

Book Reviews

Education for Life: Proposal for Difficult Times, by Jorge Mario Bergoglio, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2014, 123 pages, \$ 12.95, ISBN: 978-1-58617-890-1.

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Education for Choosing Life: Proposal for Difficult Times is a compilation of reflections by Pope Francis, while he was cardinal of Buenos Aires, addressed to educators of Argentina who were faced with particular social, economic and political problems. Though the series of messages are directed to a particular place, yet the relevance of these are equally pertinent to educators worldwide. Pope Francis exhorts the teachers to go back to the roots and ask them to fix their eyes on the values of people and to renew their confidence in the true richness of the heritage and commit themselves to the task of education. This book is a passionate call to every educator to meditate on the task of accompanying children and young people in their process of maturation. The purpose and mission of the educator is to form the individuals to be useful to society and to make them agents of its transformation.

The three chapters explain the three key messages of this book. Chapter 1 entitled "Being Creative, for an Active Hope" shows that teaching is an act of hope and the indispensable component and attribute of an active hope is creativity. To act creatively implies to take into serious account *what there is* in all its concreteness, and to find the way by which something new can be made manifest. It needs memory and discernment, equanimity and justice, prudence and strength. The author mentions the example of Manuel Belgrano an Argentine creative revolutionary, who gave centrality to the dignity of the human person, how to go about laying firm foundations which focus on cultivating souls in an enterprise of historic creation. The Pope emphatically states that the essential mission of every educator is to commit totally to inclusion based on a well defined standard: fraternal solidarity and generosity. To do so creatively, one must continually develop the capacities, polish the tools, deepen the knowledge and look beyond what one sees by employing most appropriate and valuable means. In order to accomplish this the educators are asked to speak the truth always, align with the value of fraternal solidarity, look for the best in schools and incessantly build up capabilities and propose concrete models for life to the students.

The message communicated in the second chapter “With Courage, among us All, a Country that Educates” is to be a country that educates students. It requires reconstruction of community by putting in the forefront ends, desires and ideals, and to find new and effective ways of orienting our actions towards these ends, desires and ideals articulating efforts and generalizing realities which permit the coherent and shared participation in the journey forward. The author affirms that any project that does not put education in a priority position is of no use. The educator’s duty is not just to make functional citizens, cogs in the big machine industry but to educate the young who will transform the society and the world at large. Educators guided by wisdom and love need to seek the education of the intelligence and of the will and prepare children and young people to make practical choices in their life based on strong ethical principles. It is a huge challenge and responsibility for the teachers. Pope Francis expresses his concern when he categorically states that many institutions promote the formation of wolves rather than of brothers, they educate for competence and success at the cost of others with a few weak ethical norms. To avoid this danger the educators is called to act upon a task to create something in the students who have been entrusted to them, to rouse a change, a growth in wisdom and ultimately leading to produce results and to yield fruits. A subject that yields fruits is someone who has matured his/her creativity and able to use the freedom responsibly and gestate something new departing from the truth one has assimilated. To posit that every educationalist should realize that the end of our task is to produce fruit, without neglecting the results, favouring that which is given freely, without losing competence and creating a space where excellence does not imply loss of solidarity.

The third chapter “An Opportunity to Mature” focuses on raising mature people. A mature community puts life first where the educators carry out the task of accompanying children and the young people in their process of maturation. Maturity is more than growth and is not purely the development of something previously contained in the genetic code. On the other hand it is the capacity to use our liberty in a sensible and prudent manner. It requires experience in time and implies independence enabling the young to use the freedom responsibly to choose and to decide according to one’s own experience and desire, consistent with one’s values. Ultimately maturity is made complete in love. The author exhorts the necessity to open our eyes and re-examine our own ideas, sentiments, acts and omissions in the field of the care, the advancement, and the education of children and adolescents. Everyone has the responsibility and also the possibility of making of this world something that is much more habitable for our children. This is precisely the vocation and task of teachers. In order to construct and reconstruct the social and communitarian ties that create a better society and help the young to walk towards maturity the author gives few practical suggestions that can be applied by the educators all over the world. In order to complete the tasks the educators are called to strengthen the ecclesial community which helps to reinforce the ecclesial sense, to try new forms of dialogue in a pluralistic society, to revitalize

specifically the theological dimension of motivation these help, recommit over and over to the ultimate motivation of human existence and to establish concrete educational goals toward maturity. It calls for the need to awaken memory in order to experience the experience, helping to live the present as gift, developing the capacity of critical judgment in order to escape the dictatorship of opinion, accepting and integrating one's own corporal reality, deepening social values, and insisting on preaching the *kerygma*.

It is visible from this timely book a clear unifying theme of life and what it means to be human. Cardinal Bergoglio wants to raise a generation of young people who will love the world and change the world for better. To do so he calls for responsible accompaniment of the young in their process of growth and maturation. It is a must read for principals, teachers, especially of value and ethics, parents, or anyone involved in educating the next generation. It explains the real objectives of education and calls every educator into action. Though it is directed to a specific set of people, it is applicable to everyone no matter wherever they are. The beauty of this work is that each chapter concludes with prayers, reflections and questions that prompt one to action. The reader is invited to reflect on these individually or in groups. This book avoids all philosophical and theological jargon and is written in simple and plain language for easy assimilation.

