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Evangelisation Today
«Making a success
of the mission entrusted to us»

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For the Church, evangelisation means bringing the Good News to modern man and, through its impact, transforming humanity from within and making it new. "See, I am making the whole of creation new" (Rv 21,5).

1. Socio-cultural and pastoral context

"Communicating the message to people today".

Nowadays, a new approach is needed, as well as new methods which are in step with changes in society and in the way people perceive themselves as individuals and their future. Without this new approach, evangelisation would remain on the theoretical plane, and those responsible for it would be condemned to be ineffective.

There is need for adaptation. In a complex world, characterised by secularisation, great advances in communication technology, and by the mass media, the practical, everyday approach to the mission has to be stated in different terms.

These modern means have given rise to a whole series of values which they make available to everyone without distinction. These values even transform and have a powerful impact on human relations. They play a great part also in interpreting cultures and publicising certain lifestyles and ways of thinking. As a result, there now exist new ways of expressing ideas and feelings, a new language and new attitudes.

"Amidst all these changes, our mission would be ineffective, if in the transmission of the message it has the task of communicating, it did not use the language of our own times" (Synod of Bishops, Oct. 1977).

There is need for adaptation. As Darwin, the famous English naturalist said, "Adapt or die". In this context, our establishments deserve special attention. In the past, our institutions fulfilled an important social function - and they continue to do so - by offering education, hospital care, the care of the elderly, etc. This was a way of serving society and of collaborating in God's plan for our world.

It is obvious that society still needs teachers, healthcare workers, organisers and specialists. In the same way, the Church will always have a need for workers, catechists, ministers but, whatever their approach, it will have to change. In a world that is becoming progressively secularised, and has more and more means at its disposal, this need is no longer expressed in the same way, and can no longer be satisfied in the same way as in the past. Civil society claims for itself the right to provide itself with institutions, structures and training programmes. In addition, parish ministries and services are looking for a new image, more to do with communication and present-day aspirations and seeking goals.

All this has practical pedagogical consequences. We need to give special thought to a new form of training for parish workers.

2. Some thoughts on providing pastoral training

On the practical level especially, new problems have arisen which did not exist, or existed only potentially, in the past. There is, for example, the need to train people to be prepared to adjust constantly, and the need to acquire not only skills, but also new attitudes which are the key to personal growth.

A) The content of formation programmes. In our case, it is important to know what form this problem takes for religious or priests "entrusted with a mission" or with responsibilities in administration.

In the case of adults, in practical terms, each individual must be given the opportunity to become trained in the areas which interest him. In the case of adults with a mission, this problem becomes more specific: their concern normally is to seek to understand and resolve their problems in the situation in which they find themselves. It is rare for organised programmes to provide answers to their problems.

So the question of providing training courses for adults does not consist so much in offering them ready-made courses, but rather in enabling them initially to analyse their needs, re-organise what they know, and re-evaluate their experiences.

The first pedagogical step, therefore, consists in making each adult define his needs and aims. This step is necessary not only at the initial stage but throughout the whole training process: in this way continuing formation becomes an uninterrupted transformation of unperceived needs into perceived needs.

It is important, therefore, to recall that, as far as possible, any formation aim, in a given discipline, must be formulated in terms of ability: ability to produce a diagram, ability to diagnose a conflictual situation and remedy it, etc.

The advantage of formulating aims in this way is that they are pedagogically sound, in the sense that they enable the teacher and the trainee to calculate at all times how much still needs to be done in order to acquire the skill the trainee aims to acquire.

B) Training stages. For adults, a well-thought out training programme includes 3 stages: acquisition of structured knowledge; acquisition of new experience; acquisition of criteria for evaluation.

Acquisition of structured knowledge: basic general knowledge, new information regarding pastoral work, leadership roles, communication, administration.

In our days, as we know, the level of knowledge required in all kinds of areas of people in posts of responsibility is constantly rising and changing. There is room, therefore, for an extensive programme to update and deepen knowledge on the theoretical and methodological level, and on that of means of implementation and communication.

Acquisition of new experience. Life in establishments is such that many things cannot be learnt from a course of study: they need to be experienced, if the trainee is to learn from them. For example, the organisation of a new pastoral youth programme, liturgical reorganisation, team work and so on, are complex processes which can be understood only through personal involvement in them.

The department of continuing formation should draw up a plan with the following important aim: to integrate training

into everyday life. Home and work background are the principal elements which determine habitual behaviour.

Experience is nourished by daily practice, that is, by life itself. However, its contribution to the learning process will be all the more effective, if this process is well-thought out and structured, and characterised by intelligent and directive supervision, and by a theoretical knowledge which facilitates change and practice.

Acquisition of criteria for evaluation. Here training is based on models originating in experience, but practical application of criteria is much more complex.

As an example, we can take two teachers at a major seminary. Both of them have followed the same courses and their pastoral experience is identical, and yet their criteria for evaluating a community meeting can be quite different. One, for example, sees community meetings as one of many means of verification. For the other, they represent an extremely important expression of the active participation of community members.

While sessions offering practical help can contribute a great deal, the principal means of acquiring criteria for evaluation is without doubt identification with the community and with its specific mission embodied in its aims (purpose, services, procedures).

C) Basic principles. Let us recall some of these principles which experience has shown to be useful in the process of acquiring personal efficiency.

Knowing oneself better: knowing better one's real possibilities, the riches of one's own personality, what makes it grow, what hinders its growth. When speaking of building up personality, psychology has to be a basic reference: it can throw light on many things and can help our efforts.

One of the interesting consequences of psychological research is its contribution to our understanding of the close links between the demands of religious life and of psycho-affective needs.

In-depth psychology, in particular, has shown the importance of affective stimuli in the process of personal maturation: affectivity is one of the major factors contributing to the integration of the personality, precisely because affectivity is considered to be a fundamental dimension of personality.

Knowing others better: discovering the essential characteristics which must be recognised and maintained so that each person can fulfil himself fully. A person needs others to help him bring this about, hence the need for better communication.

In the first place, communication presupposes knowing the other person, and the acceptance of someone who is different from oneself. A relationship has to be built up and a dialogue started.

A relationship with another person can be established in a number of ways and to a varying degree. When two persons meet, it is always possible that one of the persons sees the other not as his "you" but simply as his object: an obstacle, a function, a figure. Meetings, in particular on the professional level, tend to ignore deeper aspects of human relationships, and confine themselves to the level of exterior appearances, social considerations, interesting aspects, anything that has to do with externals and not the person.

Knowing the principle of "reciprocity" better: This comes into play when the other person in an interpersonal

exchange accepts to let me become his "you". In other words, a true "coming together" with another person implies an element of reciprocity: the message is reciprocated.

On the pedagogical level, there is a need to learn how to welcome others, and more than anything else, to listen to them; to learn to express oneself, to use language adapted to the other person, to the members of a meeting, of a session, etc. If a person does this, he becomes capable of making judgments based on the other's point of view, of "putting oneself in his shoes", and especially, of putting himself in the objective place occupied by the other person vis-a-vis himself. In a discussion, for example, he becomes capable of considering both his own point of view and that of the other person, and of recognising that the other person is capable of doing the same thing. He is able to engage in dialogue with the other person.

3. Setting up a continuous formation programme

All methods, like all instruments, are effective only if used in a particular way. The intention of the person using a tool is not enough of itself, nor is the technical quality of the tool. This is all the more so when it comes to the complex area of adult education. However noble the intentions and however great the good will of the centres which organise continuing formation sessions, their work will be effective only under certain conditions.

What "drives" an adult to learn? It is difficult to reply to this complex and controversial question. It implies what psychologists call "motivation".

In practical terms, how can one create a motivating situation? How can one exploit it? Kurt Lewin was among the first to suggest "sensitising actions", when he spoke of "motivation acquired after an experience entered into with indifference or in a state of intellectual interest without a motivating value". The classic speech, intellectual information, the show-business talk cannot inspire true motivation. As early as 1942, Lewin had realised the consequences of this when it came to changing behaviour and especially mentality.

On the other hand, personal involvement in a group discussion or an experience bring about not only a change of mentality, but also more intense personal reactions when the same problem arises again.

A person, therefore, can acquire or contract a motivation (in the same way that one can contract a disease) when initially he was indifferent or simply intellectually interested in the topic as simply one among many others. When this happens, a person is said to have been "sensitised".

These few thoughts about motivation and the ways of teaching motivation will perhaps help those responsible for running continuing formation sessions for adults to see more clearly the spirit in which they should approach their work, the psychological climate they need to create, and the spiritual openness they need to have in order to adapt more and more to their mission.

Basic reference texts

- *La pratique de la formation permanente*, P.Grièger, Libérit, Rome.
- *L'efficacité, objectif numéro un des cadres*, P.F.Drucker, ESD, Paris
- *L'efficacité personnelle: "être efficace pour mieux servir"*, Cl.Duval, ESD, Paris
- *La vie et oeuvre de Kurt Lewin*, ESF, Paris. •