

**RELIGIOUS TEACHERS'
RENEWAL AND COMMITMENTS
FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Bro. H. Cannon, F.S.C.

Once Cardinal Suenens was asked, "what do you believe will be the main problem of the Church in the post-councilar era?" He replied, "the application of the conciliar teaching will be the main problem. It needs men of faith and in a special way of knowing how to realize that faith. In the council text you have a general orientation but now you must build of a methodology. The question is, how are we to implement Vatican II in a practical way? And it is a very important question. I think that there is present sufficient power to achieve this methodology of the apostolate on every level—laity, nuns, religious, priests, bishops, synods of bishops. We have only to find our way."

The following remarks have to do with one method that might be used to make the conciliar teaching applicable to today's apostolate. It's a method which might be used at all levels. It's highly practical and is being used to some extent in too few pockets of the Church. It has no clearcut, precise label. It might be named, "Creative Problem-Solving" or even better, "Creative Problem Finding" which is by far the more original. It might be called "Ideation Techniques," "Imaginative Research" or "Scientific Creativity". Its aim is to find new solution to new problems and where possible to foresee future problems and solve these problems originally. This method is best understood as a tool, a tool for releasing not simply vast quantities of ideas but ideas of quality; ideas triggered from that precious resource, the human imagination; ideas that will help men realize their faith; ideas that will enable the Church to apply the spirit of Vatican II to the modern apostolate.

Interest in ideas is nothing new. It began with the dawn of reflection and has not only kept pace with man's progress but has led him on his way. However, within the past one-hundred years, the concern for new ideas has steadily gained in momentum until we come to today's daily barrage of ideas.

The notion that the present day world is in a period of rapid change has been expressed so often that it has become trite. But trite or not, it's a fact. The world is in an age that sees changes taking place at an almost frightening rate. The older one is, the more frightening change is. The young thrive on it. Mathematicians graphically label this accelerated change as being "exponential". Cardinal Suenens has said: "every thoughtful man today is confronted with two inescapable facts of twentieth-century life—the diversity and speed of change, and the depth and urgency of the human search for meaning and unity in individual and social life. It would be naive to suppose that the religious life would be unaffected by these two powerful influences."

Today's challenge is to successfully cope with and, to go a step further, influence change. This is especially true for religious educators. The fundamental task of religious education is the forming of youthful minds in a Christian way. We are working with the future Christian, the future Church. To say the least, the task and the responsibility is awesome. It's this aspect of our life that places on us the responsibility to be vitally interested in such things as change and how to cope with it.

One might ask, "just how did it all start?" "Why are things not the way they used to be?" "Why isn't the pace nice and slow, then people would all be much happier?"

It is clear that Council was for the Church, an awakening, a surge of hope, of confidence, of faith, of optimism. The religious of today, young in age or in heart and spirit, see the message of the Council, as aligned with the mentality of the Church of today, accepting the challenges of this historical period and of the world of this later twentieth century. For these, the Vatican II is a motive for encouragement and enthusiasm.

other inner force destructive of dialogue is fear to speak the truth as one sees it. Ordinarily this fear is generated by the intolerant attitude of the group or of influential elements in the group. But whatever the cause, fear is a destructive force because the real problems of the adapted renewal can be fruitfully discussed only when each member of the dialogue says frankly what he thinks, even when it is a question of espousing an unpopular cause or of criticizing what the majority or the authority is doing.

It is not enough, however, to know and to combat the enemies without and within the dialogue in order to arrive at a really fruitful and satisfying exchange of views. There are certain positive aspects of the dialogue that must be cultivated: (1) All statements, criticisms, objections, suggestions, should be based on knowledge of the facts and principles involved, and on the history and the aims of the practices or the institutions under study. In other words, what the dialogue needs is not critics, but informed critics. This implies study and research. (2) The statements, criticisms, objections, and suggestions must not be exaggerated; they should be kept within the bounds imposed by truth. (3) In making statements, criticisms, objections, and suggestions they should, of course, be courteous and respectful, but at the same time fearless, fearless in speaking the truth as they see it, but fearless also in recognizing and accepting the truth about their own ideas when these are shown to be incorrect and exaggerated. (4) Before presenting statements, criticisms, objections, and suggestions, they should have thought out how the proposals are to be implemented and what will be the consequences of them, and such methods of implementation and such consequences should form part of the exposition. (5) In the presentation of criticisms, objections, and suggestions, disagreement with others must be a function of love for them. Among intelligent persons in mutual search of the truth and the common good, intellectual disagreement need not involve interpersonal alienation. Men disagree in order to arrive at eventual agreement, so their dialogue must be aimed at harmony.

This consideration dwelt thus long on the technique of dialogue because of the difficulties sometime found in the dialogue and the dis-

cord it has occasioned in certain groups. There is also a positive reason, because without dialogue there is small chance of achieving a real adapted renewal.

One of the subjects under serious discussion today is education. In many places today the Catholic school system is being questioned. It is not enough simply to reaffirm the principle that the Christian school has an apostolic value. This will not satisfy everyone, including many of those who have given their lives to this form of education and who now wonder whether such a school has any real effect, or indeed, any future at all.

Every period of important change in the history of civilization has known similar cases. The solution, however, was never to suppress the school, or abandon it, but rather to emphasize its renewal. Today the Church is committed to make its contribution to the rebirth of the Christian school, to help make it capable of preparing men for the twenty-first century. The Council is pleased to take cognizance of the desire of many, evident throughout the entire world, for this renewal of the educational apostolate. All are invited to participate actively in this movement, committing themselves with confidence and courage to the new directions necessary to answer the needs of youth today. Insofar as such a renewal is undertaken and pursued with intelligence and perseverance, the importance of the school will become more evident than in the past, and the relevance of the education provided in the Christian school will be felt more than ever before. But the implications of such a renewal are many and complex.

The renewal of the school calls for reference and relevance to contemporary culture.

First, it is important that the Christian school at every level be characterized by quality education, a truly professional spirit and genuine service to students and to society. The Church is very explicit in its desire for excellence in education. A poor standard, or a lack of quality is somehow not to add glory to the Church or to radiate the splendour which is rightfully hers.

The school must be aware of the tremendous cultural changes of these times and consequently update itself in its objectives, programs and methodology. In its objectives, the school must impart to the students more than mere book knowledge, by emphasizing instead the development of the powers of observation, imagination, reasoning and discrimination. In its curriculum the school must keep in mind the present importance of physical sciences, the need for sociology, anthropology, the behavioral sciences, modern languages and the significance of mass media and increased leisure time. In its methodology the school must highlight research and creativity rather than rote memorization, by using the best audio-visual materials, and by taking advantage of the more recent developments in pedagogical techniques. In this way the school will play a specific and important part in the total process of education by enabling a man to profit better from other communications media, thus providing a completeness and synthesis to all that he learns.

One of the fundamental functions of the school is to promote "the vitality and growth of a new culture without sacrificing fidelity to the living heritage of tradition." It favors "increased cultural exchange" in such a way that "it does not undermine ancestral wisdom or jeopardize the uniqueness of each people." It is for this purpose that schools now emphasize a more dynamic approach to the teaching of history and the masterpieces of the past. In this same vein the school today stresses training in sensitivity, the ability to form judgments and the development of a critical mind. This is important in a world in which discernment in the use of mass media is required to maintain one's personal liberty in the face of all the propaganda that abounds. The mission of the school is more indispensable than ever in forming men who can think. In an atmosphere of quiet, study and reflection it introduces the person to the life of the mind, to an intuition of and reverence for the inner reality of things, a sense of the sacred and a response to values, an awareness of the limitations and sinfulness of man, and an acknowledgement of the reality of the invisible world.

Education to the faith must also renew itself in terms of the modern world. In a secular society catechesis linked to cultural formation can provide a needed purification for religious thought by ridding it

of magical notions of the world and superstitious practices. In a world in which man is tempted to confine his vision to this life and to think of Christianity as useless or dangerous because it is inhuman, catechesis can point out that man realizes himself only by reaching beyond himself and that "men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are, rather, more stringently bound to do these things.

The renewal of the school calls for great attention to persons and to the community life of the school.

The Catholic school, then, will be characterized by a concern for each student. Modern techniques of psychology and pedagogy make it possible for the individuality of each one to be known and respected. This concern encompasses the whole person; his family background, his temperament, his strong points, his special interests. He is more than just another student who happens to attend the school. The teacher will endeavor to discover and develop more and more the special talents of his students, not concentrating on shortcomings and mistakes. Thus the school will be a living community where young people, coming from different social and family backgrounds, educate one another by mutual understanding and respect, openness of mind in dialogue, acceptance of the uniqueness and limitations of each, growth in the spirit of service, and the practice of justice and fraternal charity.

To give a living example of the true meaning of community, the Catholic school will strive to promote the students' personal freedom, encouraging them to assume the responsibility for their own formation. Education to freedom is achieved by a cordial relationship between faculty and students, by intelligent school discipline, by the very approach to teaching itself. The experience of freedom is absolutely indispensable to training in responsibility, students need to assume an active part in the life of the school itself, its discipline and all its operations. Work in small groups will be preferred in order to instill self-confidence, a sense of responsibility and the spirit of collaboration. This will also minimize the problem of undue conflict and selfish ambition. The school will be molded into community only through a faculty rich

in the diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the religious staff members work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life and of civic affairs. Lay teachers should be completely involved with the whole life of the school with catechesis, apostolic organizations, extra-curricular activities and administration. Finally, the administration will do everything possible to facilitate the ministry of the religious spirit of the school as a community, and in the Christian education of the students.

More than in any other domain education to freedom is required when there is question of instruction in the faith. The Christian school should be the freest of institutions, it suggests without coercion the infinite possibilities of life according to Christ; it announces the Good News of the Gospel to each one insofar as he is ready for it, and with absolute respect for the freedom of all. To students who have heard and accepted the call of Jesus Christ, the teachers explain the Christian mysteries, and work to develop their faith and their Christian life.

The renewal of the schools calls for an openness to the life of the world and of the Church.

The work of education is achieved by many influences over the course of a lifetime. The modern school therefore endeavors to collaborate with every educational agent. We work closely with parents, who have the first responsibility for their children's education; both must keep in mind that they can learn much from each other. We seek to establish friendly ties with other educators, particularly with those who are concerned with the activities of the young in their moments of leisure. In certain cases it may become necessary that teachers themselves take charge of these leisure activities. We can also work closely with parish priests, chaplains of Catholic Action groups, and with laymen in charge of apostolic organizations directly influencing the life of the young. Thus the school becomes a focal point where educational agencies can meet and enter into dialogue for the greater good of the students. Such openness to the realities of the contemporary world can be furthered in particular instances by having the

school make its facilities and equipment readily available to the public of the local community for adult education and youth activities.

The Christian school endeavors through its program of instruction to prepare its students for their professional life, for marriage and its responsibilities, for service to society and the Church. It makes known to them the great needs and aspirations of modern man. It encourages them to be competent in today's world and to work closely with all men of good will, especially with those not of the faith, for the welfare of mankind.

One way for educators to get to know better the real situation and the real needs of a world in evolution is to take full advantage of a continuing dialogue with the graduates of the schools, both those who have recently finished school and those who have had long experience in the adult world. This makes it possible to give to the students still in school an education that is more realistic and better adapted to the demands of modern life. Following the recommendation of Vatican II in this matter, it is an integral part of the work of education to be concerned about the human and religious difficulties that students encounter when they leave school. Schools should "continue to assist them with advice and friendship and also by establishing special groups genuinely inspired by the spirit of the Church." From an ecclesial point of view, this implies on the part of educators an unselfish dedication that will respect the initiative and responsibility of laymen. It is in this spirit that the Catholic teacher offers to graduates the support of professional competence and religious motivation. Special attention is due to the younger alumni who are in unfortunate financial circumstances or who have need of other support and encouragement. Alumni relations aim to help the graduates become actively involved in civil society, in the Church, and in movements appropriate to their age and station which foster an informed and responsible laity. In this way the important apostolate on behalf of the graduates of the schools will maintain a true harmony with the ultimate goals, and the school's educational activity will enjoy a greater efficacy.

The renewal of the school calls for teachers who are prepared to meet the needs of modern man. "But let teachers realize that to the

greatest possible extent they determine whether the Catholic school can bring its goals and undertakings to fruition." A society committed to the education of the youth of the world will contribute to the renewal of the school only to the degree that it emphasizes and develops the value of the teacher's vocation.

The teaching profession requires by its very nature a broad experience with men and society. The training of young teachers must not, then, cut them off from the life of the men of our time, but must help them, to participate deeply in it, according to their state and in view of their mission. The professional preparation of the teacher is not reduced simply to academic degrees and intellectual excellence. It must provide an education "in the prevailing manners of contemporary social life, and its characteristic ways of feeling and thinking."

Speaking of the religious educator his formation and spirituality will prompt him to perceive and live his teaching career as the expression of his consecration as a religious. He will strive to understand and grasp the significance of his vows for his educational apostolate. He will discover in his love for Christ and for his students the energy to renew—for their sake—the work of his own education, the development of his teaching skill and the interest and joy he finds in life. The formation and the style of his religious life will tend to develop this "constant readiness to begin anew and adapt," demanded by the very nature of the teaching vocation. Finally, the meaning and the interpretation of the "separation from the world," which is part of the religious life, must be reconsidered; it cannot ignore the need for a real presence in the world, nor justify a lack of interest in the needs, anxieties and hopes of all mankind.