

EDUCATION FOR THE POOR (2)

Characteristics of the POPULAR EDUCATOR

1. He has above all made a clear choice in favor of the oppressed, and has made a life commitment to be with them, a commitment that may be motivated by religious, political or simply human considerations.

2. He possesses a high degree of interior openness, which implies a great respect for the process of search and understanding of the others.

3. He is an "instigator": He generates (provokes) a process of reflexion among the people given the challenges that dynamism itself imposes.

4. He gives the example by his own life, being of a spirit in constant search. He educates more by his personal witness and his coherency than by his words.

5. His methodological principle is a process which serves to systematize jointly with the people his experiences and reflexions, causing the people to become critical, creative, active and organized. A pre-fabricated methodology that works in all cases of popular education does not exist. Operative models must be set up for each concrete reality, and based on different experiences. These models must be constantly re-evaluated to conform most efficaciously to the very dynamic of reality.

6. His pedagogical resources will be those which:

a) in the first stage permit that the people achieve a better grasp of their own problems. Example-theater, audio-visual;

b) in a second stage, permit greater depth and systematization: short courses, popular press, workshops.

With these conceptual elements in mind we may now better undertake a comparative study between the "mainstream" of popular education and the educational currents promoted by the Latin American Church, in order to see the likenesses and differences and to decide if they are of substance or simply of form.

B) Current Trends in Latin American Education sponsored by the Church

1. *Point of Departure: Diagnosis of the problem.*

MEDELLIN

— The vast sector of "marginated" persons, isolated from the mainstream of culture.

- Grave defects in the educational systems.
- Abstract and formalistic program contents.
- Educational systems geared to the maintenance of existing social and economic structures rather than to their transformation. (*Source*: Official Document of II Conference of CELAM, No. 3 Education, Bogotá, 1968).

PUEBLA

— Education in a situation of social and economic change. (No. 1014).

— The situation of poverty correlated with educational processes.

— The inadequacy of existing educational systems: impractical, they tend to act as a mechanism that uproots from, and evades, the community (1015).

— The accelerated demand for education owing to demographic growth (1016).

— The need for unconventional new forms of education (1018).

— The pressure applied to education by ideological influences (1021).

— Tendency towards the educative community or city (1023). (*Source*: Official Document of III CELAM, Puebla, Mexico, January of 1979).

2. Educational responses.

1. Liberating Education (Medellín).

2. Evangelizing Education (Puebla).

3. Popular Education, Interamerican Congress of Catholic Education (CIEC).

Liberating Education (Texts cited from the official document, No. 3):

— To train (the culturally marginated) so that they themselves, as authors of their own progress, in a creative and original way, develop a cultural world in accordance with their own qualities and which is the product of their own efforts.

— Education geared towards "Being More" in the joy of self-development through service to others.

— Education which is based on dialogue, creativity, foretaste of the new style of society sought by Latin America, enriching in the sense of human dignity, favoring self-determination and a sense of community.

— An asystematic education in all that contributes to the creation of a certain popular culture and the increased will to change.

— Education that liberates from the social, economic and political servitudes which are opposed to the development of the Latin American man.

— Education which favors dialogue across the generation gap, which attests to the wealth of local and national culture and which promotes the integration in the pluralistic unity of the continent and the world.

— Education capable of producing leaders who will bring about the organic and permanent change needed in Latin America.

Evangelizing Education (Texts cited from the official document):

— Humanizing and personalizing.

— Integrating itself in the Latin American process.

— Exercising the critical function proper to true education, striving to regenerate, from the perspective of education, the cultural mores and the norms of inter-action which will make the creation of a new society, truly sharing and fraternal, possible, that is, an education in justice.

— Converting the student into the subject, not only of his own development, but also of community development: Education for Service.

— Producing the agents for the permanent, organic, change needed in Latin American society, through a civic and political formation inspired in the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Popular Education

"Human promotion implies activities which serve to make the consciousness of man in all possible dimensions and, using his own potential, to become the principal subject of his Christian and human development. It is education geared towards a living together in community; it enhances the Christian sharing of goods; it helps towards communion and participation in an effective way. (Puebla No. 477).

In this extraordinary paragraph which has gone all but unnoticed are to be found the fundamental elements which define POPULAR EDUCATION from a Christian point of view.

These guidelines are then completed by another paragraph which is no less extraordinary.

"To give priority in the field of education to the innumerable poor sectors of our society, people who are deprived both materially and culturally, directing to them the educational services and resources of the Church in accord with the local Ordinary". (Puebla, No. 1043).

"The education of leaders and agents of change is equally important" (Puebla, No. 1044).

"To accompany marginal groups in their literacy education with skills that help them to communicate efficaciously; to become aware of their duties and their rights; to comprehend the situation in which they are living and discern its causes; to train themselves to organize in civic, trade union and political fields, and to thus be able to fully participate in the decision-making processes that pertain to them". (Puebla, 1045).

What may be called the elements of a POPULAR EDUCATION from a Christian perspective may be drawn from these guidelines:

— To broaden the popular base.

— To raise consciousness.

— To take part in decision making processes (societal project based on Gospel values = Builders of their own history).

— Organization, planning for action.

— The living of Christian values: living together as one, sharing of goods.

— Training of leaders and agents of change: Formation in trade unions, politics and Christianity.

What else does the Latin American Church tell us that might have some bearing on POPULAR EDUCATION?

"Without neglecting the present school commitments it is most urgent to respond with generosity and imagination to the challenges that today and in the future confront the Church of Latin America. These new forms of educational action can't be the product of superficiality or improvisation but must include sufficient preparation for their agents and be based on diagnosis of the needs as well as an inventory and evaluation of present resources". (Puebla, 1046).

We conclude this paragraph with a quotation from the final document on POPULAR EDUCATION taken from XIII Interamerican Congress of Catholic Education (CIEC) held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in January of 1980. The Theme of the conference was METHODOLOGY FOR EDUCATION IN AND FOR JUSTICE.

"The option and commitment of Catholic educators to an education in justice demand that they set a top level priority on a dedication to popular education". (no. 24). These promotional-type projects must be based on a concept of the transformation of society, and tend toward the formation and development of teams of popular organization. They will develop along the lines of a horizontal concept of learning, with regard to the local cultures, and with a methodology which is congruent with the whole liberation of man and of society. (No. 25).

"These projects, which have been drawn up and carried out by grass-roots organizations, are geared towards raising the scientific, cultural and organizational levels of the popular sectors". (No. 26).

"Catholic educators and their organization (school center, federations, CIEC) recognize and commit themselves to promote popular education as one change which is valid to educate in and for justice and place their resources and means at the service of this educational and evangelical option". (No. 27).

"So that this commitment may truly be translated into a reality, it is recommended encounters be held on the national level to share the experiences of those that are engaged in popular education, and to study the most effective ways to give priority to this urgent action". (No. 28).

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