

## TOUNOUMA: A COLLEGE FOR THE PEOPLE

In De La Salle College, Tounouma, students generally do well in the examination for the Baccalaureat. But does the Baccalaureat serve any purpose today?

It is, in fact, true that this diploma is no longer considered essential for entrance to a profession. The successful student is the one who has acquired a certain amount of knowledge in the subjects studied: Literature, Mathematics, Science, both natural and physical, History, Geography, etc...

But has he really assimilated this knowledge so as to be able to use it effectively in daily life?

On leaving college he soon discovers that, after completing his secondary school course, he no longer knows how to use his hands and that he is less prepared for life than the mechanic down the street who repairs motorcycles or the young girls in the store who sell peanuts.

To find a professional post he has no other solution but to keep on accumulating diplomas, at the university, if he can gain entrance, or at some other educational establishment. So, is the time spent in college lost and is his early life wasted?

Certainly not. But we must qualify the initial question by the statement that, while the Baccalaureat is not of direct use, you cannot get far in present day society without it. That is one of the reasons why countries maintain and develop secondary education.

### **Formation of personality**

We all know that the knowledge acquired during the twelve to fourteen years spent in primary and secondary schools quickly evaporates on leaving school. That is why we think that the secondary school should:

- train students in the art of learning,
- train them to work on their own,
- develop in them a taste for knowledge and
- inculcate a degree of humility in face of what has yet to be learned.

It is not a question of deprecating the acquisition of knowledge and the accumulation of diplomas, for this is the duty of every educational establishment.

On the other hand, the school has an important social dimension. A school is, of course a building of bricks and mortar, but it is, above all, a team composed of teachers and taught. The quality of relationships within the team condition, to a large extent, the academic result. At Tounouma we think that a school which functions well should become a centre of radiation in the immediate area and in the region as a whole. When we possess something we must share it generously, particularly if the area in which we work is deprived.

At Tounouma we have walls so that those who feel themselves imprisoned may escape to the outside world. But in those walls what counts are the doors, always open to those who wish to enter or leave. You may judge for yourself.

The College is an educational establishment for secondary education which aims at providing educated Christian leaders for the country and for the Church but we try to go a little farther.

## **A literacy centre**

For the past ten years we have made our students, girls and boys, aware of the problem of illiteracy. The literacy rate in this country is one of the lowest in the world.

Every evening, from 6.00 to 7.30 p.m., we take in about 250 adults from eighteen upwards. These are taken care of by sixty monitors, all students of the second cycle, under the guidance of five teachers. They are divided into six categories: A, B, C, D, E, F. Occasionally four or five out of group F take the Certificate of Primary Studies examination, but our aim is less to prepare them for examinations than to give them sufficient knowledge to face the problem of finding employment.

## **Basic Technical Training**

With a view to giving additional technical training, we initiated, ten years ago, a section for home electricity and a section for motor maintenance. This is, of course, a modest beginning but it is an effort to give our students a better chance of finding work, and for those already employed, a chance to improve their skill.

As most of our students are either unemployed or unpaid apprentices or, at most, poorly paid shop assistants or labourers, we do not ask much in the line of fees. Text books, electrical equipment and motor engines and parts are paid for by friends of the College.

## **A socio-cultural centre**

Another important extra-mural activity of the College is caring for the children of the area during the long summer holidays from July to September. Under the direction of two Brothers, some fifteen senior students organize football leagues for more than 2,000 children. Football is very popular in Burkina-Faso. This activity is less a pastime than an effort to break down religious and ethnic barriers. The results, so far, are encouraging. Our sports facilities, especially our football pitches, are at the disposal of local adults and townspeople during the holidays when the students are away.

Five years ago we set up an open air cinema cum theatre which can accommodate about 2,000 people. There, most of the Diocesan Christian Youth events take place. The aim is always to instruct, to educate and to evangelize.

## **A catechetical centre**

One of the Brothers, with the help of a group of senior students, gives religious instruction to the primary school children of the parish on Saturday afternoons. Primary schools were nationalized in 1969 with the result that there is practically no religious instruction given in them.

We could, in addition to the above activities, mention the meetings of the Focolari group, the National Union of Christian Youth, and parent groups which meet every Monday.

## **Conclusion**

It is true that the College of Tounouma prepares students for the Baccalaureat as a matter of professional obligation on the part of the teaching staff. But, at the same time, it tries to form young people who, at the end of their academic studies, will feel themselves more human and more at liberty. The out-of-school activities mentioned above contribute, we believe, to their human and Christian formation.

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