

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PUERTO RICO

I. What is Education?

Education is founded on the facts of human life. From these facts, let us select three outstanding ones.

1. The educability of the human mind. The children of each generation are not all born on the same day, every thirty years, but they are born "little savages," and with a mental disposition toward civilization by education. Just as the generations of mankind overlap, so the status of education of humanity, in any moment of its history, is not equal in every individual. This obliges educators to a continuous and everlasting action in order to maintain a progressive level of civilization.
2. The progressive and cumulative character of culture. At the birth of a child, culture goes back with him to its beginning, but at the death of each great culturebuilder, he always leaves his world more advanced than what he found it. This effort of individuals, generations, and epochs is accumulated in history and transmitted through education to society.
3. The rationality of human behavior. In spite of Rudolf Otto, Paul Sartre, Freud, and other apostles of the irrational, the human being continue to be a rational animal. Of course, this rationality is not only conditioned by circumstances, but it is also limited by education.

The vital ideas are those acquired very early in life. They are integrated with other forces of human life to form the spiritual complex which we call Ego, person, character,

or conscience. To change or modify this character in a more desirable direction is the eternal and highest aim of education.

Christian education is based on the same facts which have just been pointed out. In the first years of life, preferably before passing through adolescence, the Church should place its youth in possession of the basic ideas of Christianity, and ought to have interested youth in the story of Jesus. Revelation of Christian truth is total and complete, but nevertheless human beings are slowly and progressively approaching its discovery and being transformed by its power. This makes Christian education a constant and progressive need of the Church.

A contemporary philosopher has classified knowledge in three categories: (a) For mastery, (b) For culture, and (c) For salvation. Knowledge for mastery refers to things and their utility. Knowledge for culture refers to the progress of humanity in history. Knowledge for salvation pertains to the ultimate destiny of the human being, humanity, and creation. Knowledge for salvation, once acquired, cannot cease to affect and even determine the attitude of the individual toward the other two categories of knowledge. This offers us a point of view through which we can appreciate the far-reaching effect of Christian education and its curriculum.

II. How are we educating now in Puerto Rico?

The evangelicals in Puerto Rico number now some 100,000. Fifty-per cent of these belong to the Baptist, Disciples of

Christ, Congregationalist, United Brethren, the Christian Church, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Christian Alliance denominations which at present form the Association of Evangelical Churches of Puerto Rico. The rest belong to the Lutheran, Episcopal, Adventist, Pentecostal, and other minor groups. The rest of the population is nominally Roman Catholic although in reality the vast majority are free-thinkers and spiritualists.

What are we, the Evangelicals, doing to educate our constituency and our youth?

1. We preach the Gospel

In pulpits

In out-door meetings

In the Christian newspapers

On the radio.

2. We give Bible studies

In Sunday School

In the classes for candidates

In the Mid-Week Prayer Service

In the Evangelical press

Over the radio.

3. We are teaching ideals and attitudes

Through the united work of the Association, the Young People's organizations, organizations of women and of men, and through interchange among denominations.

Through the cooperation with government agencies.

Through the Summer Camps of the Association and of the individual denominations.

4. We maintain a series of institutions for public service

Seminaries, schools and colleges

Hospitals

Work and Service projects

Rural centers.

What materials are we using?

Almost universally the International Sunday School lessons are used. Some churches use graded lessons or the Spanish-American ones. There is a little of audio-visual aids, and this is becoming increasingly popular.

What personnel are we using?

There is sufficient personnel among the church volunteers for this work, but these people are very unequal in preparation and ability.

III. How can we improve in the future?

1. Improving our materials for teaching in content as well as in method.
2. Finishing and using the Spanish-American courses which were planned in the Conference of Buenos Aires in 1949.
3. Recruiting and preparing teachers.
4. Improving the teaching plants.
5. Improving Summer Camps, using the Work Projects more, strengthening Christian unity through the united organizations and their projects.
6. Developing further and extending the influence of the Evangelical Seminary of Río Piedras, private schools, Missionary Training Schools, colleges, especially the Polytechnic Institute of San Germán.

7. Strengthening the united effort through the Association of Evangelical Churches and its agencies. Taking advantage, through the Association, of every help available from other organizations abroad.