

VALUES EDUCATION
(1/2)

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I have changed the title of this paper. It was originally entitled "Education to Values". Now the preposition has been modified and so I now prefer to refer to it as "Education in Values" instead of "to" values for the simple reason that one only learns if one practices and in the measure that one practices.

Towards humanization of the school

I have advocated the humanization of the school in other areas. I mean education as a human endeavor that has little to do with machines used in teaching. Facing teachers from Salesian ministries where the oratory is more important than just the school classroom I should rather refer to the humanization of education.

The first time that I was put in charge of a fifth grade class there were 54 students and I was the newcomer. They had already been in that school for four years and I was a beginning teacher. The advice that I received from a veteran teacher was as follows: "Don't forget for a single second that you are facing some wild beasts. Either you tame them or they'll tear you to shreds". I was never able to stop wondering whether my companion had many years of service...or years of combat. I discovered another trick for academic success three days later when the principal gave me 54 blank reports so that I could write the names of the students on them as well as their grades for the first week in all subjects! I survived thanks to some community help and here I am, twenty-some years later speaking with you, my teaching colleagues.

I have discovered that a "good teacher", that is to say, one who will never have any difficulty with the school authorities, is the one who has good group

control - this is how it is now said rather than taming wild beasts - and who has up to date records. Whatever values are conveyed by the teacher do not matter, what matters is discipline and administration. I can point out a very common type of narrow thinking in our educational practices that does not immediately show Christian values (1).

The fact that students make no attempt to participate, that they are passive and obliging, that they continue to be dependent and non-expressive, that they are responsive only because they are interested in their grades or not being called down to explain why they received poor grades...are all signs that order and discipline have not served as a vehicle for growth, for possible personality development, for democratic living together as Venezuela wants for the population (2). This is the type of narrow thinking that is unsettling.

Another type of narrow thinking is the idea that education only occurs within the classroom. Education happens - even more so - while standing in the cafeteria line, while playing a ball game during recreation or while interviewing each student.

The teacher's presence in terms of "walking with" is a great contribution to education. These are the times when both student and teacher remove their masks and then simply be who they really are and stop acting according to a preestablished role. They are significant adults for young people and significant young people for adults.

This is mutual education. This image considers the teacher as a guide as well as all those who wish to take on the role as teacher.

Society values and Gospel values

It has always been difficult for me to deal with the topic of values. This is made even more difficult when I observe that values are different in various societies and they even differ among the various classes of the same society. Also values change with the passage of time. It is something like driving a car on a slippery surface. And it is even more so today when we see signs of the birth of a new type of generation and the dawn of a new culture that will demand profound and accelerated changes.

Why are there countries where, with regard to murder, the press and other means of communication treat it as something inconceivable while we, for our part, have grown accustomed to the 20 or 30 murders each weekend in our own capital? Is it that among ourselves the idea of life, or the life of others of course, is not worth anything at all?

Where are we headed? Is a pair of shoes worth more than a life? Perhaps we should pose this question to the mothers of the victims to see what they would tell us.

But is it the shoes themselves or the status that they

provide? I see this as normal behavior for someone who wants to be important in life and who will continue to wear brand "X" gym shoes with a special star that shines even knowing that they cost two minimum salaries and the person has no job nor even one extra penny at home. And since he needs to be someone in life he will get a beautiful pair of boots. This is the same as in the time of pirates. Those times have not really ended because now we hear about more and more highway robberies. This is easy money with a minimum of effort. It seems to me that it is like one of the pillars of capitalistic accumulation: "The search for the maximum return with the minimum investment".

When I said that I see certain behavior as being normal I do not mean that I approve of this behavior nor consider it to be appropriate. This behavior is tied to a system that perhaps we have grown too accustomed to without realizing its evils and the destruction to which it leads us. We cannot, nevertheless, merely contemplate these two worlds that daily confront each other. On the one hand there is the school that values work and on the other there is

education that demands dialogue and respect in order to solve problems. Also there is the systematic annihilation of the enemy on the most popular television programs (3). The school and the counter school. It is necessary to trust that in the future things will be better. This is part of our Christian hope. The world is in the Father's hands and the Father for his part puts it in our hands so that we might act.

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(1) Schiefelbein, E. *¿Transmiten valores cristianos las escuelas católicas?*, Educación hoy, number 116, Oct-Dec., 1993, Bogotá, pp. 21-26.

(2) *Ley Orgánica de Educación de Venezuela*, 1986, article number 3.

(3) See Reyes Johnny, SDB. *Valores educativos y la formación moral del niño y del adolescente*. In *Educación cristiana generadora de cultura*, DIOC publishers (Coro-Venezuela), 1994, pp. 143-164.