

## THE INFLUENCE OF EUGEN ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY ON MY LIFE AND WORK

by Ko Vos

I am sixty-five years of age now and I think that the most remarkable thing in my life has been that I always seem to meet the right persons at the right time. One of those persons was Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. I heard about him from Bas Leenman, who was my fellow student at the institute "Church and World" (established in 1945 after the second World War). Bas read with some students "Des Christen Zukunft" (The Christian Future) and "Atem des Geistes" (The Breath of the Spirit). He also took me along to three meetings where I met Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and heard him speak. There I was the silent listener in the corner, guessing that this was important but not yet knowing why.

Why it was important I learned afterwards when I became a teacher in the secondary schools and later at the training college where teachers for the elementary schools receive their education. Before the war I had worked as an analytical chemist in a hospital. But the war changed my life. I came to the new institute "Church and World" in order to become a social worker related to the church. But things turned out differently and in 1951 I became a teacher at the college in Rotterdam mentioned above. Here it was my task to give lessons on the Bible, on all kind of religious and spiritual movements.

After the war we all intended to act and to teach and to educate in a new way. In spite of these good intentions I--and I am sure many others with me--felt I was getting stuck. At first you do not know why you reach a dead-lock: many of the students appreciated the lessons...you have learned how to behave in a classroom...what can be wrong? Very slowly I learned what was wrong. All the work that started after the war as a sign of renewing and rebuilding was trying to correct the mistakes we had made before the war. Now we all tried to do it "better" and perhaps we did. But correcting mistakes is not the same as giving an answer to a real new situation caused by the world war!

I now realized that my students were longing for a post-war education. However, at our schools and colleges a pre-war attitude still dominated. My students suffered but did not know why. They often complained that they had to learn things of little or no use for their own lives. Then I understood the valuable contribution of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: he is a real post-war thinker. I realised that his views on time, on history and on speech were indispensable for my work with a post-war generation.

In order to pursue the significance of Eugen's views, I asked and got a year's leave without salary. During that year I read the books of Eugen and I studied to get a pedagogical certificate. I asked my Professor if I could use the books of Eugen

Rosenstock-Huessy for my project. He agreed on the condition that I show in my paper that Eugen's views had a pedagogical significance. Of course I accepted this condition and with the help of my students I planned evenings where my students came in groups of about ten and there we spoke on all the new things I read in the books of Eugen. Our starting point was the book "Planetary Service" and we discussed on five evenings the following topics:

1. our pedagogical impotence and the crisis in authority.
2. listening to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; his life and work; the cross of reality and our point of time; after two world wars.
3. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy as a "thinker on time."
4. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy as a "thinker on speech."
5. The pedagogical significance of the things we had heard.

These five topics formed the chapters of my paper called "In consideration with young teachers about Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy."

After that year I returned to the training college from 1967 until 1979 (the year I retired on pension) I have given my lessons with the help of Eugen's books. I was now able to put the things I had to teach in the context of the history of mankind. This is necessary for a post-war education. I chose history as the topic I spoke about with my students and I will mention some remarkable things I encountered while working with my students.

My students looked on history as if they were looking at a film. That film moves from the past to the present and from there to the future. You sit in your seat, you look at the film, and you have your opinion or judgment on all the persons and things that pass by...In no way were they aware that the past is our past and that having no past means having no future! The past seemed to be a burden of facts and dates one learned for examinations and then forgot the day after that examination. They considered the Bible, religion, and church life as things that belong to the private sector of life and such things have nothing to do with an education that is provided by the government of a state. Eugen's views on the history of mankind and the significance of Christ to that history were quite surprising to them. Listening to the views of Eugen many of my students became aware of their own lack of orientation in life. They discovered that we are disorientated when we do not have fathers. This was the situation of many students as a result of a so-called "free education." Thankfully they offered their help in order to get my lessons printed (no editor would do so) and so I can offer you the summary of my lessons called "op weg naar de planeet" (on the road to become a planet). Hans Huessy permitted me to copy some pictures from "Out of Revolution". It was printed by young people who had never printed anything before, so far concerning my students.

Concerning myself, I must say that I cannot be thankful enough for having met Eugen and the way he spoke to me in his books. "Being addressed" instead of being "a reader of an interesting topic" was not only quite new to me, it moved me deeply and it forced me

to say "thank you Eugen." The only possible thing I could do was to become a listener and an answerer. I tried to answer by telling my students about it as I indicated above. But I learned that this is not enough. I shall have to go the long and difficult way from being a thinker to becoming a speaker. This process was long and difficult since I grew up in and belong to a culture where a high value is placed on objectivity and where thinking precedes speaking.

Finally, I want to illustrate this by recounting two small incidents. The first happened about 1952. I was speaking to Bas Leenman about the problems and difficulties I encountered in Rotterdam as a 'newly-baked' teacher. Bas said, "Your real problem is that you are not behind your own words." At that time I did not understand this answer for I knew that I honestly said what I thought... It took years of my life before I understood that saying what you think is not the same as speaking. Likewise, speaking about Eugen Rosenstock Huessey is not the same as being able to speak as his child (or as the following generation). This point is illustrated by a second incident that happened about 1965 in my classroom. I told about Eugen and his many-sidedness and how we needed his views. One of my female students sighed deeply and audibly. I asked, "What is the matter with you?" She answered: "I do not think that we need that learned professor Rosenstock, I think that we need you". . .