

Selection from Chapter 13. The Movement's Educational Vision

The Word of scripture & tutorías in the schools, pp. 251-254

Besides academic excellence, then, there is a deeper aim to be achieved in and through all the activities and all the growth that the academic and other goals of a school imply. It is an aim that can be summarized, but not adequately described, by the word 'evangelization', that is the bringing of the 'good news' of Christ to our fellow human beings in ways that they can understand and assimilate. José Manuel himself expressed in simple and compelling terms his own experience and his desire to share it with others:

At a time when nothing seemed to make sense to me, a Benedictine monk handed me the Sacred Scriptures and taught me to read them in such a way that it seemed as though Jesus Christ himself was revealing himself to me, risen and alive, shedding light on my life and filling it with meaning.ⁱ

Having received that gift he wanted to share it and, when he was faced with a class of largely unwilling and uninterested eighteen year-olds, he saw at once that what they needed was what he had himself received:

All I did with them was to take the Bible and set about discovering how the Word of God speaks to each one individually. Their response was remarkable. We soon became filled with ideals. We wanted to do things, change the world. We became very good friends. We decided to organize ourselves and we called ourselves the Manquehue Apostolic Movement.

It was thus that, when a potentially hostile confrontation was converted into a shared experience, it began to take shape as an educational program. It developed rapidly. This rapid growth was due partly to José Manuel's genius for friendship. It was also partly due to the fact that among the young with whom he was dealing he was faced by those same crying needs from which he had himself suffered so recently. They are, in fact, the crying needs of the young at all times. Sometimes these needs are suppressed. Sometimes they break out in violent ways. Sometimes they are diverted into the pursuit of false ideals. Always they are there.

It was to lead the young to the Christian response to these needs that the Movement started their schools. As they sought in this way to pass on what they had received they gradually discovered something new. When the original group gathered round their teacher, they were drawn together and led onwards in their work by a strong experience that led to the creation of a special instrument of the Movement, which they called *tutorías*. One of them remembers the early days:

We felt that we simply had to be with the children and tell them about our experience of Jesus Christ. A very special relationship began to grow up between a number of the older students and the younger ones. They helped train the younger sports teams, helped them with their studies or simply played with them in their free time. We began to discover how this special relationship, which we began to call *tutoría*, was in fact a precious vehicle for talking to children about this living God that had so much to do with their lives and all that was happening to them, who spoke to them through his Word and who heard their prayers.

It was in this way that at a very early stage, the whole concept of *tutoría* taken shape. It is the second vital element, after sharing through *lectio* the Word of God in scripture, in the educational theory and practice of the Movement. *Tutoría* is, in fact, so important to the

Manquehue educational vision that José Manuel has described it as ‘the soul’ of his schools so that without it their “whole educational project would fall apart”. It is a unique feature since most of the tutors are still students (at school or university). They are not qualified educators in the ordinary secular sense of having a degree or other official academic certificate, although some of them have that sort of qualification. Their qualification for this work comes from their complete commitment to Christ through baptism, the sacraments and the daily practice of *lectio* in the Movement and the Movement is responsible for and guides their performance. This concept and how it worked out is so important that we must spend a little more time on it.

The word of scripture is the primary source book for *tutorías*. It is always available. Everyone in a Manquehue school has his or her own Bible. In *tutorías* they learn how to use it and listen to it. José Manuel explains:

Simply reading the Word is not good enough. What is needed is for the Word to be brought home to each person. We must remember what the Ethiopian eunuch in the Acts said to Philip: ‘How can I understand, if I have no one to guide me?’ⁱⁱ This is where the tutors come in. They must play Philip to the children. A tutor might be a senior student, an alumnus (former pupil of the school) or one of the younger members of the Manquehue Movement who is assigned to a specific group of children with whom he or she over the course of time builds up a strong personal relationship. This enables him or her to take a real interest in the children’s well-being and how they are getting on at school and at home with a love that ensures that no child gets lost in a crowd.

Elsewhere José Manuel describes this as ‘rescuing a young person from anonymity’. Right from the beginning each child in the Manquehue schools is affirmed and saved by his tutor from feeling 'out of it'. This can achieve something of great and lasting significance. It is a way of evangelization enabling the child to identify with the mission of the School and of the laity within the school and in the Church – precisely as laity. This encourages the development of self-confidence, because self-confidence cannot grow in the vacuum of isolated self but only in the context of acceptance by others through love. The tutors themselves have experience of that context of love, just as the older children of a family do if it is founded on love. As younger members of the Movement every tutor has already been on the receiving end of *tutoría*. Thus, when they volunteer to be tutors, they know well the needs they have themselves at an earlier stage experienced. Now it is their job to care personally for the younger children, to 'rescue them from anonymity' and 'reveal a living God' to them through the word of scripture, a God who speaks to them in the word of scripture and is at work in their everyday lives.

The young tutors, of course, work under the guidance and supervision of one of the Oblates, but that is in the background. It is important that a tutor is seen to be a real young person and not just an agent of adults. That makes the tutor one with whom small children can identify as an individual, so as to rescue the young not only from the spiritual neglect of anonymity but also from the domination of 'peer groups' or 'gangs'. A tutor can come to have an enormous influence in the life and faith of a younger boy or girl. Few adults are as credible in the eyes of an eight or ten year old as is an older student of sixteen or eighteen. Once the relationship is established it is not only in the weekly period that the tutors work with the pupils. They join and help them in many other activities, such as sport, outdoor activities etc. They help them to celebrate important events like birthdays. They become a constant support and inspiration to the younger pupil.

It may seem dangerous to let the young lead the young in this way, but it is important not to be unrealistic. The ordinary fact of life in western schools, as every parent discovers, is that the young are anyway led by the young through peer-group pressures and the teenage culture. The

way of *tutorías* within the Movement is realistic in accepting this fact and providing an 'escape route' of real spiritual depth. It is effective in rescuing many from the worst effects of a spiritually empty common culture of peer-group domination.

The time comes, however, when the young children must move on.

The weekly *tutoría* periods end when the children reach the age of fifteen. At this point the students can opt to join a shared *lectio* group run by the Manquehue Movement. These groups of between six and twelve people meet once a week, out of school hours, and currently just over half of the fifteen to eighteen year olds in our schools belong to a *lectio* group. It is important to mention that these *lectio* groups are not just something for the students. There are *lectio* groups made up of parents, teachers and maintenance staff as well. In their weekly meetings the students proclaim the Word and share with each other or pray out loud what God is saying to them. Each group is headed by a slightly older member of the Manquehue Movement. In school the whole tone of *tutoría* changes from about this age on. The relationship between the tutors and children gradually gives way to the provision of spiritual companionship for as many of the senior students who want it.ⁱⁱⁱ

Spiritual companionship arises naturally from shared *lectio divina* and from the weekly welcome of each other by the members of the community. It is closely related to the personal affirmation of each other, which in the Movement is called *acogida* and is quite simply an expression of the call to see Christ in each other which comes from the gospel^{iv} and is strongly repeated in St Benedict's Rule^v. Since all are following the same way they share their experience with the word and this is the foundation of their community. This sharing brings encouragement and confidence through which in Christ they rescue each other from the spiritual isolation and the loneliness that can be so profoundly threatening at this age. They are now growing into the way of life of the Movement under the guidance of the gospel and the Rule. The Movement through *lectio*, *acogida*, *tutorías*, spiritual companionship and the mutual support of the meditation communities has been doing nothing more than passing on to the young the teaching of Peter to the first generation of Christians:

Love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.