



European Committee for Catholic Education

Comité Européen pour l'Enseignement Catholique

Europees Comité voor het Katholiek Onderwijs

EUROPE: DARING HOPE

Matters of Concern

While the European Union is struggling to convince its own citizens of the relevance of its existence, it is being shaken up on every side. Pushed internally, by the vote of the United Kingdom that led to the *Brexit*, which confirms certain political leaders of some countries in the idea that the exit of Europe would be a possible way. Pushed externally, by the massive influx of refugees, about which all countries do not have the same positions. Pushed externally also by the terrorism that strikes the populations, aiming at the symbols of the western way of life.

We can only note that the European Union is often perceived, within it, as a scapegoat, as being incomprehensible, far from the everyday life of its citizens... Does it really occupy too large a space, which makes people dizzy? A too important, too constraining regulation? A too complicated working, which leads to incomprehension?

School

In this context, what could be the mission of the school? How and to what should it educate?

If it is certain that the school cannot solve Europe's problems, it probably has a role to play in giving pupils, on the one hand, keys to understanding what is this area and, on the other hand, tools to inhabit it fully.

We must give **keys to understanding** to younger generations so that they can understand the issues of the Union. If they do not understand them, they would turn away from Europe and finally be afraid of it.

- Among the possible angles of approach: history. History of the construction of the Union but also the history of each of the peoples and States that compose it. How can we understand the reactions and attitudes of a State or a population towards its neighbours if we do not know the history of their relations? The foundation of today's Europe is respect for the person, human rights and democracy. How are citizens aware of it?
- Sociological and economic approaches can also be very helpful. Economics is the entry point chosen by the Union from the beginning to support its construction. How can we understand where Europe comes from and where it goes to without having any economic reference?
- Another entry: culture and especially literature. Is it not said of culture that it reveals the soul of the peoples. How can we ensure that relations between States are not only economic and mechanical without the detour through culture?
- Europe can also be seen through the prism of religions, especially Christianity with its tensions and struggles, the new ecumenism, but also the development of Islam. Is Europe not searching for itself? Is it not in constant search of its soul? Faced with the migration and mobility issues, do we not often confuse religion and culture?

The younger generations should be able to rely on **tools** to better inhabit the European area since references are not yet transmitted through family heritage. Few young people living today a European experience have parents who have had a similar experience. Yet, young people will have to live in this area and, for some of them, it will be a strong professional component.

- These tools are above all those of the intercultural and interreligious encounter. Even in countries that are close to us, we experience misunderstanding, which questions our own references. The school can help pupils to move from the eye of a coloniser, considering their own references and practices as the best ones, to the eye of an anthropologist, seeking above all to understand the other as it is.
- The tools to inhabit the European area are those of communication and particularly of language proficiency. Whether it is the language of the other or a third language for both, people who want to communicate must find a common way of exchange. But there is still something more, because “*language is the clothing of the soul*” (Seneca).
- Finally, the university and school exchange programmes of the European Union and the cultural programmes of the Council of Europe are probably among the best European achievements. Participation of pupils in these programmes is certainly a very good preparation for what is expected of them later.

Catholic School

It is by relying on its own specificity that the Catholic school fulfils the mission of general interest of education. This specificity is anchored in the Catholic religion’s vision of man and relationship to society. As a school, it undeniably has a role to play about Europe that probably goes beyond what is described above.

Thus, in a European society that tends to value individualism, the Catholic school promotes the person in relation, having a spiritual dimension. It is in this Christian anthropology that the Catholic school wishes Europe to really take root by placing the human person as the subject and purpose of any organisation.

The Catholic school can show through the mirror of Catholicism that globalisation and the thought of Europe are not distant or strange, but that it is a reality existing in the Church for centuries – also in some other religions in the world!

A big challenge for the Catholic school today is not so much to find values, but principles. Of course, both are needed, but it is important to distinguish between constantly changing values and fixed principles. To rely solely on the values is to take as a reference a moving point, which does not make it possible to decide where to go. This is perhaps the challenge for the school: to provide both keys to understanding that encourage pupils to think and tools that also affect them through emotions, affectivity and the reason of the heart.

The proposal of the Catholic school must enable young people to envisage Europe not with fatalism and distrust, but with hope. This hope getting its strength from the certainty that it is possible for everyone to act on its political, economic and natural environment, even at a European level.

Questions

Can the Catholic school play its role if it does not have the necessary autonomy in its relations with the State? Can it constitute a common good if it has only the place of an alternative to the public service? How can its European network develop links giving an idea of its vision of the future of the European Union? Should it resolutely support the strengthening of Europe, or should it keep its distance from the political and societal quarrels which this question provokes?