

EDUCATION

Definition of Education

Education is a wide and complex reality, that can be represented as a system consisting in many elements interconnected and linked together, immersed into the series of human events and yet provided with consistency and continuity, interacting with other sub-systems of the entire society. Because of its nature, both practical and theoretical, it is also spoken of as educational practice, i.e. a historical human activity, individual and collective, aiming towards the transformation of reality according to a well-defined project. In a more specific meaning, Education indicates every intentional action carried out by adults, to help children grow and develop harmoniously, through interpersonal communication and cultural transmission, to promote a positive integration in the environment. This concept is strongly bound to others, e.g.: *world-view*, since Education is directed by a set of beliefs and presuppositions; *culture*, because it consists in transmission and learning of cultural techniques; *schooling*, as far as it is systematic and formalized; Education is especially associated with *pedagogy* (theory of Education), with which is often identified, because every education activity always implies some sort of thinking preceding the experience itself. This term reminds of the role of the *paidagōs* (from ? ____, *pais*, son, child), the slave or freedman which, in ancient Greece, was entrusted to accompany children to school, or was himself commissioned the education of the young aristocrats. Among the Romans this term was translated with discipline (*institutio*), a term that is found also in the “Institutio”, by John Calvin, who writes about divine pedagogy as the divine merciful and providing care, with which God guides humanity.

Towards the end of the 18th century the term was used to indicate the systematic study and theory of education. In English, “pedagogy” is barely used, “education” is used instead, both for the activity and for the theory of Education.

Education is a phenomenon which is recorded in the whole Scripture. Biblical religion developed together with education, to the extent that Christianity is considered *par excellence* a religion that teaches. The concept of Education, is found already implicitly in Gen. 1:27-28, that states the conditions for its possibility: being created in God’s image, thus provided with personality and moral, intellectual and creative faculties; having received the call, together with the blessing, to be fruitful and multiply, which is to be understood both biologically, and culturally and socially, and then to replenish the earth, and subdue it, which implies a cognitive research and the application of the results to a wise over creation. As for every other human activity, even Education has been subjected to the damages and distortions caused by the breaking of the creational covenant, and is marked by sin and needs to be redeemed by Christ’s Gospel.

History

All civilizations, ancient and modern, reserve a lot of space to educational activity and to its thinking, even if for many centuries the problem of education does not take the form of a separate discipline, but it develops within a more general debate on man and reality. Among the biggest educators of the past, Socrates relates to the educational principle of “not knowing” and to the “maieutic” method, aimed at generating knowledge and virtue from within, through dialog. Plato considers Education the only

possibility to overcome injustice and to build an ideal State. To Aristotle, the goal of Education is forming the citizen for the community life. Education in ancient Rome has, as its foundation, the parents' and ancestors' example, the homage payed to divinities, the practice of healthy military and farmer's virtues, according to the ideals of a moderate eclecticism. At any rate, Education, elite and aristocratic, sets *man* as the centre, which, as a rational being, can be educated. The Jewish people have the privilege of receiving from God an unique education, and to set God Himself at the centre of Education. First through Moses, then through the prophets (Ex. 4:12; Ps. 32:8-9; Is. 48:17; Ger.32:33), God sets the foundation and the goal of Education (the *Shemà*, Deut. 6:4-9) and assigns this task to parents.

Learning a job and housekeeping, grafted on scriptural principles and soaked with the biblical worldview, combines knowledge and doing. During and after the Exile, the Synagogue gains more and more importance for the people as the centre for education of the Law, and the Scribes become expert scholars, and teachers of the Scripture. Around 75 b.C. Jewish children Education becomes compulsory, it is given within the synagogue or at the teacher's house, and the contents are taken only from the Scriptures of the Old Testament, particularly from the books forming the Pentateuch (the Torah) and from the book of Proverbs. Jesus Christ, the best of all teachers, renews the interpretation of the O.T., setting himself in continuity with it and declaring himself to be the Subject of the ancient Scriptures and the fulfilment of the prophecies. In his work, teaching and doing are strongly connected, the content of his teaching coincides with his mission: to redeem the world from sin, to reconcile "all things" with the Creator, to reconnect the fallen human culture to the original call, to re-establish the relationship with the God of the covenant. Thanks to Christ's Lordship, the task entrusted to his disciples (Mt. 28:20) is not different to that which was entrusted to the first human couple, but it is re-commitment of the very same task in a different situation. The teaching of the Apostles, onto which the people of God are built, is based on the proclamation of the Gospel (*kerygma*) and on how it is applied morally and socially (*didaché*), and it is given in the context of a church in which adults and children are together, and listen and learn.

In the patristic era, the *catechumenate* begins, a preparation towards baptism and the integration into the Christian community. Around 190 in Alexandria of Egypt one of the first Christian schools is founded, where Education is given, which is not only about the Scriptures, but also on many Greek culture elements (philosophy, grammar, rhetoric etc.), starting the confrontation between Christianity and classical pagan tradition. According to the great Augustine, a rigorous critic of the Roman school, the true teacher is the light within that comes from God, without which, no knowledge is possible. In the Middle Ages, as the public schools decline, monasteries develop as centres of culture and scholarship to form the clergy; moreover Charles the Great (VIII century) gives an important pulse to Education. During the Scholasticism there's a re-discovery of the Greek philosophy and a new cultural development leading to the start of the oldest Universities (Bologna, Padua, Paris, Oxford). Thomas Aquinas juxtaposes, also in his pedagogy, reason and faith, asserting that man can learn through reason, better if aided by the teacher, that acts as a doctor. The Reformation promotes a great re-birth and spreading of Education. The full authority of the Bible legitimizes Education to be compulsory, so that everybody can read the Scriptures. The priesthood of all believers gives the responsibility for Education back to parents, taking it away from the clergy. Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon and others understand the strategic importance of Education, and they did the best they could to reform the Education System, integrating Biblical faith into Education. Comenius founds modern pedagogy, laying the Educational principles that are still present today. All over Europe Christian schools arise, whose values enrich humanism and even catholic schools.

In the modern era, the Reformation drive arrives to America, through the Puritans; it influences all of the schools and the contents of education till the end of the 18th century. Generally, all of the western Education is basically Christian until Illuminism rises, and the consequent secularization. In nations touched by the Reformation, Christian Education, through ups and downs, keeps developing in schools and private universities, giving birth to institutes of great importance and founding a new educational genre. Sunday school is born, as an educational arm of the evangelical churches, that initially fights against illiteracy, and then works to spread and communicate the Gospel among children belonging to every social class. In Italy, a country marked by Counter-Reformation, and by the backwardness of the political regimes, the Catholicism control over Education is nearly complete until the Unification. Christian Education lives a spreading period starting from the Resurgence, due to the pedagogic effort of protestant influential people such as Guicciardini, Mayer, Calandrini, Rossetti, Sommani and others. In many cities in Piemonte and Tuscany, evangelical schools and important institutes (the "Comandi", the "Gould" to name a few) are opened, that carry out an important social, educational and pedagogic-didactic function, implementing innovative and state-of-the-art programmes, thus representing a pedagogy that "breaks" with traditional ways of teaching undertaken by the counter-reformed Catholicism and anticipating developments that only later the Italian pedagogic thought will reach. During the first decades of the 20th century, as the Fascist State and the Vatican move closer together, after WWI, this period ends (with Gentile's Reform, and the Concordat of 1929). WWII's post-war period, sees a great spread of evangelical communities around all of the Country, but, despite the Constitution that guarantees religious freedom, this liberty struggles with difficulty to establish itself in Education, both because of the state monopoly on Public Education, and because of an incomplete separation of church and state in the institutions.

Perspectives

The renewed interest for theology, the birth of centres of biblical formation and study, a new awareness of the wider implications of the Gospel, lead evangelicals of the last few decades to re-discover the importance of Christian education. The Bible is once again authoritative for its worldview, to form the educator's personal qualities, for his/her narratives and metaphors, for the educational models he/she proposes.

There's a general re-thinking of Education:

- of its principles: unity of knowledge (because it comes from God), a comprehensive education (both intellectual and moral), the clarity regarding the religious pre-suppositions (neutrality doesn't exist), the limits of Education (only God converts the heart);
- of the subjects involved: the parents as well as the educators, the subsidiary role of the State, a correct understanding of the child;
- of the matters involved: *laïcité* (which is not being non-confessional), the presence of the Bible in schools;
- of the viable goals: a re-newed leading role of parents in the school, creation of associations which influence Education and culture, foundation of evangelical education educational institutes.

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