

**WHAT CONDITIONS MUST  
A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL FULFIL  
IN ORDER TO BE  
AN ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY?  
(3/3)**

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**III. Suggestions to help the Christian school  
fulfil its mission**

The implementation of the mission of the Christian Schools in Lebanon is characterised by a certain lack of concern for ecclesiality. It is enough to consider three areas to see this: the mission statement, the teachers, the parents. In what follows we shall make three suggestions which could help the Christian school fulfil its ecclesial mission better.

**(A) The mission statement**

**Introduction**

The mission statement of the Christian school deals with the integral and harmonious development of all the human and spiritual qualities of the pupil. The pupil, of course, belongs to a specific society and to a specific historical period. And so, the mission statement of a school should make sure it takes the local culture and situation into account so that it can respond in concrete terms to existing conditions of poverty. It should make provision for the organisation of pastoral care and educate its students while still respecting their individual beliefs (22). It must "engender" the Gospel in a local situation. What is the situation of young people on Lebanon?

**1. Individualism**

Young people in Lebanon are much affected by illiteracy, poverty, alcoholism and drug abuse. The moral values of society - lack of respect for individuals, injustice, lying, self-sufficiency - do not help young people to find meaning in life. On the contrary. Society leads them to close in on themselves. You hear them say often: "There's no future in this country. What's the point of working? Where's this God of love they talk so much about at school? Everyone's got to look after himself. The only thing that counts is money". A trend characterised by individualism and indifference is growing in Lebanese society. Does the school mission statement take this trend into account?

**2. Group discipline**

It is noticeable that in the mission statement of the Christian school there is too much emphasis on the tradition of Christian personalism regarding the training of character and the personal development of the individual. If we wish to educate young people for our society, which is characterised so much by individualism, it is imperative that they are taught participation and given a sense of solidarity. This presupposes a new look at the needs of our times and the reformulation of the mission statement to reflect them (23).

We need to think about the role that group discipline and participation should play in the personal development of the individual. We are not concerned with theory here. There is a clear need for an educational approach which seeks to strike a balance between the value of relationships and that of personal development. Whatever happens, a Christian mission statement cannot leave its community dimension simply as an abstract notion. This community dimension is absolutely necessary so that young people can learn how to interpret the world that surrounds them, how to become involved in it and how to transform it, so that they can build a society which enables each person to fulfil himself. Let us now turn to the teachers whose influence is an essential element of the Christian school.

**B. The teachers**

**1. Inadequately trained teachers**

It is through the teachers that the Christian school pursues its ecclesial educational mission. They are responsible for making Jesus Christ present in the very fabric of young people's lives - in their affective, intellectual, social and spiritual lives. This is a service they offer by a personal and community witness to evangelical values. In addition, they form a team in which they share their experiences. They make sure they keep themselves up to date professionally (24). This is the ideal, but in practice, not all teachers are capable of doing all this because they lack the professional and religious training needed.

**2. Continuing formation**

The remedy for this situation lies in the creation of continuing formation courses for teachers by the Christian school. Their aim would be to motivate and to stimulate teachers to update their knowledge and seek to discover their vocation as Christian teachers, by following a programme of professional and religious studies. The more these teachers rediscover, or discover for the first time, the call of Christ to live according to the Gospel, the more they will look upon their educational mission with the eyes of faith. The vitality of a educational community depends on the human spirit and the life of faith of its teachers.

**C. The parents**

**1. Lack of responsibility**

Responsibility for the education of the young people confided to teachers by parents does not rest entirely with the teachers. In fact, the primary responsibility rests with the parents. The Christian family is the first school of human and Christian virtues of its children. It is the role of parents to create a family atmosphere conducive to the integral, personal and social education of their children. This is why they have to take care when they choose a form of education for their children. The role of the Christian school is to complement but not take the place of the education provided

by the family in the home. Unfortunately, only too often, parents shift the primary responsibility for the human and Christian education of their children onto the school, forgetting that they themselves are primarily and principally responsible.

## 2. An overall pastoral approach

The Christian school is aware of what some parents think. It is convinced that its work can be effective only to the extent that there is cooperation and a sharing of responsibility by the various persons responsible for the education of the young person. In the first place there are the parents, then the educational community, and then the priests and bishops concerned. There is need for a concerted effort (25) to create a consistent Christian approach which the young person can find at home, in the school and in the parish. To help to achieve this it would be a good idea to organise a programme of sessions for parents to consider the respective responsibilities of parents and schools in the education of young people.

The Church is involved in the plan of God the Father who wishes all people to be saved, a plan which was fulfilled by the Son through the Holy Spirit. The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind. It is the people of God whose leader is Christ. Its mission is derived from that of Christ: to announce the Kingdom of God. By doing so, it shares in the threefold role of Christ as priest, prophet and king. By its common priesthood, the Church is a people of priests which offers itself to God through Christ by means of the sacraments and prayer. Having received the Holy Spirit, it is a people of prophets through its proclamation of the Gospel and the indwelling of Christ. It is a royal people with a humanising role, defending mankind and working for peace in the world.

The Christian school is a community of baptised persons sent by God to announce his salvation through the human and Christian education of young people. United to Christ, it proclaims the Kingdom of God. Its mission is part of the Church's mission. It shares in the threefold vocation of the Church as priest, prophet and king. It is a community of priests by its prayers and practice of the sacraments. It is a

community of prophets by its religious teaching and the witness of the teachers within the educational community, in communities of faith and, in particular, in its commitment to the poor. It is a community of kings with a humanising vocation through the acquisition of knowledge and the willingness of its members to work together for a better world. It is an ecclesial community because it bases all it does, says and is on Christ. Also, to the extent that the Christian school adapts its mission to the new needs of the world while still remaining faithful to the Gospel, it constitutes an ecclesial cell.

In practice, however, there is a certain lack of ecclesiality in the Christian school. In the face of the individualism which has developed in Lebanese society, the school mission statement ought to stress group discipline rather than individualism when speaking of personal development. In the case of teachers who are inadequately trained professionally and religiously, continuing formation group sessions could help to raise their standards. In the case of parents who are irresponsible regarding their children, a programme of courses for parents could remove some of their ignorance. Finally, an overall pastoral scheme involving the educational community, students, parish priests and bishops could provide a firm basis for the creation of a coherent climate for the Christian education of the young person.

The aim of this article was simply to consider some of the more important aspects of the ecclesiology of the Christian school. It could be useful to go into greater detail regarding the mission statement by organising an enquiry in Lebanon to discover what are the new needs of its society and Church. The mission statement could then be adapted to ensure that the Christian school remained faithful to the reason for its existence. •

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(22) *42nd General Chapter*, p. 47.

(23) *Id.*

(24) *Association La Salle...*, p. 21.

(25) *Khoury, Ildefonse, op.cit.* p. 107.