation as it is in that of general education. As he presented doctrinal content, he was concerned with “stressing the inner life, the awakening of religious sentiments, the participation of the heart in the objective realities of our holy religion.”<sup>lxxvii</sup> Reading Overberg’s *Catechism*, one soon becomes aware that the author had much experience as a spiritual director and confessor. He taught mental prayer very simply<sup>lxxviii</sup> and often suggested other ways in which a person can stay in touch with God throughout the day.<sup>lxxix</sup> He drew on Scripture to an extent unusual in his time.<sup>lxxx</sup> Regardless of the particular topic, whether the commandments or the Church or the sacraments, he always showed its connection to one’s personal, loving relationship with God.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

### ***The goal: a complete human being, a fully human life***

In his second lecture to aspiring teachers as published in the *Anweisung*, Overberg used two words to characterize what the adult should be like who has received the right kind of education: that adult should be *verständig* and *gottesfürchtig*.<sup>lxxvii</sup> In pointing to the “end product” of the pedagogical mission these two words suggest also the particular kind of help the Overberg teacher offers those with whom he or she is working.

The first word means “intelligent,” “sensible,” “reasonable,” “prudent.” Both the root word in German, *der Verstand* (“understanding, mind, intellect, intelligence, common sense, wits, brains, discernment, comprehension, judgment”), and his whole way of teaching suggest that by using the

adjective *verständlich* to describe the properly educated person, Overberg meant that the child who had come through the Münsterland common schools should have a good understanding of everything necessary to function wisely and competently as an adult and to be a positive influence for good. He or she should possess an understanding mind and heart, should be able to “live with understanding.”

Beside his concern that children learn how to think, how to observe and then to interpret correctly what they have seen,<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Overberg emphasized basic skills in language (written and oral communication, love for reading)<sup>lxxxiv</sup> and mathematics (both for thinking logically and for solving practical problems on the farm).<sup>lxxxv</sup> He respected the intelligence of children, who were to be encouraged to relate *in their own words* what they were learning about God and their faith. That way the teacher could tell whether the children understood or not.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Overberg placed great importance on the teacher’s efforts to inspire interest, enthusiasm, and excitement in the students over their own learning experience, to get them talking, asking questions, figuring things out for themselves.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> The children's future ability to support themselves, to establish a healthy and happy home, to be of help to their neighbors, would be influenced by how they were taught in the local elementary schools,<sup>lxxxviii</sup> which for most of them was as far as their formal education would go.

Overberg took seriously and joyously God’s gifts to human beings in creation. Their human powers were to be developed, the beauty around them enjoyed with a heart open to God.<sup>lxxxix</sup> As Overberg saw it, the responsibility of helping others develop their gifts so that they could live as happy human beings was not for teachers alone. Ordinary people who found others in need should not only share what they have to relieve the present distress, but also try to help them acquire the knowledge and skills to be self-supporting.<sup>xc</sup>

The focus of Overberg’s work was the education of the common people, especially the country folk. Learning was not just out of books or about reading and writing. It was also about such things as how to use mathematics for solving the numerous practical problems connected with life on a farm.<sup>xcii</sup> There was much that rural people needed to know to provide adequately for their families, including certain basics of agriculture,<sup>xciii</sup> health,<sup>xciii</sup> and business.<sup>xciv</sup> Material goods by themselves might not be the key to happiness,<sup>xcv</sup> but a sufficiency was necessary for a life in keeping with human dignity.<sup>xcvi</sup> Underlying all the practical considerations is a spirituality that deeply values creation and, most especially, the human person.

The other German word, *gottesfürchtig*, means having the fear of God, or being “God-fearing.” Within the context of the spirituality that pervaded Overberg's catechesis, this meant an awareness of God,<sup>xcvii</sup> a sense of belonging to God,<sup>xcviii</sup> a loving responsiveness and obedience to God rooted in a deep desire for eternal union with him.<sup>xcix</sup> God is not only the Lord of all things<sup>c</sup> who, seeing everything that happens,<sup>ci</sup> in justice and love rewards good and punishes evil<sup>cii</sup> but also the loving Creator and Father

who is always there<sup>ciii</sup> and who cares for each human being more than anyone else ever could.<sup>civ</sup> People are created for a loving union with God here and hereafter<sup>cv</sup> and therefore are simply too great to be able to find complete happiness in anything apart from God.<sup>cvi</sup> No one is more worthy of our love.<sup>cvi</sup>

Therefore the term “God-fearing” seems too narrow a translation to communicate what Overberg saw as the spirituality to which students must be led. “God centeredness” comes closer to expressing his understanding of the relationship human beings need to have with their loving Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier. His approach to faith formation helped adults and children develop a simple, genuine, solid, and deep spirituality,<sup>cviii</sup> nourished by Scripture,<sup>cix</sup> the sacraments,<sup>cx</sup> and personal prayer.<sup>cx</sup> Overberg was convinced that the heart must participate in the realities of our faith.<sup>cxii</sup>

Overberg's “fear of God” or “centeredness on God” meant also that the adult who had been well formed by the right kind of religious education in school had a well developed moral sense, including a social conscience that recognized every other human being as a neighbor and an equal.<sup>cxiii</sup> Thus he or she would be a good influence on others, able to create conditions of peace and well being in family and community.<sup>cxiv</sup> Such a person would recognize as an obligation of justice the effort to be diligent and frugal, even to take on extra work, so as to have something to share with those in need.<sup>cxv</sup>

While *verständlich* and *gottesfürchtig* do well as summary statements of the kind of human capacities Overberg was trying to develop in people, a typically simple analogy he used in his religion handbook has the advantage of saying much the same thing through an image. He noted that God has given us *two eyes* to see with, the *eye of reason* and the *eye of faith*, and it is his will that we should use *both of them*.<sup>cxvi</sup> Helping people see with “both eyes” roughly corresponds to the idea of helping them to be *verständlich* and *gottesfürchtig*.

### *Qualities of the teacher*

With love the characteristic note of Overberg's pedagogy and the complete human being its goal, what qualities did he and those who followed him try to develop in the teachers they educated and trained? The information available from Overberg's own writing, from secondary works about his life and ministry, and from the historical work of Sister Maria Servatia Döring on the early history of the Coesfeld congregation makes it possible to single out at least eight qualities of the Overberg teacher:

- a) *Centeredness on God* "What comes from the heart goes to the heart." Therefore only teachers who themselves experience the beauty and joy of life centered in God can lead the children in that direction.<sup>cxvii</sup>
- b) *Love* For Overberg it is love that motivates good teaching, good discipline, and that creates the atmosphere in which children can learn.<sup>cxviii</sup> He told his teachers that "all students have a right to good instruction, which depends so much upon your love."<sup>cxix</sup>
- c) *Prayerfulness* The prayerfulness Overberg sought to encourage in teachers flows from the loving centeredness on God. He encouraged them in mental prayer and suggested spiritual reading, such as Francis de Sales' *Philothea*.<sup>cxx</sup> Later at the Münster female "seminary" both liturgical and non-liturgical prayer were woven into the pattern of life for the teachers in training.<sup>cxxi</sup>
- d) *Simplicity of life* Because it is union with God, not material things, that makes a person happy;<sup>cxxii</sup> because everyone is supposed to be saving in order to have the means to help those in need;<sup>cxxiii</sup> because a parent of any social status should feel comfortable approaching a teacher about his or her child,<sup>cxxiv</sup> teachers should live simply and not make a display of wealth, even if they have it.<sup>cxxv</sup>
- e) *Respect for the dignity and capacities of the human person* Overberg teachers were supposed to respect the capacity of children to observe, to think, to understand, to express themselves;<sup>cxxvi</sup> to discern what is good when helped to think through a situation;<sup>cxxvii</sup> and by

means of a measured approach to rewards and punishments<sup>cxxviii</sup> to recognize the consequences of their actions and to choose the good.<sup>cxxix</sup>

- f) *Deep sense of responsibility* Because the teachers were providential instruments in the hands of God bringing the children to a point where they could be happy in this life and in the next, their role was not simply a job, certainly not a game, but a genuine and high vocation.<sup>cxxx</sup> The children were the “darlings of God”<sup>cxxxi</sup> and teaching them involved a lot of hard work, willingness to go the extra mile, thoroughness, self-discipline,<sup>cxxxii</sup> and the desire to keep learning.<sup>cxxxiii</sup>
- g) *Vitality and freedom of spirit* The motto of the female teacher training seminar in Münster was “*frisch, frei, und offen,*”<sup>cxxxiv</sup> which may be translated as “spontaneous, free, and frank.” It was expected that the students’ friendliness of face and cheerfulness of mind would carry over into the teaching field.<sup>cxxxv</sup> Thus the usual requirements of courtesy or the demands of working together or the need to cooperate with authority were not perceived as external burdens but as a kind of framework within which the teacher was free to be herself.<sup>cxxxvi</sup>
- h) *Faithful and mature Catholicism* Overberg’s teachers were prepared specifically for service in the common schools established by the government for Catholic children. The kind of Catholicism Overberg taught and that the teachers were to carry into the schools<sup>cxxxvii</sup> was noted for the manner in which it brought both faith and reason into play.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Overberg’s approach was as far removed from rationalist dissent on the one hand as it was from unthinking pietism on the other. Rather his was a Catholicism rooted in the living tradition of the Church, at home with Scripture, with the Fathers of the Church, with the liturgy, with the pastoral teaching authority.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

## Is Overberg Still Relevant?

One might ask whether someone born over 250 years ago still has anything of value to say to people engaged in faith formation and in general education during the twenty-first century. Retired Auxiliary Bishop Max Georg von Twickel of Münster suggested a “yes” answer to that question on May 1, 2004 when he gave his homily at the Mass in Voltlage opening a year of celebration for Overberg’s 250<sup>th</sup> birthday. He called Overberg’s work *zeitlose*, meaning “timeless,” “lasting,” “valid at all times” noting

that the basic questions about God, about the meaning of human existence, about eternal life that Overberg articulates and tries to answer in his catechism are the same ones that are asked today.<sup>cxl</sup>

Actually, Overberg's view of the role that the Bible and its account of God's saving work in history need to play in bringing people to a close personal relationship with God anticipated twentieth century developments. He was one of the principal influences on the work of Josef A. Jungmann, S.J. (1889-1975) in the area of catechetical renewal.<sup>cxli</sup> Writing in 2001, Gundolf Kraemer, S.J. noted Overberg's continuing relevance for religious pedagogy and the similarity of concerns between our day and his. He singles out four aspects of this common concern: speaking about God; the responsibility of the teacher as the agent of God's dealings with people; in this context, leading them into spirituality; the connection between religious and secular education.<sup>cxlii</sup> He also points out the similarity between Overberg's view of Sacred Scripture and that expressed by Vatican Council II in *Dei verbum* 25 as explained in a 1967 commentary by Josef Ratzinger. Scripture is seen not only an object of intellectual, scholarly study but also as a basis for prayer, for entering fully into dialog with the Lord, for a living realization of faith.<sup>cxliii</sup>

But what is Overberg's relevance for general education today, for overall human formation, in a world so different from his? Perhaps that question is best addressed by reading through the following key elements of Overberg's pedagogy and asking how each might fit into the contemporary situation:

**Some Key Elements of Overberg's Pedagogy:  
A ready reference summary**

- a) Responsiveness to the needs and dignity of the common people
- b) Belief in the value and importance of education for helping individuals, and thus also society, arrive at the kind of life that is worthy of human beings
- c) Concern for the education of girls and for the training of women teachers
- d) Focus on the basic skills needed for any future learning, namely, observing, interpreting, remembering, thinking, reading, writing, mathematics
- e) Focus on competencies needed to be self-supporting and able to live with human dignity
- f) Commitment to teaching religion, not simply "hearing catechism," in a way that allows the attractiveness of God to be experienced, drawing others into a deeper relationship with him, with the Church, with the neighbor, with creation
- g) Concern for ongoing spiritual growth as essential to happiness in life, for the human being is too great to find happiness anywhere apart from God
- h) Belief in the power of music and song to help people interiorize what they are hearing about God and to express their relationship with him in both liturgical and non-liturgical settings
- i) Attention to the individual needs of the students, including those concerning character formation, with the teacher giving good example
- j) Preference for the kind of discipline that helps the student understand the consequences that flow from human actions and to make choices that are consistent with love for God, for self, and for others; avoidance of arbitrary and corporal punishment; genuine love of teachers for their students and of students for their teachers
- k) Education regarding the obligation in justice to share resources, to exercise proper responsibility for the welfare of others, to enable others to become self-supporting, to see every other human being as a neighbor equal in dignity to oneself and equally deserving of respect
- l) Sense of wonder and joy in creation and, because God loves all of it, a stance of respectful stewardship
- m) Encouragement of parents' interest, involvement, and support in the education and faith formation of their children

At least two recent experiences have been brought to the attention of the writer that indicate in a concrete way the relevance of Overberg's approach to the contemporary educational scene. The first happened to Sister Mary Jeanne Moenk, S.N.D. in 1999 during the course of her work toward a doctorate in mathematics education at Central Michigan University. She had been reading through

Overberg's *Anweisung* (in translation) on the teaching of arithmetic<sup>cxliv</sup> as part of the process of putting together a review of the literature, her personal beliefs and philosophy of mathematics education, her background, and so on. As Sister Mary Jeanne relates the incident:

In a meeting with my dissertation advisor, Mary Beth Searcy, Ph.D., . . . without telling her what I was quoting, I read her several excerpts from Overberg's writing. I recall reading the advice he gave on using money to help students learn to add and subtract because it was both familiar to them and they could actually count out the coins to verify their answers. She stopped me at one point and said: "Why are you reading me something from the NCTM Standards? I thought you were telling me about the Sisters of Notre Dame!" Then I showed her the materials and who had written them and the date of publication.

Dr. Searcy was surprised that directives for teaching arithmetic published in 1793 should sound so much like the current Standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. She went on to say that the methods Overberg suggested have been shown by modern research to be more effective than those taught by John Dewey at the University of Chicago and considered at the time (the 1940s) to be at the cutting edge of pedagogical practice.<sup>cxlv</sup>

The contemporary relevance of Overberg's educational approach has been noted also by Sister Regina Alfonso, S.N.D. While teaching various elementary methods courses in the Education Department at Notre Dame College, South Euclid, Ohio, she became aware of Sister Mary Girolama's *Handbook of Pedagogy*, a single hectographed copy of which is held by the Provincial Archives, Chardon. As she read through the *Handbook*, she recognized principles of education that she had been taught as a young sister. In 1994, she produced a typewritten copy of the document, making several copies of the spiral-bound typed version. She also incorporated the principles spelled out there into her own classes and found that her education students reacted very positively even when she told them that the ideas she was sharing with them actually came from a handbook on teaching written one hundred years earlier. Sister Regina notes that while some details in the *Handbook* are outdated, such as how far apart the students' desks should be, the principles presented there are still very sound pedagogy.<sup>cxlvi</sup>

## Tying It Together

If one had to find the right word to identify a characteristic or quality that runs through Overberg's life and work that word might well be "relatedness." The more one reads about him and by him the more one recognizes that Overberg is bringing into dynamic balance and mutual relationship realities that people tend to set in opposition to one another. Much of this relatedness is interpersonal: teacher and

learner; parent and child; man and woman; those who have much and those who have little; the well-educated and the illiterate; Catholic and Protestant; the individual Christian and the Church community; the God who calls and the person challenged to respond.

But Overberg's gift of bringing into positive and fruitful relationship realities that people often experience as opposed to one another extended to more than just persons. Overberg saw clearly the relationship between God and creation without confusing them. God was always both transcendent and imminent, both infinitely powerful (but never a tyrant) and always with us, intimately loving and close (but never simply a pal). Overberg was likewise able to bring together religion and life, head and heart, faith and reason, truth and love, freedom and obedience, joy and sacrifice, delight in beauty and self-denial, faith in divine providence and honesty about human suffering. For him there could be both theoretical knowledge and down to earth common sense, both training of memory and stimulation of inquiry and reflection, both hard work and fun in school, both discipline and freedom of spirit, both kindness and firmness.

This ability Overberg had of seeing things in relationship to one another gives his work not only a dynamic balance but also contributes to an impression of overall unity within his approach to human and faith formation. That is understandable since all the elements that came into his work he saw and dealt with in relation to God. The cohesiveness and coherence in Overberg's approach to God, to people, to the work of teaching seem to flow first of all from his understanding of God as loving, provident Creator and Father always working to bring creation to its best state. That work continues in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. The teacher and catechist share in it as well, if they let God work through them, and so theirs is a sacred calling. Perhaps one can see in this quality of relatedness combined with an overall unity a reflection of the Trinity, for the inner life of God is unity and relationship. With its related depth and simplicity Overberg's approach to forming human beings was a gift to his own time and to the Sisters of Notre Dame. There are those who believe it still is a gift to be brought to bear in the present.

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<sup>i</sup> Domcapitular Caspar Franz Krabbe, *The Life of Bernard Overberg*, trans. Hon. and Rev. George Spencer (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1841-42), 5. In translating Canon Krabbe's *Leben Bernard Overbergs* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1831), Father Spencer gave his German name an English spelling, "Crabbe." The Generalate Archives, Rome, has copies of both the German and the English editions. The German copy is the one given to Sister Maria Bernarda's sister, Maria Perger (later Sister Maria Borgia), by the director and faculty of the teacher training seminar in Münster upon her graduation in 1852.

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Hubert Schiel, "Ludowina von Haxthausen und ihre Erinnerungen an ihren geistlichen Vater Overberg," in Richard Stapper, ed. *Bernard Overberg als pädagogischer seiner Zeit: Festschrift zum Hundertjahrgedächtnis seines Todestages*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1926), 184. This paper draws extensively from the notes of Ludowina von Haxthausen who for about twenty years, from shortly after her First Communion until his death when she was thirty-five, had Overberg

as her “spiritual father, director, and friend.” An English translation of the Schiel paper by Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. can be made available upon request.

<sup>iii</sup> Krabbe, *Life of Bernard Overberg*, 6

<sup>iv</sup> Schiel, “*Ludowina von Haxthausen und ihre Erinnerungen*” in Stapper 184-185. As Overberg told Ludowina the story, a new school teacher had been there only a short time when “in the classroom he called me to come up to him and said to me, ‘Bernard, go over to the woodworker and give him a compliment from me, then tell him he should make for you a wooden piece which is flat on the bottom and from the two sides tapers up to make a point, like a triangle.’ ‘Master, what shall I do with such a thing?’ I asked him. ‘Just go ahead and do it; you will soon learn.’ When he said this he looked at me in amazement. I should have known. With this order I went to the carpenter. ‘Good day, Master Johann. I must give you a compliment from my teacher, and you must make me a board, so-and-so.’ The carpenter looked at me with big eyes and said, ‘Lad, lad, how will it go with you if you don’t know what to do with the wood?’ ‘But the teacher would not tell me. He said I would find out.’ ‘Now, then, I will tell you. You must kneel on the pointed wood, and hold your arms up high. In one hand you hold the Old Testament and in the other hand the New, and then the school master will beat you.’ He didn’t want to tell me this. I slipped away quickly and went back to school, and I sat very quietly in the corner with my book. I didn’t need to say anything. Although the wooden thing never appeared, from this time on I was more industrious at lessons.”

<sup>v</sup> Krabbe, 5-6.

<sup>vi</sup> Overberg’s own account of his cure from his crippled condition and of his elementary schooling may be found in Schiel, “*Ludowina von Haxthausen*” in Stapper, 182-185.

<sup>vii</sup> Schiel in Stapper, 185.

<sup>viii</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Anweisung zum zweckmässigen Schulunterricht für die Schullehrer im Fürstenthum Münster* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1861), trans, Kenneth Kronenberg, ¶191. The English translation of the *Anweisung* is not yet edited for publication, but the text can be made available electronically for research purposes.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶117.

<sup>x</sup> Krabbe, 11.

<sup>xi</sup> Münster at the time was one of the German ecclesiastical states headed by a prince-bishop. As a result of the Napoleonic Wars and the secularization of 1803, governmental authority in the former principality of Münster passed into various hands with Prussia in 1815 gaining a control over the region that lasted until 1945. Overberg’s work in the renewal of catechesis and of general education for the people continued until his death in 1826 despite the changing political circumstances.

<sup>xii</sup> See Krabbe, 51-55; P. Gundolf Kraemer, S.J., *Bernard Overberg: Religionspädagogik zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 213-217.

<sup>xiii</sup> This congregation was founded in 1597 by St. Peter Fourier (1565-1640) and Bl. Alix LeClerc (1576-1622). During the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) a group of Canonesses fled Lorraine and took refuge in Münster where they established both a free school and a tuition school for girls. In Europe the Canonesses are often called simply the “Congregation de Notre Dame.” This is the congregation that Bishop Müller and Father Elting thought they were inviting back into the diocese when they approached the Sisters of Notre Dame of Amersfoort in 1849.

<sup>xiv</sup> After its first publication in 1793, Overberg’s *Anweisung* underwent numerous re-printings and one new edition that simply added some new material at the end of the original version. The copy available in the Chardon Provincial Archives is the revised edition as printed in 1861.

<sup>xv</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Die Geschichte des Alten und Neuen Testaments zur Belehrung und Erbauung für Lehrer, grössere Schüler und Hausväter*, 2 vols. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1799) (*The History of the Old and New Testaments for the Instruction and Edification of Teachers, Older Students, and Fathers of Families*). Overberg wrote this “Bible history” after he realized that many of the teachers he was working with did not know enough about Scripture even to tell stories from the Bible. *Die Geschichte des Alten und Neuen Testaments* went through numerous re-printings

<sup>xvi</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Katechismus der christkatholischen Lehre zum Gebrauche der kleineren Schüler* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1804) (*Catechism of Christian Catholic Teaching for the Use of Younger Students*); *Katechismus der*

*christkatholischen Lehre zum Gebrauche der grösseren Schüler* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1804) (*Catechism of Christian Catholic Teaching for the Use of Older Students*) The latter is available in English as *Catechism of Christian Catholic Teaching for the Use of Older Students*, trans. Sister Adelia Marie Maag, S.N.D. (1997). Both catechisms went through numerous re-printings and remained the official catechism of the Münster Diocese until 1887.

<sup>xvii</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Christkatholisches Religions-Handbuch* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1804). This *Handbook of the Christian Catholic Religion* was written by Overberg to accompany the publication of his two catechisms and sets out his basic approach to catechesis and Christian faith formation. It presumes the teacher making use of it is already familiar with the *Anweisung*. Key parts of the text are available in English as *Handbook of the Catholic Christian Religion for the Instruction of Oneself and Others: Selected Portions including To the Reader, General Reminders, Maxims*, trans. Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. (1997). The *Religions-Handbuch* went through numerous re-printings.

<sup>xviii</sup> Klemens Löffler, “Bernhard Heinrich Overberg,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911. See also Kraemer, *Bernard Overberg: Religionspädagogik zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*, 162-163; Sophia Inkmann, *Die pädagogischen Grundsätze in den Konstitutionen der Chorfrauen des heiligen Augustinus, ihre zeitgeschichtliche Bedeutung und ihr Einfluss auf Overberg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1928.)

<sup>xix</sup> Sophia Inkmann, “Overbergs Wirken am Kloster der Lotharinger Chorfrauen,” in Richard Stapper, ed. *Bernard Overberg als pädagogischer seiner Zeit*, 64-79. An English translation of the Inkmann paper by Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. can be made available upon request.

<sup>xx</sup> Sister Maria Servatia Döring, S.N.D. and Sister Maria Amabilis Engel, S.N.D., *He Cared: Life of Fr. Theodore Elting*, trans. Sister Mary Dalene Wasserman, S.N.D. (Toledo, Ohio: Sisters of Notre Dame, 1980), 55-59. According to the account of our early history written in 1880 for the information of the Namur superiors, Father Elting had already formed the idea of founding a community of religious teaching sisters before Hilligonde Wolbring and Elisabeth Kühling came to talk to him about their proposal for taking care of neglected children. [Sister Maria Hildegardis Hüsing, S.N.D.] Cleveland, Ohio, to [Révérende Mère Aloysie Mainy, S.N.D de N], Namur, Belgium, n.d., handwritten French original in the Motherhouse archives of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur, trans. by Sister Mary Elayne Bockey, S.N.D. A photocopy of the French original and of the translation are in the Generalate Archives, Rome. This rather long letter is unsigned and undated. However as Sister Maria Hildegardis was at the time collecting material for the history of the congregation, worked closely with Mother Maria Chrysostoma, and herself wrote one of the letters that were found in the Namur archives in Belgium, she is the likely author of the document. Having been professed in 1855, three months after the separation from Amersfoort, she was in a position to know the story of Coesfeld’s founding.

<sup>xxi</sup> Bishop Hermann Dingelstad, Münster, to Sisters of Notre Dame, Mülhausen, 23 August 1900. Trans. Sister Mary Sarah Braun S.N.D. This correspondence is found in a hand copied Gothic script notebook entitled “*Briefe von unsern Hochwürdigsten Obern in Münster*” (Letters from our Most Reverend Superiors in Münster) held by the Generalate Archives, Rome.

<sup>xxii</sup> Bishop Hermann Dingelstad, Münster, to the Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, 1 September 1891. Trans. Sister Mary Sarah Braun S.N.D.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Chimes*, November/December, 1925, 5, Archives, Chardon Province

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Unter dem Banner Unserer Lieben Frau: Eine Erinnerungsgabe zum 75 Jährigen Ordens-Jubiläum, 1850-1925* (M.Gladbach: Schwestern Unserer Lieben Frau, 1925), 6.

<sup>xxv</sup> Klemens Löffler, “Bernhard Heinrich Overberg,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Sister Maria Servatia Döring, S.N.D., *Soli Deo*, trans. Sister Mary Benedict Vogel, S.N.D., ed. Sister Mary Dalene Wasserman, S.N.D. (Toledo, Ohio: Sisters of Notre Dame, 1983), 5-6.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Sister Maria Aloysia Wolbring, S.N.D., Cleveland, to Hendrina Honsel, Stenern, Westphalia, 13 July 1881, in Werner Schneider, *Making Gold out of Stones*, trans. Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. (Rome: Sisters of Notre Dame, n.d.), 33.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Sister Maria Servatia, *Soli Deo*, 11-13.

<sup>xxix</sup> It was Father Elting who selected Sister Maria Bernarda to draw up the plan for the Präparandie and to lead the teaching. Sister Maria Servatia Döring, S.N.D. and Sister Maria Amabilis Engel, S.N.D., *He Cared*, 55-56.

<sup>xxx</sup> *Jahrbücher*, 1849-1855, 58-60. The *Jahrbücher* are the congregational “yearbooks” or annals. These are a secondary work based on primary sources. Sister Maria Servatia Döring began her work on these historical accounts during the 1920s.

<sup>xxxi</sup> G.A.M.Abbink, *History of the Origin of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Amersfoort* (Zeist: privately printed, 1993), 38.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Jahrbücher*, 1849-1855, 5.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> “Statutes and Rules of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady brought from Amersfoort to Coesfeld in 1850,” Article 8., mimeographed translation, Archives, Chardon Province. The Rule the sisters brought with them to Coesfeld was based on the 1836 Namur Rule, a fact about which the Coesfeld congregation would not learn for another thirty years.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 50.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 52.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Jahrbücher*, 1849-1855, 72.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Sister Maria Amabilis Engel, S.N.D., *Teacher of Teachers: The Biography of Sister Mary Bernarda, S.N.D.*, trans. Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. (Rome: Sisters of Notre Dame, 1977), 10-15

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Catechism*, Part I, Ques. 138, 15.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III, Ques. 33, 25

<sup>xl</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III, Ques. 16-29, 24-25.

<sup>xli</sup> Sister Maria Amabilis, *Teacher of Teachers*, 34.

<sup>xlii</sup> “*Predigt des Hochwürdigen Herrn Director H. Kiküm, am I. Sonntag des neuen Schuljahres, Coesfeld, 22. October, 1876*,” handwritten copy in modern German script, Archives, Chardon Province.

<sup>xliii</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Anweisung*, §12, 13. 14.

<sup>xliv</sup> Sister Mary Margaret Kopp, S.N.D., *In Our Lady’s Household*, Vol. II, ed. Sister Mary Elisabeth Ruffing, S.N.D. (Rome: The Motherhouse Press, 1961), 94.

<sup>xlv</sup> Bernard Overberg, “*Handbook of the Catholic Christian Religion for the Instruction of Oneself and Others: Selected Portions including To the Reader, General Reminders, Maxims*,” trans. Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. (1997), 3.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Regens W. Kramer, Münster, to Reverend Mother Maria Chrysostoma Heck, Cleveland, 3 June 1878 and 16 January 1879, in “*Briefe von unsern Hochwürdigsten Obern in Münster*,” Generalate Archives, Rome. Trans. Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. There are no extant copies of the letters the Notre Dame superiors wrote to the diocesan authorities in Münster. These were destroyed in the 1943 bombings of that city. What the sisters asked about is reflected in the answers sent. Because of the Kulturkampf, Bishop Johann Bernard Brinkmann was at this time living in exile in The Netherlands. The congregation’s communication with him was handled by Reverend W. Kramer, whose title “Regens” would indicate that he was the rector of the seminary.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Sister Mary Thaddea Thien, S.N.D., “Bernard Overberg,” in “Miscellaneous Bulletins, Articles, Outlines, etc. 1935-1970.” The essay by Sister Mary Thaddea is undated, but is found in sequence with other items from 1959-1960 in a special binder among the Elementary Supervisor’s materials in the Archives, Chardon Province.

<sup>xlviii</sup> In addition to the *Anweisung*, the term “handbook” would also include the *Christkatholisches Religions-Handbuch*.

<sup>xlix</sup> Sister Maria Amabilis, *Teacher of Teachers*, 60.

<sup>l</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>li</sup> Sister Mary Girolama Lehmkuhl, S.N.D., *A Handbook of Pedagogy*, n.d., Hectographed Manuscript, Provincial Archives, Chardon, Ohio; mimeographed typescript, 1994, History Office, Chardon. The presentation on school discipline, for example, pages 8-15 in the typed copy, generally follows *Anweisung* §41-§106 and §234, the “Treatise on Rewards and Punishments” with the content summarized and simplified. Sister Mary Girolama also incorporates Overberg’s division of content into duties of the teacher before school, during school hours, and after school. This handbook was compiled sometime after Sister Mary Girolama began her teaching at Notre Dame Academy, Cleveland, in 1885 and before the beginning of the Spanish American War in 1898. The section on teaching the history of the United States mentions that there have been three wars since the War of Independence. These unnamed wars would have to be the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War.

<sup>lii</sup> The loss of reading contact with Overberg’s catechetical approach was due also to the fact that most German Catholic parishes in the United States used the more recent (1847) catechism of Joseph DeHarbe, S.J., whose questions and answers were shorter and more easily memorized than those of Overberg. English speaking parishes gradually adopted the national United States catechism prepared under the 1884 mandate of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. For more on the history of catechesis in the United States see Mary Charles Bryce, O.S.B., *Pride of Place: The Role of the Bishops in the Development of Catechesis in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984).

<sup>liii</sup> Sister Mary Vincentia Klein, S.N.D., *Their Quiet Tread: Growth and Spirit of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame Through Its First One Hundred Years, 1850-1950* (Milwaukee: Bruce Press, 1955), 470-472.

<sup>liv</sup> Sister Julia McGroarty, S.N.D. de N., Cincinnati, to Reverend Mother M. Chrysostom Heck, S.N.D. [Cleveland], 12 February 1892. Handwritten original and copy in the Generalate Archives, Rome.

<sup>lv</sup> Sister Mary Borgias Palm, S.N.D., *In Our Lady’s Household*, (Cleveland: Sisters of Notre Dame, 1958), 18.

<sup>lvi</sup> *Einige Bestimmungen für die Schulen*, Cleveland, O., in der Octave vom Feste Maria Himmelfahrt, 1893. Typescript copy in German and English in the Provincial Archives, Chardon. When Mother Maria Chrysostoma returned to Mülhausen in September 1892 she took Sister Maria Bernarda back to Germany with her and there had the longtime prefect of schools draw up these school regulations for the United States.

<sup>lvii</sup> Maria Mediatrix Gratiarum Province had its center temporarily in Ahlen, until it was possible to move to Coesfeld.

<sup>lviii</sup> Mother Maria Irmgard Schürmann, S.N.D. “Principles of Education in Our Congregation – Sources and Traditions,” in *Report of the Proceedings and Papers of the Educational Institute of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame*, Vol. I (Rome: Generalate and Motherhouse, 1950), 18-33. In Volume I of the English Proceedings there are two pages numbered “31.”

<sup>lix</sup> Mother Maria Irmgard, “Principles of Education in Our Congregation,” 36.

<sup>lx</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-39.

<sup>lxi</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>lxii</sup> C.F. Krabbe, *Leben Bernard Overberg’s* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1831)

<sup>lxiii</sup> Kraemer, *Bernard Overberg*, 302-303.

<sup>lxiv</sup> This paper being only a summary, readers who wish more detail will need to consult various published sources. Those who require material in English can find it in Krabbe, 17-43 and 51-77 and in the three papers (by Inkmann, Shiel, and Stapper) from the 1926 *Festschrift* that have been translated. For those who read German, in addition to the Stapper *Festschrift*, the following should be helpful: Hans Hoffmann, *Bernard Overberg: Sein Leben und Wirken in Zeit und Überzeit* (Munich: Verlag Kösel-Pustet, 1940); Sister Helene I. C. Heuveldop, *Leben und Wirken Bernard Overbergs im Rahmen der Zeit-und Ortsgeschichte, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Verdienste als Volksbildner* (Münster: Westfälischen Vereinsdruckerei, 1933); Alwin Hanschmidt, “*Bernard Overberg und die Reform des Elementarschulwesens im Fürstbistum Münster*” in Meinolf Peters, ed. *Schulreform im Fürstbistum Münster im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert* (Ibbenbüren: Ibbenbürener Vereinsdruckerei, 1992), 1-44.

<sup>lxv</sup> Memorial card announcing the death of Bernard Overberg. Original in Provincial Archives, Chardon. The love that people had for Overberg is obvious from the account Krabbe gives of his wake: “For three days successively the galleries and

staircases of the seminary were crowded with people, who wished once more to see the earthly remains of the venerated man. Those who were set to watch by him, could not keep off the press of people, nor hinder the hair of his head being all cut off. Everyone wished to possess some memorial of him. His books and effects were sold afterwards for double and triple their value.” Krabbe, 182. The account helps to explain how a lock of Overberg’s hair and his wooden pre-dieu came to be in the Generalate Archives, Rome. With them is a note, dated “Mülhausen, 6. Februar 1908,” indicating that the items were the gift of the “würdigen Lehrerin Fräulein Pape.” the revered teacher, Miss Pape.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Krabbe, 184. On May 1, 1904, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, Overberg’s remains were transferred to a new burial site behind the main altar of the Church of Our Lady (*Überwasser Kirche*) in Münster, where he had been dean.

<sup>lxvii</sup> *Catechism*, Part I, Ques. 1-12, 57-70.

<sup>lxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III, Ques. 364-381.

<sup>lxix</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III, Ques. 382.

<sup>lxx</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III, Ques. 375, Part IV, Ques., 274-275.

<sup>lxxi</sup> Overberg, *Anweisung* §261, trans. Sister Mary Sarah Braun, S.N.D.

<sup>lxxii</sup> *Catechism*, Part II, Ques. 56-68.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Ques. 63.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Ques. 66.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Overberg, *Anweisung* §25-28, trans. Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, §72, trans. Sister Mary Jessica Karlinger, S.N.D.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Bernard Overberg, *Handbook of the Catholic Christian Religion*, 3

<sup>lxxviii</sup> *Catechism*, Part IV, Ques. 553, 556-570.

<sup>lxxix</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Ques. 138-139.

<sup>lxxx</sup> Richard Stapper, “Overberg als Katechet,” in Richard Stapper, ed. *Bernard Overberg als pädagogischer seuner Zeit: Festschrift zum Hundertjähredächtnis seines Todestages* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1926), 86-87. An English translation of the Stapper paper by Sister Mary Gerardis Kleman, S.N.D. can be made available upon request. For further discussion of Overberg’s catechetical use of salvation history in the tradition of Augustine see Kraemer, *Bernard Overberg*, 268-271.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> For examples relative to the Commandments see *Catechism* Part IV, Ques., 173, 176, 178; relative to the Church see *Catechism* Part III, Ques. 308-309 and Part IV, Ques. 469 and 501; relative to the sacraments see *Catechism* Part IV, Ques. 631-635.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Overberg, *Anweisung* §14.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, §109-§114, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, §176-§202

<sup>lxxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, §203-223.

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, §160-§174.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, §115-§117; §126-§159.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, §14.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> *Catechism*, Part I, Ques..60-62.

<sup>xc</sup> *Ibid.*, Part IV, Ques. 370, 372, 389.

<sup>xc</sup> *Anweisun*, §223.

<sup>xcii</sup> *Ibid.*, §31, §225 #4.

<sup>xciii</sup> *Catechism*, Part IV, Ques. 323-326, 333, 337; *Anweisung*, §31.

<sup>xciv</sup> *Anweisung*, §199-§203.

<sup>xcv</sup> *Catechism*, Part II, Ques., 57-59.

<sup>xcvi</sup> *Ibid.*, Part IV, ques. 369-373.

<sup>xcvii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Ques. 135, 136, 138.

<sup>xcviii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Ques. 8

<sup>xcix</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Ques. 1-28.

<sup>c</sup> *Ibid*, Part I, Ques. 7

<sup>ci</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Ques. 49-54.

<sup>cii</sup> *Ibid.*, part I, Ques., 87-100.

<sup>ciii</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Ques. 104-109.

<sup>civ</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Ques., 35, 46-48, 57-59, 71, 78-80. This ability on Overberg's part to let neither the sovereign lordship nor the intimate, loving closeness of God become swallowed up in the other is noted by Kraemer in *Bernard Overberg*, 312.

<sup>cv</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Ques. 60.

<sup>cvi</sup> Overberg, *Handbook of the Catholic Christian Religion*, 2.

<sup>cvii</sup> *Catechism*, Part I, Ques. 122; Part IV, Ques. 41-54.

<sup>cviii</sup> For the influence of Francis de Sales and Ignatius Loyola on Overberg's spiritual teaching see Kraemer, *Bernard Overberg*, 305-308.

<sup>cix</sup> *Catechism*, Part I, Ques. 13-34.

<sup>cx</sup> *Ibid.*, Part IV, Ques. 617-990. For Overberg's comments on the benefits of singing hymns in the vernacular at Mass and at other church services see *Anweisung*, §92-§94.

<sup>cx</sup> *Ibid.*, Part IV, Ques. 531-616.

<sup>cxii</sup> Overberg, *Religion Handbook*, 3

<sup>cxiii</sup> *Anweisung*, §164; *Catechism*, Part IV, Ques. 81-84.

<sup>cxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, §14.

<sup>cxv</sup> *Catechism*, Part IV, Ques.370, 372, 379.

<sup>cxvi</sup> Overberg, *Religion Handbook*, 10. The statement is found in "General Reminders" XI.

<sup>cxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>cxviii</sup> See pages 12 and 13 above.

<sup>cxix</sup> *Anweisung*, §27.

<sup>cxx</sup> *Ibid.*, § 29.

<sup>cxxi</sup> Sister Maria Servatia, *Soli Deo*, 14, 16.

<sup>cxxii</sup> *Catechism*, Part II, Ques. 56-67; Part III, Ques. 42.

<sup>cxxiii</sup> *Catechism*, Part IV, Ques. 398.

<sup>cxxiv</sup> Sister Maria Amabilis, S.N.D, *Teacher of Teachers*, 15-16.

<sup>cxxv</sup> Sister Maria Servatia, *Soli Deo*, 14.

<sup>cxxvi</sup> See page 7 above.

<sup>cxxvii</sup> *Anweisung*, §84

<sup>cxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, §234-§261.

<sup>cxxix</sup> *Ibid.*, §242-§251.

<sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*, § 12.

<sup>xxxi</sup> *Ibid.*, § 12.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Ibid.*, § 18-§20.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, §21.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Sr. M. Raphaelita Böckmann, SND and Sr. M. Birgitta Morthorst, SND, *Geschichte der Kongregation der Schwestern Unserer Lieben Frau von Coesfeld, Deutschland* (Rome: Schwestern Unserer Lieben Frau, 1993), 19.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Sister Maria Servatia, *Soli Deo*, 15.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> *Anweisung*, §31.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Kraemer, *Bernard Overberg*, 325-330.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-321.

<sup>cxl</sup> Bishop Max Georg von Twickel, “*Bernard Overbergs Werk ist zeitlos*,” *Osnabrücker Land*, 3 May 2004 [newspaper online]; available from [http://www.neue-oz.de/archiv/noz\\_print/osnabruecker\\_land/2004/05/8511436.html](http://www.neue-oz.de/archiv/noz_print/osnabruecker_land/2004/05/8511436.html); Internet; accessed 6 September 2005.

<sup>cxli</sup> Mary Charles Bryce, O.S.B., *Pride of Place*, 96-97, 129.

<sup>cxlii</sup> Kraemer, 391.

<sup>cxliii</sup> *Ibid.*, 401-402.

<sup>cxliv</sup> *Anweisung*, §203-223.

<sup>cxlv</sup> Sister Mary Jeanne Moenk, S.N.D., Cleveland, to author, electronic mail message, 8 July 2006.

<sup>cxlvi</sup> Sister Regina Alfonso, S.N.D. , interview by author, 15 July 2006.

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