

**EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE
TO THE MISSION
FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM
(2/2)**

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For a missionary pedagogy

"Catholic pedagogy reconciles in a single and complete way all the human and divine values of the Christian ideal in the living unity of the person. In both a realistic and human way, it takes all the factors and human weaknesses into consideration and uses the modelling force that can come from science and the history of the spirit. Ideological excesses and polemical positions brought about by circumstances do not disturb its view because it always has before it the complete ideal of the true human man. In the collectivist tendency, which is spreading more and more today, it guides man toward being inserted as a living member into social life while not renouncing his own independence but bringing the contribution of his personal activity. Imitation of the ideal figure of man-God and the union of grace with the Blessed Trinity, preserves it from the modern tendency to get lost in earthly goals. Thanks to its eternal foundation, Catholic education has a certain conservative character and, at the same time, a perennial modernity in that in its omni-comprehensive fullness it already bears within it germinally all the new ideas and developments. Throughout its long history it has always been capable of adapting its norms to the characters proper to each people and the changing needs of the times (...). The task of Catholic education in our times is to permeate with its spirit the various modern unilateral educational orientations by using the good results of modern psychology and reworking them from its viewpoint. Above all, the domination of the supernatural over the natural and the spirit over the body, must be assured. By inserting religion intimately and harmoniously into a young person's life, education makes him or her also acquire a deep social sense in the light of Christian truths." (12)

Almost as if to make the theoretical subject concrete and permeated with practicality, precisely with regard to what has been said up to now, it is possible to outline four precise areas of didactic-pedagogical-educational action, aimed at educating to the missionary spirit.

1) A wise, vocational education will not be able to overlook the fact that God calls some subjects to respond positively – in freedom and in intelligent and Christianly verified readiness – to the real and proper missionary vocation. Those who are called to the missionary spirit, despite how it is carried out, must say "yes" to the Lord who calls. Otherwise, if they were to withdraw themselves from a generous and obedient response, they would risk failure and not totally realizing themselves as persons;

2) Education to prayer and offering sacrifices for the missions leads to active participation in the task of redeeming souls which is always a result of Christ's immense and heroic sacrifice to which the subject joins him or herself.

3) Education to the missionary spirit cannot overlook suggesting the need to support the Missions through material means, stipends, offerings in money and time aimed at supporting missionaries and their work, first of all, the seminaries, schools, hospitals and orphanages;

4) Lastly, missionary education should help in taking into consideration cultural aids (reviews, texts, publications in general) suitable for giving missionary awareness and a capacity for sensitizing other persons to the missionary spirit.

The four areas suggested for a pedagogy and didactics that sensitize with regard to the mission must become the regular means used by Catholic educators, whether they be parents, priests, men and women religious, professors or writers, in order to fulfil concretely the Gospel command.

In-depth study

Almost, as it were, to give theological substance to a sound missionary pedagogy and refer to the wealth of teachings of the most recent Popes, from Benedict XV down to John Paul II and, in particular, his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, dated December 7, 1991 (13), it would be good for educators, and most especially Spiritual Directors, to insist, with regard to the souls of young people whom they are guiding, in presenting the uniqueness of Jesus Christ the Savior, through whom alone it is possible to go to the Father, as the Apostle John states in his Gospel (14:6) in the certainty that "There is no salvation in anyone else" (Acts 4:12).

By understanding Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, Word of God made flesh, the understanding flows subsequently that the object of the Divine Son's mission is the proclamation and establishment of the Kingdom of God.

From these two understandings, a young person will feel encouraged to proclaim Jesus Christ who frees man from sin giving him salvation freely which generates a new life in his disciples, "gift from the Most High without any merit of ours" (14), and still frees him by leading him to conversion through the trinitary action and, in particular, through the work of the Holy Spirit (15).

The doctrinal content of young people's education to the missionary spirit must include a presentation of Jesus Christ's new life: this is shared freely through the Sacrament of Baptism (16) and flows into the Church, Christ's own mystical body (17).

To young people it must be constantly repeated that the subjects of the mission are all baptized persons (18) and that

missionary action consists in giving witness to what we have through grace (19).

It should be kept in mind in carrying out the pedagogical and educational task for the mission that it is directed to man's heart which is awaiting what it still does not know but which it is nevertheless truly awaiting (20).

The Papal documents – and this too must be told to young people – state that faith is proposed to each one's truth and favors freedom *qua talis*. In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II insists repeatedly upon this concept (21). It seems as if he wants to stress both its propaedeutical value and importance in a serious didactic task in the missionary perspective and make beneficial effects known that teaching such a concept can produce in the spirit and overall personality of the subjects being educated, young people, who are especially sensitive by their nature to the call of freedom and tend toward freedom to the degree that they are aided in being authentic and spontaneous and not damaged by false messages or conditioned by treacherous destroyers of conscience or corrupt teachers with weak thinking.

Lastly, it is good to help young people know about the history of what was done for the universal mission at the beginning of Christianity. Just as some 2,000 years ago the Church was obviously intrinsically missionary when she received Jesus' mandate, so now – since that mandate is not contingent or external but natural to the Church's heart – every believer must feel sent to the people (22) and, in a special way, every young person must know he or she is held to listen to the word of Christ who says, as he already did to Simon Peter and Andrew on the shore of the lake, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men." (23) (Mt 4:19).

If young people will have the courage to answer, like Isaiah the prophet, "Here I am... send me!" (24) (Is 6:8), a fascinating life will open up before them that will make them taste that true joy that is born from the satisfaction of proclaiming the "good news" to our brothers and sisters, thereby leading them on the path to salvation (25).

Conclusion

What has been said "must be placed in the spiritual atmosphere of our times: a time of declining values and essential certainties that give meaning to human life and man's adventure on earth which is often dark and dramatic. A time, therefore, of skepticism and uncertainty that leads to hanging on to the only things that seem to have any consistency and give security: money, above all, but also pleasure, anxiety for success, in brief, everything that life – "this life" – can

offer. But it is also a time of dissatisfaction and perhaps of discomfort because neither wealth, nor pleasure, nor success gives happiness: one that is not passing and not continuously threatened by suffering and death." (26)

Here then is the meaning of an education for young people to the missionary spirit "at this point which, for many aspects, is a dramatic one, of the twentieth century": it "is meant to be a strong sign, given to people today, to overcome skepticism and uncertainty and realize that the Christian faith offers values and certainties which were absolutely valid and consistent because they are not based on human theories and philosophies which are always fragile and changeable, but on God who is the Rock that never changes and on Jesus Christ in whom God spoke to men and came personally to them in order to make them share in his Kingdom and therefore in his infinite happiness." In other words, the education of young people (and not only them) to the missionary spirit "is a light destined to enlighten the path, bitter and dark, of the men of our times, because it tells them not only what they must believe and how they must love, but also what they must hope for beyond the futility and fleetingness they experience in their everyday life." (27)

Being convinced of all this and acting consequently means working effectively so that missionary action will be consistent with and suited to the needs of people in the third millennium by preparing young people today to be adults tomorrow as God wants them. ●

(12) *Dizionario del Cattolicesimo nel mondo moderno*, cit., p. 233-234.

(13) In this regard see these Encyclical letters:

BENEDICT XV, *Maximum Illud*, Encyclical Letter, Rome 1919.

JEAN XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum*, Encyclical Letter, Rome 1959.

JEAN-PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, Rome 1990.

PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, Rome 1975.

PAUL VI, *Graves et Incrementes*, Apostolic Letter, Rome 1966.

PIE XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Encyclical Letter, Rome 1926.

PIE XII, *Evangelii praecones*, Encyclical Letter, Rome 1951.

(14) *Redemptoris Missio*, I, 11

(15) *Ibidem*, V, 46.

(16) *Ibidem*, V, 46. 47. 55.

(17) *Ibidem*, I, 9; II, 18; III, 29; IV, 39.

(18) *Ibidem*, Introduction 2.3; I, 11; VI, 71; VII, 77-86; VIII, 90.

(19) *Ibidem*, III, 23.26.27; V, 42.

(20) *Ibidem*, I, 8.11; III, 28-29; V, 45.

(21) *Ibidem*, Introduction, 3; I, 7-8; IV, 39.

(22) *Ibidem*, VI, 62-63.

(23) Cf. Mt 4:19.

(24) Cf. Is 4:8.

(25) *Redemptoris Missio*, VII, 80.

(26) *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1993, I.

(27) *Ibidem*.