

Rome 2004

'As It Were a Second Creation'

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It is a privilege for me to greet you today. We are grateful that you have been prepared to leave your family, your community, your work for more than a week to come to Rome. You have a wearisome journey behind you. Some of you have crossed half the world to take part in this Forum.

1. What we shall be dealing with in these days

What brings us together here? What will be the central issue during these days? Is it our congregation? Naturally the future of our congregation is of much concern to me and I hope that this Forum will give us a push in the right direction. And yet it is not the Society of Mary which is the major focus in these days. So what then bring us together here? Is it the Church? All of us, some as laypeople, others as religious, if not priests, are involved in the Church and concerned about the future of the Church. I hope that this Forum will benefit the Church. And yet it would not be good to view the Forum from a predominantly ecclesiastical perspective.

The student and God

Those who really are the focus are the students and God: the student as a unique being, created in God's image and called to share in the life of the Triune God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the life-giving Spirit. Of course this is aiming high, but it is the way our founder himself looked at education. Father Colin says it in the introduction to his instructions to the staff of the college in Belley and he says it in a sentence which sums up everything: "It is God's children that are entrusted to us, and so it is towards God that we have to turn their hearts by our constant efforts to provide them with sound rules for their

guidance and examples lived in a manner consonant with them”.¹ Education may have endless objectives - social, cultural and economic - for Colin, however, the ultimate objective is religious.

A second creation

The title of this address, ‘As it were a second creation’, comes from Father Colin. He finds education the most beautiful work granted to people. No other type of work is more worthy. No other type of work is so lofty. Why? “We contribute with God to forming a man, in a real way. When a man leaves the hands of his nurse, he is only sketched in rough. We must make him into a man, form his heart, his character, virtue, etc... That is what education does. Nothing is more lofty. You give him as it were a second creation”² ‘As it were a second creation.’ I thought of these words when I saw the illustration on the cover of the book by Marguerite Léna who is our guest this week. Her book, *Le Passage du témoin* (‘Handing on the Baton’), deals with education, teaching and evangelization. On the cover we see a photo of a child’s hand in that of an adult, a beautiful image of the security and trust which ought to typify any educational situation.³ Quite spontaneously this image recalls Michelangelo’s depiction of the creation in the Sistine chapel: the Creator who, in an image in which power and tenderness balance each other, extends his index finger to that of Adam and thus lets the human being share in His spirit and in His life. This image of a second creation speaks to me. It says that every child in this world is made originally in God’s own image and likeness. It is alive by the very life-breath of God, called to share in the fullness of God’s life as son or daughter of God, entitled by divine copyright to be treated with dignity and equality. The image of a second creation says also that this is not going to happen automatically, and that God’s creation in a certain sense depends on human partnership. God calls us to become partners in the realization of his creation and his kingdom.

¹ *Avis à m(essieu)rs les professeurs, préfets, directeurs et supérieur du petit séminaire de Belley. L’an 1829*, in François Drouilly, *Jean Claude Colin’s Instructions to the Staff of the Minor Seminary of Belley*, Rome 1990, p. 152.

² *A Founder Speaks. Spiritual Talks of Jean-Claude Colin*, selected and introduced by Jean Coste sm, Rome, 1975, doc. 13, 11.

³ Marguerite Léna, *Le passage du témoin. Eduquer, enseigner, évangéliser*, Paris 1999.

A working definition

The image of education as a second creation says finally that catholic education does not spotlight a specific segment of the person, but aims at the formation of the whole person: intellectual, physical, social, moral and religious, and it concerns the human person in his or her four key relationships: to self, to others, to nature, to God. If you would ask me to present my own working definition of education, I should say: At this Forum we deal with education as 'an integral and structured process of communication of knowledge, values and skills, which aims at forming the whole person in his or her ultimate destiny.' This is why we shall talk at this Forum - I refer to the subtitle of the book of Marguerite Léna - about the 'three E's': 'éducation' (upbringing), 'enseignement' (teaching) and 'évangélisation' (evangelization) in their mutual relationship.

Aiming too high?

I realize that this ideal of education as 'a second creation' is aiming high. Too high? Indeed, there is much to argue against it. To come down to earth, I mention a few aspects of the education context in various parts of the world. My intention is not to describe the reality of your schools, but to express solidarity with many educators who try to realize a lofty ideal under hard conditions.

- Creation is the opposite of conveyor belt work and serial production. Each creature is a first edition, is unique. But what do beautiful words such as 'creativity', 'personal approach' and 'respect for uniqueness' mean in the big schools of today? Simon Lee, vice-chancellor of Leeds Metropolitan University and a practicing Catholic, looks at his 41,000 students and thinks of Cardinal Newman, who wrote about what a university ought to be: 'an Alma Mater, who knows her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint or a treadmill'.⁴ Of course, our schools are of a size different from the University of Leeds. Still, the question remains: What happens to a creative and personal approach in a big school organization today?

- Creative education supposes an atmosphere of trust and security. But in many parts of the world the school as a safe haven is no longer an automatic assumption. In some European and American schools pupils have to be searched to see if they are carrying stilettos.⁵ Fortunately this

⁴ *The Tablet*, 6 December 2003, p. 8.

⁵ In January 2004, the newspapers reported that a student from the Terra College in The Hague had shot his vice-rector dead with a firearm

might not be typical of our educational environment. At the same time, one must ask: To what extent are our schools places which radiate security and confidence.

- God creates freely and unpaid. His ground personnel, however, cannot work without financial basis. Many parents cannot afford the second creation of a good education. In the poorer parts of the world there is often a vast gulf between expensive and high quality private schools on the one hand, and cheap but poor state schools on the other. I think that we all realize that good education should be accessible to all. Again, the question remains: What do our schools say about the dignity and equality of every human being created in God's image and likeness?

Caring for the soul

All these issues are real. Nevertheless, Simon Lee, whom I quoted earlier, does not arrive at the conclusion that he should give up everything. He calls for a new debate on what is most important in the whole issue of education and teaching: the soul. What education suffers from most is not primarily a shortage of money but a lack of soul. 'Universities need a soul!'⁶ It is interesting that the word 'soul' pops up here. Our founders lived in a time when this word was much used in the context of education. Now, after a long absence, I come across this word again. Thomas Groome, in his contribution to the Dublin conference on 'Imagining the Catholic School', sees the 'soul' in the original sense of the word as the principle of life which under-girds the whole person. He refers to Plato, who defined education as turning the soul towards the true, the good and the beautiful. If it is true that all education is about the soul, how much more true is it of Christian education.⁷ That is truly what our founders wanted: inspired teachers with a passion for the soul of their students, as the carrier of their ultimate divine destiny. They were not content with anything less. Marcellin Champagnat put it succinctly in his profile of a brother as reported by Brother Jean-Baptiste: 'A Brother is the cooperator of God and the associate of Jesus Christ in the holy mission to save souls'. Jean-Claude Colin puts it as follows: 'It should not escape teachers that in the education of boys divine Providence offers them very many occasions and innumerable means to promote the glory of God and the

⁶ Simon Lee, *Universities need a soul!*, in *The Tablet*, 6 December 2003.

⁷ Thomas Groome, *Forging in the Smithy of the Teacher's Soul: The best hope for Irish education*, in: *Re-imagining the Catholic School*, edited by Ned Prendergast & Luke Monahan, Dublin 2003, p. 35-45.

salvation of souls'.⁸ Moreover, what is at stake in education is not only the soul of the students, but also the soul of the teacher. Education is truly working in the 'smithy of the soul', the smithy of the soul of the student, but even more so of the teacher, as Thomas Groome underlines.⁹ Education means caring for the soul. Anyone who does not agree with this would do better to spend his time elsewhere in Rome – the Forum Romanum, for example – rather than here at our Forum on education.

2. How we arrived at this Forum

It is time for me to come closer to the point and say something about how we arrived at this Forum. You have been invited by the administration of the Marist Fathers. This administration was elected by the general chapter of 2001. What does a superior general and his assistants do once all the letters of congratulation have been answered? You begin to reflect and hold brain-stormings with regard to the job. What emphases will you set? What are to be the priorities? What objectives are you to promote? Or where rather shall you put on the brakes? What problems must be tackled first? Fortunately in such debates you don't have to start from scratch. There are the constitutions of the congregation, the recommendations from general chapters, the signals you receive from the congregation and, of course, your own convictions. On the basis of all these, you set to work.

Beacons

The constitutions of our congregation are clear. When, in 1872, Colin, by then over 80 years of age, sets out how Marists can promote the well-being of their neighbors. He puts education in a prominent role. That is no old man's whim. 50 years earlier, in the letter from Courville and the Colin brothers dated 25 January 1822 and addressed to Pius VII we see that for them education is one of the most important means of realizing the objectives of the congregation.¹⁰ At the time, Champagnat had already started founding the Marist teaching brothers and had already spent five years training young brothers and setting up

⁸ *Constitutions of the Society of Mary 1872*, Latin Text with English translation, Rome 1992, nr. 464.

⁹ Thomas Groome takes this image from James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Cf. Groome, *Forging in the Smithy*, p. 35.

¹⁰ J. Coste sm - G. Lessard sm (eds.), *Origines Maristes (1786-1836)*, Vol. I, doc. 69 n. 262-264

schools in the area around La Valla. Education was his charisma and his life's passion. Jean Claude Colin, too, was a talented educator and he gave education a very prominent place in our constitutions.¹¹ Our new constitutions presented to the chapter of 1985 are careful to keep the congregation following the same path.¹² Nevertheless education received little attention at that same chapter of 1985. In the statement on 'The Mission of the Society' there was only a discussion in very general terms with regard to evangelization among young people in the countries of the Third World.¹³ The chapter of 1993 limited itself to a somewhat obligatory reference to the constitutions and said that we should devote ourselves to all forms of education, especially among the young.¹⁴ The recommendations in the statement 'The Mission of the Society' from the 2001 chapter are stronger. What the chapter gave was not a cry, but still, it broke through the silence surrounding everything to do with education. It encouraged Marists to go on with their education work and to look for new ways of carrying out their educational vocation.¹⁵

John Paul II

In September 2001 all four Marist congregations held their chapter in Rome. On 17 September they were received by John Paul II in Castel Gandolfo where the Pope had a clear message for them:¹⁶

"Keep the missionary tradition of your family alive! Do this with Mary, for she leads you to be particularly attentive to the distress of the people of our times, of those who in our modern societies are deprived of dignity, recognition and love. The Church has special need of you in an area essential for the Marist Family: the education of children and young people. This missionary priority is rooted in the spirit of Mary, mother and teacher of Jesus at Nazareth, and later in the first Christian community. The world of education is difficult and demanding, ceaselessly needing

¹¹ *Constitutions of the Society of Mary*, Latin text in conformity with the text approved by the general chapter of 1872, with English translation, Rome, 1992, nr. 5, p. 7; 'The Education of Boys in Colleges', single article, included at the end of the constitutions book, *ibid.*, nrs. 451-465.

¹² *Constitutions of the Society of Mary*, Rome 1988, nr. 13, p.7f.

¹³ 'The Mission of the Society of Mary', nr. 22, in *Decreta Capitularia of the Society of Mary 1985*.

¹⁴ *1993 General Chapter, Statements and Decisions*, nr. 37d.

¹⁵ 'Declaration on the Mission at the Beginning of the 21st Century', in *2001 General Chapter, Statements and Decisions*, especially nrs. 18 and 23.

¹⁶ Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, Bolletino N. 0501-17.09.2001.

educators to be adaptable to the young and to their new expectations. Do not let yourselves become discouraged by the difficulties of the moment, such as a person's age which seemingly creates a distance between you and the young, or the lack of means or availability of laborers to go and work in the vineyard! Look at the young, instead, with the eyes of the Good Shepherd, as he looked upon the crowds that seemed like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mat 9:36), and also as a field growing ripe for the harvest and which will bear fruit at the desired time! (cf. John 4:35-38). Likewise form lay people to work with you so that they will live that charism which gives you life. By your existence, furthermore, you are called to bring young people to discover the joy there is in following Christ in the consecrated life. Do not be afraid to invite young people in search of truth to this way of life."

A voice crying in the wilderness?

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness' was one confrere's comment on this section of the papal address at the end of the audience, as we were standing in the piazza at Castel Gandolfo. At first sight it would seem that this confrere was right. Indeed, no one would claim that the educational landscape of our congregation is in full bloom at this present moment.

- Only a small number of confreres of the older provinces, where education once occupied a central place, are still working in schools today. In most provinces the average age is so high that any reversal of the trend in the foreseeable future is unlikely.
- Younger Marists often feel more attracted to pastoral and social ministries rather than teaching and education.
- Moreover, especially in circles of religious, since the 1960s, a sort of allergy to anything to do with 'institutions' has set in, and that has encouraged the exit from institutional education.
- Many people, especially in the western world, feel that religious, or in any case priest-religious, should leave education to the laity and devote themselves to pastoral or more 'spiritual' tasks.
- In some parts of the Third World confreres look at education with scepticism, because private institutes of education would promote the forming of a social elite.

In short, there are any number of reasons for doing what we have done: to let the issue of education rest. Every Marist has his own experiences, but I think I can sum up the feeling among many Marists when I say: 'Marist Fathers and education? That was a great book, but it is finished!'

Other signals

And yet there are other signals. I encounter them as I look around our congregation, and they echo in the reports by Luke Monahan and Martin Daly from the *Marino Institute of Education* in Dublin whom we asked to assess the situation with regard to education in and around our congregation by means of a quantitative assessment and a qualitative study.

- More than 70% of the fathers and brothers of our Congregation who participated in the survey, strongly agree with the statement that education is one of the best means of achieving the objectives of our congregation.
- There are provinces which – albeit on a limited scale – invest personnel in teaching and education. I think of Boston, Atlanta, Mexico, Peru-Venezuela, Oceania, but also of Italy, Spain and Ireland and to a really small extent also some other provinces.
- In some places Marists were able, in a creative way, to start off new educational projects which fall outside the framework of the classic school, for example the Rural Training Centre in Makira in the Solomon Islands.
- On the more individual level there are still Marists working in secondary and tertiary education: as lecturers, school presidents, professors or student chaplains.
- There are units, like the district of Africa, where younger confreres show clear signs of an interest in education. In Peru-Venezuela the pastoral plan includes a community in Callao with an explicit concern for educational work.
- With a view to supporting the Trust boards of some three colleges, the province of New Zealand has established a new community for youth work and education in Wellington.
- In older provinces where Marists have handed over their schools, lay people are wondering how they can continue to work based on the motivation and inspiration of the Marist tradition. In France an association, *Maristes en Education*, has been set up with members in six French high schools with more than 10,000 students. They hope to find inspiration for their work within the Marist educational tradition. In 2002, the Irish province endorsed its three schools through the *Marist Education Authority*, which is also looking for creative ways of keeping alive ‘the Marist ethos’, an expression current in the Anglophone world, which refers to the basic human and Gospel values as Marists try to realize them in their educational ministry. In New Zealand, the discussion with regard to the relationship between the congregation and the three schools for which it still has responsibility is in full flow. In Australia the *Association of Marist*

Schools of Australia has been set up to support the staff of schools of Marist sisters, brothers and priests.

Balance and conclusion

In our administration we have drawn a cautious conclusion:

- that our founders, our old and new constitutions, our recent chapter and the Pope call on us with insistence to keep education on the agenda;
- that a notable number of confreres still cherish education;
- that educational activities, as a percentage of our total apostolic works, have decreased drastically over the last forty years;
- that there are still a number of places where, as the 2001 chapter said, Marists are working professionally and successfully in teaching and education;
- that we have examples of teaching and education that cover more than what is called 'the classic school';
- that various lay people working in schools established by Marists have a concern for what we refer to as the 'Marist ethos';
- that the book of 'Marist Fathers and education' is not yet finished.

In such a situation, there is little point in making a statement or issuing a directive with regard to 'Marists and education' from behind our desk. The situation is too complex and too ambiguous for that. We need a fundamental reflection, above all with people who can help us: confreres with experience in education, experts from other congregations and laypeople. To resume my expectations: I hope that this Forum:

- will help us to understand better why our founders considered education to be so important;
- will provide us with a sharper insight into what is going on in the field of education at this time;
- will encourage the fathers and brothers of our congregation to engage in educational ministries;
- will stimulate all of us to study new models of education, especially of the poor;
- will inspire lay educators to apply Marist educational values in the schools that were started off by our congregation.

3. Renewed dialogue with regard to education

The situation now is not rosy, but offers sufficient points of departure for a renewed dialogue with regard to education. That is my

opinion and the opinion of my council. In order to offer a few opening moves in this dialogue I should like to have a look at some objections that are often raised to a fresh commitment to education. This third and last paragraph of my address is, of course, not intended to close the discussion but rather to open it.

We do not have the people!

One initial problem counts heavily. Where, today, can the Society find the people necessary to do anything worthwhile in the field of education? Our congregation is struggling with decline and ageing. Here I have four remarks to make. First of all, I believe that our efforts are not only determined by numbers but also by priorities. Secondly, having said this I am very much aware that we have to work within the possibilities that are available. Thirdly, that we have no Marists available is not true throughout the Society and not to the same extent everywhere. Therefore I should not like us in this Forum to talk mainly about passing the baton to laity. There are regions where young Marists are trained and where young people are in training. Many of them have a warm affection for education. They want to make their own contribution to the local Churches in Oceania, Africa, Peru-Venezuela and Brazil, for instance in education. And finally, with regard to the Marists in the western part of the world we also have to ask the question: what is the reason that our congregation fails to attract new members? Has it something to do with a lack of a specific color, of a specific profile? What makes Marists different from diocesan priests? A qualified interest in educational matters could contribute to sharpening our profile.

Our parishes are desperately short of priests!

Many people in our day feel that priest-religious render the best service to the local churches by working in parishes. I would be the last to underestimate the importance of parish work. Many Marists work in parishes, which are centers of sacramental ministry and of pastoral care. They can also be centers of a missionary dynamic, although many parishes tend to develop a centripetal rather than a centrifugal dynamic. But schools, universities and other educational projects can have their own missionary dynamic. They have a different sort of impact on society and on individuals. They are deeply entwined in the whole social and cultural network of society and focus on the formation of the whole person: intellectual, social, moral, religious, connecting the

various aspects with one another. They aim at forming the whole person being in a crucial phase of his or her life. Education therefore has a specific missionary dynamic. Marguerite Léna emphasizes this in the foreword to her book, *Le passage du témoin*: 'To educate, to teach, to evangelize are to the Christian understanding three inseparable activities which always interact and fertilize each other'.¹⁷

We should shift the emphasis from working in education to working with the poor.

I sometime hear confreres, especially those working in the countries of the Third World, but also elsewhere, saying that we should shift the emphasis from working in education to working with the poor. They say that many schools run by religious in poor countries promote forming a social elite. I don't want this serious question to be disposed of in a few words. Religious congregations with a vast educational experience, like the Jesuits and the Marist Brothers, are involved in a serious restructuring of their education practice in the light of an increasing awareness of the social role of their educational institutions.¹⁸ Whatever the case, the intention cannot be to play off social commitment and education against one another. Father Kolvenbach sj demonstrates time and again how education and social commitment assume each other and call on each other. Ignatian pedagogy today of necessity contains a social component. The service of faith cannot be accomplished without fighting social injustice. Social injustice in its turn has not only economic, social and political causes, but ultimately very powerful spiritual and moral roots.¹⁹ What makes for really lasting changes in our world is the conversion of minds and hearts. Social action alone is not sufficient, neither do knowledge and technical skills automatically lead to social responsibility. For that more is needed: education. In a society in which it has become almost natural not to become involved it is of fundamental importance that there

¹⁷ Léna, *Le passage du témoin*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. Gabriel Codina sj, *A Century of Jesuit Education*, in: *Jesuits. Yearbook of the Society of Jesus 2000*, p. 60, and Jeff Crowe fms, *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat* (in this volume).

¹⁹ Cf Peter-Hans Kolvenbach sj, *The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education*, in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 31, 1 (January 2001), 13-29; *La pédagogie de la Compagnie de Jésus*, in Gabriel Codina sj [ed.], *Eduquer aujourd'hui et demain selon la pédagogie des Jésuites* (1993), Rome s.d. p. 171-186.

should be such a thing as education to that which is not natural: a culture of responsibility, a sense of solidarity, a passion for that which unites people and binds them together for all time.²⁰

We mustn't go back to the institutions of the past!

Finally, I want to say a word about a fourth objection to a renewed educational commitment. 'We mustn't go back to the institutions of the past!' Such a statement is loaded with all kind of experiences and emotions. I should just like to say this. In the Sixties the word 'institution' has more or less become the screen on which we project everything we do not want to be: big, powerful, impersonal, bureaucratic. I should be the last to deny that the criticism of institutions in the Sixties and thereafter in many ways was salutary. I also am most interested in experiments of what is often called 'non formal education', experiments especially in the service of people most in need, projects which flourish alongside the traditional institutions. 'Institutions', however, are not the devil incarnate. In society and in the Church we need institutions, or at least certain elements of institutions. They protect our good intentions and our generosity from becoming victims of the subjective, at times somewhat romantic preferences of individuals, communities and superiors. They ensure a minimum of continuity, stability and trustworthiness with regard to the things we take on. They ensure that we have a certain visibility in the Church and in society and as a result also a certain impact on what is happening around us. Therefore I have some difficulty when I hear people saying: education, well and good, but not in an institution. I cannot help quoting Brother Jeff Crowe, a confrere with years of experience in education and administration, when he states that the anti-institutional rhetoric of the Sixties in many aspects has proved empty, and that experience has shown that even in a secularized society schools which are rooted in a true tradition of faith still have an impact on students, no matter their background.²¹

Conclusion

I have tried to put into words what we, in the long run, are dealing with in this Forum: children and young people who are entrusted to

²⁰ François-Xavier Dumortier sj, *Les grandes orientations actuelles de la Compagnie de Jésus*, in *Tradition jésuite. Enseignement, spiritualité, mission*, Namur 2002, p. 173.

²¹ Crowe, *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat*.

educators as though for a second creation. I have tried to explain why we organized this Forum. I hope it is also clear that I do not take part in this Forum as an impartial and neutral observer. I have indicated why I believe that the story of Marists and education is not ended and why people who do believe that this is the case have got things wrong. I hope that in the course of these days you will tell us how you look at these things, based on what motivates you and what you bring of your experience. Above all, I hope that you will reflect with us on the content of the next chapter of the story of Marists and education. I wish you all a Forum that warms our heart, illuminates our mind and stimulates our energy.