

## FORUM FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGION AND CULTURE „MODERN PERSON AND MODERN SCHOOL”

*(Lovran [Croatia], 26-27 March 2010)*

The Slovenian Interdiocesan Culture Committee under the wings of the Slovenian Episcopal Conference organizes a forum for dialogue between religion and culture every year in Lovran in Croatia. This year the meeting took place on 26 and 27 March 2010 with the title: What share of a person is in a modern school? Chosen representatives from Slovenia, Croatia, Poland and Italy gave the Forum an international importance and higher quality and therefore a wide response in general public.

The Forum was formally opened by Prof. Dr. Anton Jamnik, Bishop of Ljubljana, with the lecture: Neoliberalism on the school threshold. This was followed by other renowned speakers: Prof. Dr. Robi Kroflič (Plural school and the search for meaning), Prof. Dr. Barica Marentič Požarnik (Can a school be human and successful at the same time?), Prof. Dr. Tomaž Pisanski (To Measure of not to measure, that is the question), Prof. Dr. Alenka Šverc (School, family and young people), Prof. Dr. Tadej Vidmar (School as a catalyst for social frustrations). The contribution made by Prof. Dr. Józef Stala and Prof. Dr. Elżbieta Osewska was especially valuable. She stressed the importance of the early initial spiritual formation for the integral child's future development. She also underlined the necessity of clarifying the importance of context in specifying the appropriateness and efficacy of various modes of teaching Religious Education in various countries in Europe. Yet in every country religion is the part of the culture and as such has to be a part of school education without any prejudice. Well planned and organized Religious Education in school leads children and young people into an exploration of the different aspects of religion, culture, society, tradition and helps in thoughtful reflection upon religious belief. Lack of basic knowledge about religion, especially Christianity in Europe gives as a result lack of understanding European history and culture.

Profound thoughts of the chosen speakers were an introduction into a lively, controversial, intellectual and provocative discussion which motivated almost all forty participants of this year's meeting.

For Dr. Jamnik, bishop of Ljubljana, started his speech with the question how to make school today more personal and creative. Populist and permissive education is indeed more attractive for young people. However, it leads a young person into apathy and indifference, which is contrary to the development of an independent personality who thinks with one's own brain and defends basic values of existence. The western society today is facing the crisis of values reflected in the increasing individualism, subjectivism and moral relativism.

- Therefore, religious education is vital in secondary schools.
- Students should obtain basic classical education which leads a person into the realism of life questions.
- Art should be given a more prominent place as it speaks of the mystery of human existence which can never be completely controlled.
- Volunteering and social relationship fostering should be encouraged systematically.
- Qualitative education needs to assured. The quantity of knowledge does not suffice. In the process of education a person should be changed by the knowledge.
- Education for common good is vital today.

Dr. Šverc has pointed out that young people are best understood by consumer industries, which has a vision with money. That vision works on the basis of competition which has the result as its last criterion. How should young people be addressed in order to do something good for themselves and others? Young people today are emotionally illiterate. Everything happens on the level of ever stronger impulses unfortunately not leading to reflection. All this is not source to mental but also integral cultural discomfort. Taking a deep insight we could see that the main problem is not young people but WE because we are not ready to change. Adults are the first who use external power, the logic of competition and rivalry and utilitarian culture which kills motivation. If we really want to make school more human, it will not be based solely on the contract system, but also on mutual trust, which is a general and fundamental challenge of the modern society.

Dr. Kroflič highlighted the importance of meaning. It is a necessary dimension of human identity without which a person cannot live. Therefore, education must work on meaning. School has three global goals: socialization, education in terms of knowledge and education in terms of moral education. This brings us to even more questions: what is the relationship between socialization, education in terms of knowledge and education in terms of moral education? Should we give priority to objective interpretations or personal approaches? Should we encourage free choices or civilization values which enable survival and community life? Should personal development be privileged on account of community development such as family, nation, class, Church? Should we defend the principle priority of distributive social justice or should each person be recognized in one's own individuality? Definitely, in the pedagogical area three registers are being used, namely knowledge or skill, ethics and personal engagement. The final one is of vital importance.

Dr. Požarnik pointed out the relevance of direct and indirect factors of academic performance. Direct factors are the following: characteristics of learners, class atmosphere, home circumstances; indirect factors are curricular planning and carrying out lessons, school elements and school policy. All these factors are present in the socially-economic, cultural and religious system of a particular state. Interestingly, the meta-analysis has shown that the

direct factors have a relatively stronger impact in comparison with the indirect ones, academic performance being expressed in the form of the knowledge test results. However, the hidden-curriculum should not be overlooked in this matter. The teacher might e. g. stress that the student should study from the text books trying to understand the meaning. However, the student remains with their notes and learn them by heart, which is only surface type of learning. They know from experience that the questions in the test will be focused on what is in their notes and that heart learnt answers will be appreciated.

Dr. Pisanski raised the issue of science and conscience underlining that education combined with example is best. The teacher is due to the students and not vice versa. Dr. Vidmar presented school as the ideal scapegoat – because much is being expected from it. At the same time, school is under great pressure these times from both parents and the wider society.

It is encouraging that the last two decades have seen much attention being devoted to education and training of adults. The focus has moved from the formal, institutionalized education towards the informal education. At the end of 20 century, experts started to define knowledge as occasionally gained and having impact on the development and changes of the personality. In this time a notable shift has been made from formal studying towards learning (tudi premik obravnave od izobraževanja proti učenju). The growing interest in learning, although in short clusters at times, experiential and out of the class of a formal institution has been recognized as the concept of the lifelong learning. Furthermore, it should be noted that individual components of lifelong learning may be identified in all life periods. Today, four fundamental pillars supporting the very concept are known:

1. Learn to know.
2. Learn to know how to work.
3. Learn to know how to live in a community.
4. Learn how to be.

At the beginning of 21 century, more precise definition of lifelong learning and the recommendations was formed by the European Union<sup>35</sup>. Here, two most urgent tasks are presented: encouraging active citizenship and employability. Unfortunately, the definitions and goals do not cover lifelong learning in the function of personality development and personal growth.

The term forum for dialogue and culture, under which this year international consideration about school and education took place, is on one hand very general and unspecific; on the other it expresses a lively happening and relationship. That forum has no origin in the uncritical rejection of the modern society or at least its most visible pragmatism oriented layers. On the contrary, it has grown out of the belief that open space should be maintained also for the reflection of the vertical dimension of a person and its meaning

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<sup>35</sup> *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000)*. Brussels: Comission of European Communities, p. 5.

for the culture. Opening the space in such a way, the forum recognizes three layers rejecting them consciously: intellectualism (academically correct and intellectually clear discussion which bears only theoretical fruits), topicalism (close following of sociological patterns or even current politics) and activism (the belief that solely activity is important, not the results). Dialogue between religion and culture has a significant history. In the European culture, the dialogue should be maintained especially between Christianity and the secular culture. The forum being regularly attended by at least one bishop, who gathers the participants around the table of the Word of God and Bread and together with other priests celebrates holy mass, gives the whole reflection another meaning and mission.

Culture is remaining the place of dialogue addressing each person, opening them finding the seeds of God in them. Religion, on the other hand, gives meaning, which originates in the human attitude to the transcendence, God. Religion is not a social project like politics; rather, it is an expression of human attitude to the Transcendence. As such, it defines human personal attitude to the other, but it does not require the same treatment from them. It remains on the level of a suggestion, invitation and witness as much as they as Christians live credibly from their own faith.

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