

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN LEBANON IN THE FUTURE A new educational approach. Practical guidelines.

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"Adapt or die". There are two ways in which institutions die: "either through sclerosis or loss of identity" (Paul VI).

In Lebanon, more than ever before, there is general awareness among headmasters and educational experts that there exists a situation of educational under-development in the country. All the answers received and the opinions expressed represent a powerful statement decrying the unsuitability of the traditional system of education. The need is felt for an educational renewal.

Over the last few decades, there have been many examples of worthwhile educational initiatives. We shall describe some of them here and, in particular, those which are most often mentioned in the answers of our correspondents.

1. Successful educational initiatives

The best examples of successful education seem to be found in schools which try to be "places where there is life and development". In places like these, what forms the child is not only the more or less systematic oral teaching, but most of all the **general atmosphere** there, the contact with teachers and pupils, their attitudes, the tenor of everyday life, all the ordinary things the child sees, and so on. All this has an effect on the child and gradually determines the basic attitudes he will take with him into adult life.

As a former university lecturer said to me: "Even now, 50 years later, we often talk about the friendly atmosphere there was in school, and the sort of common mind and heart we had, that made us feel, think and act differently, when we were together, from when we were on our own."

This friendly spirit, another correspondent adds, was particularly beneficial for the students' spiritual formation. "The school left an indelible mark on those who studied there: they learned the meaning of freedom, found the means to develop a Christian personality and, depending on the individual, were introduced to a deeper spiritual life".

It has to be said, however, that this way of being together, these new ways of communicating, are more demanding than traditional teaching methods. Educational renewal presupposes a different way of exercising **authority** in school. This is an important point, and almost all the answers received insist on it.

"Authority is above all a service rendered by individuals and the community which they form. Authority understood in this way calls for participation. In other words, the young

people in class wish to be responsible for their own development; as they assimilate the learning offered them they need to exercise their critical faculties."

"Participation", in this sense, is more than a simple division of labour: it means making a contribution and accepting responsibilities. Participation means enabling everyone to find his place and role in the educational community in order to share in the promotion of its aims.

When considering ways of putting all this into practice clear thinking is essential. Almost all the misgivings of those answering the questionnaire result from a mistrust of "participatory structures" which can be useless, paralysing or simply empty. And yet, everyone agrees that **participation** is a fundamental factor in the process of leading children to God.

The participation of parents is considered more and more to be essential, and there are numerous examples that prove the possibility of making parents effective members of the educational community. Many of those who wrote in return to this idea:

"Parents can and ought to play an effective role. They can contribute to the training of teachers, help with the administration of the establishment, provide a form of "osmosis" between the school and the world outside."

On the whole, correspondents did not try to suggest structural changes that would characterise a renewed school: instead, they tended to show that participation involved a **change in mentality**.

"Participation cannot work in a school unless those who make up the school **want it to work**, and that means the administration, the teachers, the pupils and parents."

2. Renewal of teaching methods in Lebanon (The priorities)

One of the priorities in educational renewal is the redefinition of the **aims** of methodology. This part of our article could have the heading: "Educational renewal to create an overall and ongoing education inspired by the Gospel".

The aim of educational renewal is the total formation of the child. Education given through teaching should stimulate the development of the child and all its faculties. It should likewise enable the child to accept gradually responsibility for its own life, not by leaving it to its own devices, but by helping it to choose its own way forward. It must give it the opportunity to fulfil itself as the pupil of a Catholic school.

Such terms as "development", "concern", "respect for the child" are used frequently in the answers we received. They call for a dynamic educational approach in an atmosphere of personal security and joy.

The aims we have mentioned above could apply to any school. However, "the Catholic school, more than any other, must strive to provide a specific sort of education, because of the value conferred on the individual by his faith".

"All the education given in a Catholic school has a Christian inspiration. The need to be authentic and faithful to the Gospel is more pressing than ever, because the more human education is based on the principles given us by Christ, the more successful that education is".

A second priority nowadays is the **diversification of educational methods**. Those who answered our questionnaire are mostly interested in active methods: "they enable pupils to teach themselves, to learn about themselves, to make progress. They develop their personality, they stimulate their sensitivity, their spirit of curiosity, their taste for re-

search, all the while letting pupils proceed at their own pace".

Active methods lead on naturally to group teaching, which is justified by the need to prepare pupils for life in society where they will have to work and spend their leisure time.

What is needed here is "to establish a balance between individual and group work". The latter does not hinder the acquisition of knowledge and promotes intellectual growth. These two methods are not incompatible, but should be complementary.

The use of audiovisual materials and modern information and communication technology is strongly recommended. Record libraries, projection facilities should be put to better use or set up again.

Educational experts, however, see the teaching of values as being most important: "not only knowing values but living them". "Christian values are not a matter for thought but for action: behaviour indicates the presence of values". It is not enough to know and accept values intellectually: they must be "embodied" and become a part of the person. They must be the mainspring of his life.

Catholic schools must undertake to lead children to life, to true life. The central task lies there: "to become the new man", the man as he should be. As we have already said, this cannot be achieved by a conservative form of education, by passive and receptive influence. Children must be constantly stimulated to put their faith into active practice by a vigorous and willing allegiance to a value, to a way of life that is constantly presented to them as an example; and by the conversion of their hearts and the commitment of their lives.

As one former student, now a lawyer, wrote: "I now have the possibility of visualising a form of life that is inspired by an authentic Christian culture. This is what I think a Catholic school should be, given the opportunity it has to act as a life community, a prayer community and a community where charity is practised".

Another priority in Lebanon is **the training of teachers**. The Founder of the Brothers was a real innovator in this area: from the very beginning of his involvement with schools he was aware of the inadequacy and weakness of the training given to teachers.

"They were badly chosen, totally unprepared, insufficiently motivated for their ministry, too unstable in their profession". As a consequence, the Founder saw he would have to found establishments for the training of teachers, which would accept only candidates with a vocation, who would dedicate themselves unselfishly to the education of the poor. Such places would provide professional and spiritual training for teachers.

A new understanding of education implies a change of mentality and the acceptance that teachers need to be appraised periodically. The immediate problem is to update teachers who are already teaching in schools.

The future has to be faced, not with a view to security, but with a view to dynamic change. Teachers need to cultivate carefully the special qualities of their profession. Teaching does not involve mysterious powers: it presupposes what is known as tact, but above all, a combination of all the qualities we have already mentioned: love of children, a sense of values, personal commitment.

These qualities which are an essential component of the teaching vocation need to be carefully developed and streng-

thened. In addition to them, there are the professional qualities properly so called which the teacher uses in his everyday work in school and even outside school.

These two dimensions of educational renewal can be summed up by the expression "ongoing formation". What is essential, we repeat, is not the sum total of ingenious theoretical and technical knowledge, but rather the high-mindedness, and the balance and well-integrated personality of the teacher.

3. Evolution of educational establishments

Another important point is worth considering: schools train young people - they are the future -, but educational establishments are already an anticipation of the future: "Education and the future are closely linked as concepts". We are talking here of a sort of "prospective anthropology". The methodology of this has still to be worked out, but what it proposes is clear: it is essential to consider the future with such a powerful imagination and with such perfect objectivity that it will be possible to prepare young people for whatever situations they may find themselves in.

And so, we can divide up educational establishments into two kinds: the "reflective establishments" and the "project establishments". The first kind of school is so called because it reproduces in its own way the characteristics of the society in which it functions. It trains children in terms of the expectations of existing society so that they can ensure the perpetuation of its institutions, power and values.

The other kind - the project establishment - carries within itself the seeds of future growth, like any society, and promotes their growth. During periods of growth, the "project" dimension carries more weight than the "reflective" dimension: the process of perpetuating the status quo is interrupted, and the vision of a new society is proposed, a society that has still to be created and accepted.

A new civilisation has structures which require changes in education at all levels. Extended education for all the population destroys structures created in the past to serve different needs and aims.

But it goes further than this. Calling into question the role of the teacher, who pursues the educational aims of the times, calls into question also the purpose of schools. What is the specific task of educational establishments?

As we have seen, education is above all for the benefit of the child. The school does not come first, the child does. Teachers are there for his benefit, to be of service to him. The pupil is the "subject" of his own education: he is the subject, the prime mover, the author of his own educational process. He is not an "object" to be "forged" by exterior pressure and coercion.

This educational principle, now generally accepted, should be taken into account by all members of the school staff. In a school, **everyone** - parents, representatives of social and religious groups - is an "educator", a teacher, someone responsible for administration. Each one has a role and responsibilities. In a school which is an "educational community", everyone is called to contribute to the education of the pupils and "to allow faith values become a priority in what concerns us, and inspire the human education of young people, and make all of us builders of the Kingdom of God".