

“OPEN TO OTHERS”

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Professor Bart McGettrick*

There is a real sense in which the title of this edition to EducA is itself a contradiction. If we were truly open it may be that there would be no “others!” There would be only a concept of “we” and “us,” rather than some kind of identification with “others” – implying a difference or separation in some way.

This journal is concerned with Catholic education, and of course the term “Catholic education” immediately provides an orientation to a certain kind of education. In my view this is an education inspired by hope, love and justice. It is education intended to be for the benefit of all humanity, for “the common good,” and is not only about the education of those of a certain faith and denomination. It is an education where the goodness of God is at the centre and is the foundation and reason for all we do in education. It does not imply a closed system of education through doctrine and dogma, but an education inspired by the Holy Spirit to benefit all of God’s children and His creation. Indeed one might claim that an essential characteristic of Catholic education is to tear down the walls of division, separation and discord wherever and whenever they exist.

In many respects it is all too easy to identify “others.” Politically and economically the migrants to Europe are on our doorsteps from The Middle East. We welcome them as sisters and brothers and they enrich the communities of Europe. To the educationist they are our neighbours, part of our community ... communities of hope, of love and of justice. These are not vague and remote ideas, but have to be lived and given real expression otherwise they are the tatters of memories and fantasy.

The identity of the students from Christian institutions is formed through the lived experiences of the university or school. These are not simply the experiences deriving from the curriculum, however impressive the teaching is. They are the experiences that come from

* Glasgow, Scotland

every facet of university or school life, experiencing the graces of the Christian culture and community. Christian identity is carried in the heart and soul of each student – each unique and distinctive - and formed largely through and by experiences. So the educated person is someone who carries a rich interior self; a person of transcendence whose world does not stop at the functional and the superficial, but reaches to the deeper recesses of the human condition so that it inspires and gives true life to the full. A Catholic education does not fulfil its mission if it leaves untouched, uneducated the spiritual life which each person has. The Christian message is not one that ignores the challenges of life, but encompasses them. It is a message of mercy and reconciliation in the lived contemplative experiences of life.

Electronic journals are often transient publications, addressing contemporary issues and moving on. Much of “Educa” is like that, but there are contained in this edition some articles which are not at all transient, but will be of lasting relevance for the student of Catholic education and Catholic studies. For example, the ideas of Dom Henry Wansbrough reflect on whether the Catholic Church itself has become more open to others with the style of “listening” being adopted by Pope Francis, perhaps suggesting we do need to more open and learn from other traditions.

Professor Sullivan argues that Catholic schools in their Christian mission demonstrate their character through sacramental reference points. They must be places of reconciliation, of celebration, of community, of all those outward signs of inward graces. Reaching out to others is simply intrinsic to this message. Dr Leonard Franchi examines some of the challenges of this in “the public square,” highlighting some of the conceptual and practical challenges which exist.

In this edition Professor Grace asks whether Catholic schools are indeed truly “open to others” or have they been –and perhaps still are- intrinsically places of indoctrination? He argues for more research being undertaken in a more “open” conceptualisation of Catholic education. While Dr Andrew Morris provides evidence of the value of Catholic education from the meticulous studies undertaken in England. The narrative methodology of student reflection from Dr Bignold raises issues about what counts as “evidence” in the academy. She argues that we do need to be a listening Church – and especially listening to students, to the poor, to those at the margins. This issue of the status and engagement of students in higher education is very significant, especially if we are indeed to be open to others. To some extent

this can be related to the study of Dr Ricardo Machon at Loyola Marymount, California, which suggests that first generation students are more engaged spiritually and in service-based activities than non-first generation students.

Professor Tomáš Jablonský poses the question, “*Who is my neighbour?*” addressing the very relevant concerns of modern times, seeing education, of necessity, involving “others.” Sister Pina del Core examines the critical issue of identity and culture, and how we need to be open to other cultures through our own identity. Professor De Natale focuses this on the culture of youth and adolescent, and examines how important it is to have a pedagogy of education that pays attention to the personal needs of young people of that age. Fr Joseph Varghese describes and analyses the work of an Indian saint, St Kuriakose Elias, of the 19th century who eloquently envisaged the Catholic school as “a mission that was inclusive,” highlighting how such a conceptualisation can survive in time and place.

Fr Imad Twal, from the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem comments on how Religious Education contributes to a more open society in the challenging settings of Jordan and The Middle East.

What is striking about the contributions, individually and collectively, is the congruence across countries and cultures, and the ways in which they complement each other to provide a coherent account of education that relates to the universal Church.

All of these contributions together suggest transformation and openness. They lead to the need for an “emergent design” – an architecture of change that uses research and scholarship from the wider world by being truly open to others. This is driven by a vision of goodness and justice. Scholarship in its endless quest for truth proclaims this and is part of it. It is never used to adjust this clear vision, but may be used to adjust how we might achieve how Catholic education always contributes to the common good by being open to others.