

AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHERS IN WEST AFRICA. A PROPOSED CHRISTIAN MODEL BASED ON THE LIFE OF J.B. DE LA SALLE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to assess how teachers have exercised responsibility in the context of the continuing educational crisis in West Africa. This study is based on a theological dissertation entitled “*Ethical approach to the responsibility of teachers in West Africa. A proposed Christian model based on the life of John Baptist de La Salle*”. The study outlines the motives, the problems, the hypothesis and the objective, the present state of the question, the methodological process, the draft plan, its justification and a bibliography. The last word has not been said....

Key words: ethical, responsibility, teacher, Africa, practices, education, crisis of values.

Introduction

The World Forum on Education held in Dakar, Senegal, on April 26th-28th 2000, chose six objectives to serve as a framework for action until 2015 [1]. Ten years after the Jomtien Conference (Thailand, 1990), experts from the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) asked themselves the following question at Dakar : “*Is the world on the right path ?*” The question is of capital importance because school education is in crisis, despite all the deliberations and all the financial aid channelled into this sector amounting to 50 billion US dollars [2]. It seems that the massive recruitment of teachers has not been enough to solve the educational crisis. In fact, UNESCO experts state that teachers and teaching support staff constitute the largest group of civil servants in the whole world.

Despite all the efforts approved by UNESCO and various African Ministers of Education, this sector is a source of concern in West Africa. There has been no lack of attempts to find a solution. These have generally focused on increasing the number of teachers and their training: participants at the Dakar Forum in 2000 noted that teachers belong to the age-range with the highest rate of deaths from HIV/AIDS, hence the urgent need to recruit numerous teachers [3].

This quantitative approach has its limitations where education is concerned. Of course, many teachers are needed in order to provide instruction for all children and young people. But teachers need also to influence pupils to help them develop in a positive and holistic way. This influence is possible only if the teacher has human qualities and has a reason for being a teacher.

The purpose of this study is to assess how teachers have exercised responsibility in the context of the continuing educational crisis in West Africa. This study is based on a theological dissertation entitled “Ethical approach to the responsibility of teachers in West Africa. A proposed Christian model based on the life of John Baptist de La Salle”. The study outlines the motives, the problems, the hypothesis and the objective, the present state of the question, the methodological process, the draft plan, its justification, and a bibliography.

1. Motives

The management of the present and the preparation of the future cannot be done without educating people. On education depend “community identity”, the survival of our society and living together as a pluralistic society. Education, in fact, is the combination of the means and actions exercising influence on others, which makes it possible to make them more human by integrating them into a society, in which they can participate in a world based on values.

According to Emile Durkheim, education is “the influence of adults on persons who are not yet mature enough for life in society. Its aim is to engender and develop in the child a certain number of physical and mental dispositions required of him by political society as a whole and the specific social status he is destined for” [4]. The influence on a child to make it develop in a positive manner presupposes that the teacher has motives and convictions inspiring his actions. He is supposed to have the good of society and of his pupils at heart. In fact, he must love people and their future in order to be able to transmit something to them, because all education is based on love. Those who become involved in teaching ought to do so through a sense of vocation and through love.

However, pupils who have only just passed their school-leaving exam (the BEPC), become teachers [5], either through the need to earn a living or because political decision-makers want schools for everybody and everywhere, whatever the cost [6]. The recruitment of teachers seems to be carried out without any regard for the “symbolic value” [7] of candidates. How can we enable pupils to find a model, a point of reference, or values to guide their lives, when the teacher comes across as an “unfinished person”? How can we speak of education, when the teacher is incapable of communicating or transmitting the “human dimension”, of stimulating life in young people? In a word, we think that the critical state of our educational system is getting worse because the quality and number of teachers are deficient.

The critical state of education is what inspires this study. By it, we hope to contribute to an understanding and to the analysis of the commitment and responsibility of teachers in the promotion of human development.

2. The problem

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Education in West Africa is described by UNESCO and various analysts as being in a state of crisis [8]. The abundance of diagnoses of the causes of this crisis, and the diversity of remedies proposed indicate how worrying this situation is.

In 1961, at Addis-Abeba, a conference for African ministers of education, called by UNESCO and in consultation with European advisors, considered strategies for the development of education in Africa. It adopted a long-term plan to bring about universal schooling by the year 2000. This conference was followed by 7 others between 1961 and 2000 [9]. Despite all these conferences, the educational crisis in Africa continues unabated.

Alongside these conferences on education, there are African analysts and Africanists, such as Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Hilaire Sikounmo and Joseph Brandolin, who suggest ways of coming out of this crisis.

According to Joseph Ki-Zerbo, education cannot come out of the crisis unless a democratisation and africanisation of the schools takes place, and the educational system is reformed. He proposes a “*New Deal Education*” [10] which would mean that all those involved in the school would be responsible for its local, autonomous management, dependent on a base community. Education must be “*immanent in the local social setting*” [11], in order to draw its strength from its African heritage. According to Ki-Zerbo, genuine knowledge of the natural and social setting is needed. He says that “*Africanisation is necessary in order to give back to education its role as an instrument to perpetuate African society*” [12].

Joseph Ki-Zerbo proposes changing the curriculum and working methods, and to make schools concentrate on studying their social environment, and on production [13]. This change is the *sine qua non* of an education in touch with the needs of the social environment. School reform in Africa will involve the introduction of African languages into the educational system. In these schools, it is necessary to promote persons as the supreme value, solidarity, creativity and ongoing initiation [14]. Teachers will be the initiated who will utterly convince themselves of the value of traditional initiation in Africa in order to fulfil their role as initiators of the young.

In 1992, Hilaire Sikounmo, in his capacity as a teacher, identified the evils which undermine education in Africa (unmotivated and untrained teachers, corruption, “fixed” examinations, etc). He proposed “changing the school” [15]. He believed that the educational system had remained colonial, fundamentally alien to the culture of African peoples. There was a need to be inventive, to draw up another system which responded to the fundamental needs of Africans.

This plan to reform schools in Africa, centred on African tradition, is in line with the thinking of Ki-Zerbo. Hilaire Sikounmo calls for African traditions to be transmitted by schools, for excellence to be praised, and work for the common good to be encouraged. Hilaire Sikounmo expects political decision-makers “to free schools” from a culture of success and of personal attainment. In fact, “education in Africa has always advocated only personal salvation, without ever stopping; however, complaining about the innumerable excesses provoked by exaggerated individualism” [16]. Schools must

promote values linked to the community and the family, as well as attach value to manual work and team-work.

In another publication, Hilaire Sikounmo drew attention to the marginalisation of young people in the search for a solution to the educational crisis [17]. On the basis of a survey of young people, he concludes that a cleaning up of the lifestyle and traditions of schools is urgently needed. This cleaning-up process would make it possible to make pupils take root more firmly in society and in the culture of their ancestors. The social link, missing for so long, would be restored. To come out of this crisis, it is necessary “to channel the surplus energy of young people towards productive activities, towards the better organised activities of collective life” [18].

Joseph Brandolin is well acquainted with the African educational system thanks to his long experience in a number of African countries, providing French support to various Ministries of Education. He calls into question national educational policies, and proposes strategies for a “reconciled education” [19]. He agrees with Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Hilaire Sikounmo that a revolution in education is needed.

Joseph Brandolin maintains that the various Ministries of Education in African countries are not established in order to think or reflect, but to administer. Ministries of Education monopolise reflection within the limits of their hierarchical offices, while stifling at the same time any innovation. His suggestion is that innovation should start at the bottom [20].

The battle has to be fought on two fronts, on that of formal and on that of informal education, so as not to separate the development of schooling and literacy programmes, education and instruction, school and employment : “Formal education is in crisis; non-formal instruction improvises, the informal sector is very lively, but there is no attempt to connect them up in order to create an educational system which would save the old and sick institution, while at the same time making the dream of education for everyone a reality” [21]. Joseph Brandolin proposes diversification in the curriculum, with emphasis on areas of study which seem more useful for Africa, such as agriculture, livestock farming, craft skills, building or architecture, engineering, etc.

While sharing the ideas of Joseph Brandolin, we are worried about the “collateral effects” of what he proposes, because, by wanting schools which contribute to the development of a country, one runs a serious risk of producing education on the cheap.

Why is it that, despite so much investment, so many plans to promote recovery, there is so little improvement in the situation? In fact, UNESCO conferences and national and international conferences on education devote little time to teachers as educators and as important modern players in education. Often what is addressed is pedagogy, curriculum, development through schooling, the educational crisis, illiteracy, universal education, upgrading salaries [22]. There is a tendency to make people believe that education can be reduced to teaching, and that instruction is the only purpose of schools.

And so, faced with the inefficacy of educational systems, and recognising the truth in much of what analyses have shown, we would like to turn our attention to those we call “teachers”. In the educational systems of West Africa, is the teacher also an educator? Is

he called upon to adopt a specific form of behaviour regarding education?

3. Hypothesis

The purpose of education is to help young people develop and to be formed: the formation of young people is an investment for the future. Teachers have the responsibility of “bringing forth” children for humanity through education, understood as a process of moulding and directing young people according to human values [23]. This kind of education requires a different kind of commitment by which the teacher, quite apart from transmitting knowledge, earning money or seeking personal benefits, seeks to form human beings. His role is to mould children and give them life. In this kind of education, what is at stake is the search for humanity. This kind of education is the goal that is sought; teaching is simply a means.

Thoroughly convinced of this, we maintain that the educational crisis with all its consequences at all levels is also linked to the reduction in the role of teachers, and to the resignation or lack of educators. Schools will work better when teachers become also educators. Any attempt to solve the educational crisis will have to include a definition of functions and an ethical code on which the responsibility of teachers is based.

In fact, reflection is not considered truly special and specific responsibility of the educator to Africa today and tomorrow [24]. Lack a clear identity of those that must accompany the younger generation towards greater maturity and development. The act of teaching effectively demands to the educator a conduct, a consistent ethic with the purpose of education. The life of the educator should be presented to students as a lesson in humanity. What must be the educator’s ethics for today and tomorrow? In other words, how to live an ethical responsibility to future and young teachers?

Teachers will be invited to make a conscious commitment to the promotion of humanity -of being truly human- through teaching in schools, so that these places set in motion a process of a committed struggle against inhumanity, immoralism, violence, corruption, incivility, lack of concern and poverty. The fear of losing “humanity”, that is, the human character of a person, should drive anyone who becomes involved in education to accept greater responsibility : that of “bringing forth children” who are truly human; of moulding young people according to fundamental values. This is possible only if teachers have that extra authority which derives from their human values. In practice, teachers have an essential role to play in the solution of the educational crisis which continues to exist in West Africa.

The transmission of “humanity” by teachers brings us to the topic of ethics. We should like to examine more closely the responsibility of teachers regarding this educational crisis, in order to distance ourselves from various analysts, and show that the will to influence, to mould and to form a person, assumes that there are the people who can do this, in the place where they are needed.

4. The aim of this study

We wish to try to understand the educational crisis in West Africa by analysing the responsibility of teachers: the promotion of universal education involves the teachers.

The State recruits teachers - educational “technicians” - to instruct young people. Official texts which state that teachers have to educate young people do not reflect the reality in schools where there is a deficiency of education. Because of this discrepancy there is an ethical void which has to be filled by schools, because the crucially important function of teachers as witnesses and promoters of the truth, and of what is good and beautiful, has been neglected.

Our purpose is to show that the effective and practical solution of the educational crisis demands also that those who are called teachers have a clear identity. They have to be educators also in order to transmit to their pupils a human spark, the quality of “being alive”, of “knowing how to live”. Christian educators in particular will know that it is in the fabric of human life that education can embrace Revelation and the call to all human beings to reach their full stature in Christ.

5. The present state of the question

The educational system in West Africa has been in a state of crisis since independence. African writers, especially those in West Africa, who have broached the subject of the responsibility of teachers for the educational crisis, are very few in number.

The earliest publication we found which advocates that the role of teachers should be re-examined - it devotes seven pages to this [25] - is the work of Abdou Moumouni, entitled *L'éducation en Afrique*, Paris, publisher Francois Maspéro in 1964, and subsequent editions [26].

The writer proposes that future teachers should be trained to be able “to root out from themselves the spiritual vestiges of colonial domination” [27], because whatever the educational system, whatever the care taken in drawing up courses, the practical implementation is down to teachers. Their responsibility is of a social and national character: the reorganisation of education, the training of teachers, the policy of universal education, the upgrading of the importance of the role of the teacher [28]. They are responsible for the instruction of their nation to bring it out from the state of alienation caused by colonialism.

The thinking of Abdou Moumouni should be understood in the context of the arrival of independence in Africa, when teachers attached great importance to claims of a financial order - increases in salary, revision of pay-scales, reclassification and maintenance of existing rights. These legitimate claims had blurred the meaning of their function and of the aims of schools. That is why it was important for teachers to become aware of the meaning of their professional activity and of the social responsibilities that came with it.

One solution of the educational crisis would be to stop seeing teachers solely as persons with knowledge, and to see them as persons who passed on values, enlightened people, in a word, as educators.

Julius Nyerere in his work *Independence and Education* stresses the responsibility of teachers. It shows, in four (4) pages [29], that teachers have a “real power” in changing attitudes and progress as “being” human. Indeed teachers, more than any other group in society determine the behavior, shape the ideas and aspirations of the nation: “Our

values, he says, were developed when we were young, the way we behave with our fellow how we react to events, what we think right or wrong, all these attitudes are formed from our experiences as a child in the home and school” [30]. Such is the responsibility that teachers must stay in school.

The work of Julius Nyerere dates from the first decade following independence (1972), when schooling was seen as a way of escaping from destitution in order to develop African countries. Discussion was centred more on instruction or teaching than on education. In schools for whites, children go to be instructed, it was thought. This idea fed the educational crisis for several generations. As a result, it was believed that only educated persons could become competent workers, citizens with a love for justice, in a word, good servants promoting material and social progress. Nowadays it is clear that a well-instructed citizen is not necessarily a good citizen, and a well-instructed doctor is not necessarily a good doctor. The educational standard of citizens does not protect any society from corruption, theft, unsociable behaviour, violence and dishonesty.

In any case, the effective implementation of the educational aims of countries will depend to a great extent on the training of teachers to have a sense of responsibility.

In 1986, Tidiane Diakité, from Mali, in his “*L’Afrique malade d’elle-même*”, gave quite a detailed and gloomy picture of sick schools and sick teachers. All who are involved with schools are responsible for the educational crisis: parents, teachers, and political decision-makers. In 8 pages [31], Tidiane Diakité tries to establish a connection between the situation of teachers and the laxity and corruption which are a part of the reality of schools in West Africa: “Cheating on the part of primary and secondary school teachers at exam time is a current practice in schools. These teachers do not cheat through love for their pupils but through irresponsibility and cupidity” [32]. It is a regular occurrence to hear that official exams in progress have been suspended because questions or question-papers have been leaked. In fact teachers make it a practice to sell exam-questions or take money for giving high marks. Great pressure is put on teachers when it is time for home-works or end-of-year exams. It is difficult to be educators under such circumstances [33].

Pupils very quickly become accustomed to cheating and corruption, beginning in primary schools, and continuing in middle and grammar schools and at university level. It is obvious that such a climate of fraud is a training ground for crooked and morally irresponsible employees who will be the public servants of tomorrow.

Finally, Tidiane Diakité’s analysis shows that, in practice, the value of teaching and education lies in the quality of the men and women engaged in them. But Tidiane Diakité’s diagnosis seems sterile because it offers no concrete solution. Sociological observation is not accompanied by any operational recommendations or suggestions.

In 2004, Marcus Ndongmo wrote that schools have inculcated in Africans a mentality “harmful to development” [34], and they would be the root cause of an upheaval in the moral and symbolic value system in Africa. And worse still, these modern schools are “incapable of educating all the children”. According to Marcus Ndongmo, a fresh look needed to be taken at modern schools, and they should be restructured in order to re-establish the link with society which had been broken. To achieve this, it was necessary to train every teacher on the basis of ethical and evangelical values. However, there are

three different points of view regarding the functions of a teacher:

The first maintains that the teaching function of the teacher must be carefully kept separate from that of educating. The second states that the teacher cannot restrict himself to only instructing. He must also consider himself obliged to help pupils to give coherence to what they are taught and to systematise it. A third maintains it is impossible to dissociate the function of educating from that of teaching [35].

After analysing these three points of view, Marcus Ndongmo states and supports the view that “the school is never neutral”, and that it is impossible to dissociate the function of educating from that of teaching. The true function of the teacher is to educate. This function is always carried out in “an ethical context” [36].

The teacher has an ethical responsibility to young people: to develop, by the use of appropriate means, general dispositions which will enable young people to cope in the various situations of life in society. To achieve this, “a spirit of discipline can be considered to be the primary factor which induces morality in a school. It is a spirit which should permeate all school activities; a fundamental disposition young people must be made to acquire, because it lies at the root of a moral life” [37]. With these words Marcus Ndongmo opens a debate, but he does not propose in any formal way the ethical stance to be adopted by the teacher, the principal agent in the reconstruction of a link with society - this is not part of his brief.

To summarise, in West Africa, there has been an effort to improve pedagogy, curricula, cultural identity, and to enhance the prestige of the role of teachers. But not enough thought has been given to the significance *per se* of the teaching profession regarding its purpose, and in the new African context.

Despite the praise worthy efforts of the writers we have quoted regarding this question, they have not provoked any general or systematic discussion regarding it. We wish to analyse and develop a Christian ethical view of responsibility among teachers in West Africa. We have yet to come across a Christian consideration of this topic. The Christian model based on the life of St John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers, interpreted in an African context, will provide us with a springboard for reflection, adapted to African culture, on which the ethical stance of teachers can be founded.

St. John Baptist de La Salle’s commitment was centred on the implementation of two plans: the creation of a new type of school conducive to the salvation of children; and the creation of a new kind of teacher who would be a “model” and an “example” for children in search of salvation [38]. For De La Salle, the quality of the teachers determined the quality of the schools. He undertook the training of his teachers so that they would be humanly and spiritually suited for their mission.

The purpose of training of teachers is to unify their lives on the human and spiritual level [39]; a life of faith gives meaning to their work in schools. That is why De La Salle wishes to offer a “model” to children and young people. Schools will become places where God’s Plan of Salvation is being permanently put into effect.

6. Our approach to this question

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First of all, we have to admit that the subject we wish to consider has not been explored to any great extent by theologians. And yet, if there is anything which is really close to the heart of Christ, because of its extreme importance, it is the education or humanisation of people.

Our belief that the education of people has a future drives us to call into question the situation of those who are called “teachers” in West Africa. To encourage support for a new approach to education in West Africa, we shall try to discover how teachers see their relationship with education. Our point of departure will need to be present practice in order to assess the responsibility of teachers for the educational crisis in West Africa.

Next, we shall examine the Lasallian view of the teacher as an educator, as a way of voicing serious doubts regarding the ingrained habits and traditions of African decision-makers regarding education. This approach will enable us to develop existing human resources in the search for a solution to the educational crisis which continues to exist in West Africa.

Lastly, we shall try to identify the elements of an ethical approach to responsibility for teachers. On the basis of anthropological, philosophical and theological data, we shall offer educators a spiritual basis for the service of others based on an ethical approach to responsibility.

In the African context, we shall refer to documentary research carried out in four countries in West Africa: Ivory Coast, Mali, Togo and Burkina Faso. We really need to assess all aspects of the identity of teachers, given that there are immense differences from country to country. This documentary research will also be analytical, and will help us, with a bibliography, to draw up an all-inclusive plan.

Part I

Teachers in West Africa: an overview

Teachers, generally speaking, are a subject that has given rise to lively discussions in several countries in West Africa, in the Ivory Coast as in Burkina Faso, for example. Discussion has centred on a variety of aspects, such as the technical nature of the profession, ways of improving its social status, the increase in the number of teachers, or the question of salaries. As a way of coming to grips with the complexity of this question, we shall give an outline, in the first chapter, of the general situation of teachers in West Africa. In chapter two, we shall examine the root causes of the crisis regarding the role of teachers. In chapter three, we shall highlight the responsibility of teachers

Chapter 1:

The situation of teachers in West Africa

The status of teachers seems to differ from one country to the next. But what is common to all the countries is that, since independence, teachers are dissatisfied with their status and their salaries. Recurrent strikes are a sign of discontent for which a solution has yet to be found.

Official speeches and texts recognise the important role of teachers in the education and the development of a country. In fact, educational establishments have a crucial part to play in the preparation of young people for life. But we have to agree with Tidiane Diakité, that evidence shows that teachers have the status of semi-pariahs, and are sometimes the victims of overt ostracism:

In the past, teachers were seen as the perfect ideal of social success; they represented the norm, the model, the absolute point of reference for families with children [...] Nowadays, there has been a reversal in the social hierarchy, now dominated by soldiers who, lacking any learning, represent the exciting glamour of the weapons and animal force of power [40].

The difficult situation of teachers can perhaps be gauged from some assessments made by ministers responsible for education. A first step in trying to find a solution would be to define clearly the profession of teachers and what it is founded on, so that a serious debate can begin.

Chapter 2:

Root causes of the crisis regarding the role of teachers

Education in West Africa is evolving in the context of a multi-form crisis, including that of the role of the teacher, as is confirmed by the following observation by Bouma Bazié:

There is reason to believe that many have abdicated their role as educators in the face of the enormity of their task, by an astonishing dissociation of the functions of teaching and education: in many cases, they are no more than organisers without any real authority, discredited, downgraded, embittered, pitied, despised, humiliated, frustrated, trivialised, etc [41].

In fact, for teachers who have become part of a complex world, the transmission of knowledge and of morality is no longer something obvious. Education is now seen as an exercise of stamina to draw out the potential of pupils.

If the role of the teacher has reached crisis point, it is because families and parents, schools and teachers, organised groups and their leaders, have failed in their mission and lost their credibility. To this we should add the ambiguity of official texts regarding the role of school education.

The crisis regarding the role of the teacher is a crisis affecting society as a whole. West Africa, like other regions in the world, is undergoing great changes. These changes have brought about a divorce between schools and society, reducing the professional task of the teacher to the role of a technician. Wage claims by teachers have tarnished their profession.

Of course, nowadays, teachers are not the only ones involved in the education of young people. In fact, the outside world is increasingly coming into the classroom through information and communication technology. The teacher is expected to emerge from the general free-for-all, to save the sinking ship, to make up for the deficiencies of other institutions such as the family. Jacques Delors, a UNESCO expert, maintains that teachers should be the living memory when everything else is falling down: "The family

is the first school of the child, but when the family home fails or is deficient; it is the responsibility of the school to keep alive...the possibility of learning” [42]. It is the responsibility of teachers to provide help and guidance where certain educational environments and agents have failed.

The expectations of society are enormous and very demanding. They can lay a very heavy burden of responsibility on teachers. Much is demanded of them and there seems no end to the needs to be met. However, the quality and the relevance of education depend on them. The crisis regarding the role of the teacher and the crisis of values in schools need to give birth to new requirements regarding education.

Chapter 3:

The responsibility of teachers regarding the crisis of values in schools.

All the educational reforms proposed in West Africa by the authorities, researchers and financial backers are for the most part ineffective without a reform of people, of teachers. The quality of the service provided by teachers depends on the degree of their motivation, on the way they understand their profession. Becoming involved in education means, from a purely social point of view, taking seriously the responsibility life in society imposes on us. This means that teachers are called to respond to the call of society to be useful to it, to fulfil a responsibility necessary if it is to function properly and develop.

But people often say that schools no longer educate, and that certain teachers no longer serve as points of reference for the gradual maturing process of young people. Corruption and cheating, the large number of teachers with AIDS/HIV (considered to be an illness associated with sexual immorality), the intrusion of politics with its use of manipulation, and union-inspired strikes supported by pupils, are evils which act as a gangrene in school life. It becomes difficult to make statements about promoting values. We are surrounded by a teaching staff whose efficacy and honesty and decency leave much to be desired.

The snag is that the human factor, the most important factor in the education of young people, seems to be taken into account increasingly less frequently. That is why writers such as Joseph Ki-Zerbo wondered whether modern schools today were going through a phase of educational vacuity. Be that as it may, we have to admit with Tidiane Diakité that “schools are satisfied with providing [today] vague and woolly teaching which has no impact on the pupils” [43].

In fact, the teacher should embody by his “lifestyle” a point of reference, a model for growing up to be an adult. Children need an environment promoting values, which will enable them to grow by imitating and then by consciously opting for these values. A school environment characterised by cheating, corruption and sloppiness is not conducive to an education which is responsible for the future of pupils and of their country. If it is true that African society is in crisis, then teachers should be bridges and cultural guides, saying and doing what is true and good.

The 1996 UNESCO report described what is expected of teachers:

Teachers are expected to be capable not only of facing problems associated with poverty, hunger, violence and drugs, and enlightening their pupils regarding a whole series of social issues, from the development of tolerance to birth control; but also of succeeding where parents and institutions have often failed [44].

Teachers should show they feel responsible by “being worried”, to use the words of Hans Jonas [45]. Teachers need to be worried about the education of children and young people entrusted to their school, so that they can feel that they have to be responsible for them. They cannot be “worried about them” unless they arouse deep feelings in them, and they freely choose to be answerable to parents, the country and to the pupils themselves. The ethical dimension of this responsibility includes also one of commitment which excludes all educational vacuity.

Part II:

The search for a paradigm

Having outlined the general situation of teachers in West Africa and the problems associated with this profession, we feel it is important to have a look at the kinds of teachers offered as models in the past and nowadays, in order to understand better the educational responsibility of teachers today.

First we shall present the Lasallian concept of the teacher as educator. Then we shall examine the functions or roles assumed by the Lasallian educator to promote the development of the pupils. Finally we shall present De La Salle’s view of education as an ethical responsibility to man and to God.

Chapter 4:

The Lasallian view of the teacher as educator

One of the great pedagogical insights of St John Baptist de La Salle was the concept of a new kind of educator. The Brothers of the Christian Schools (FSC) in the 17th century were educators based on a new concept, different from the existing secular model.

In the 17th century, the profession of schoolmaster was despised, neglected and considered of little consequence by people (MF 155,1). The merit of De La Salle is to have changed the negative view of schools, and to have presented the work of teachers as a ministry in a more organised way than anybody else. He gave dignity to the teaching profession by training teachers. Education became a vocation embraced by teachers with a clearly defined identity, called to live a particular lifestyle.

This new kind of teacher is based on a view of faith in Jesus Christ. According to this view, the child standing before the teacher is not simply a future citizen or future technician the teacher wishes to teach: he is a “son of God”, called to grow, to develop, to fulfil his unique role in the world of today and tomorrow. The Lasallian teacher sees in the person of his pupils a sign and a call from the Spirit.

In this view of faith, the Lasallian teacher is not simply a teacher who helps his pupils to discover what they need to know, nor simply a teacher who stimulates the potential of pupils. He is and must consider himself to be an *ambassador and minister of Jesus Christ*: “Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you

do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself” (MR 195,2).

Finally, the Lasallian view of education seeks to make the school a place where adults and young people work and live together. The humane atmosphere has an important role in the promotion of good educational relationships. But above all, Lasallian education requires schools to strive to be communities of believers who live, educate, share and celebrate their faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5: The functions of a teacher

In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, De La Salle defines the Lasallian charism by stating the various titles attributed to teachers. When he speaks of the work of teachers, he often emphasises that they are the elder brothers of their pupils [46], and models and watchmen, parents, priests and bishops for their pupils [47]. The teacher is first of all a “saviour”, a title which can be found in all the Meditations for the Time of Retreat. He is also a “minister”, one who corrects, a steward, a guardian angel and a watchman. The teacher is called to assume all these functions because children let themselves go, gamble, behave in a dissolute manner, and frequent bad company (MR 193,2). Some young people are difficult to guide. Their environment may be an obstacle to their salvation. And yet, these young people are called to know the mystery of God, live according to the Gospel, and become disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Lasallian School is a place where children can learn to lead a Christian life, where the salvation of God can come about because it is put within their reach. In it, they acquire the wisdom of God, learn to do things which concern their salvation, such as catechism and the reception of the sacraments. They change their behaviour, give up lying, seeking revenge, being impolite. That is how they are gradually educated.

Such an education supposes that the teacher assumes the role of an educator as well as that of a teacher, and sees his life in terms of rendering a service. The personal relationship between the teacher and the pupil is very important. The teacher must be a living example for the children, a model they can identify with.

Chapter 6: According to De La Salle, education is an ethical responsibility

Lasallian education is an ethical responsibility because, in De La Salle’s words, it takes place in the context of a mission.

It is God who, in his infinite goodness and power, has called you to impart the knowledge of the Gospel to those who have not yet received it. Look upon yourself, therefore, as the minister of God, and acquit yourself of your duties with the greatest possible zeal, as having to render an account to the Lord (MF 140,2).

The first responsibility of the teacher regards the deviant behaviour of the pupils: those who are impudent and haughty, insolent, frivolous and superficial, opinionated; children who have been brought up gently and pampered, and who are called spoilt children, etc [48]. If children are morally indigent, there is a need for teachers, guardians, agents of Divine Providence, to serve as models to be imitated. In order to touch hearts and

change behaviour, the teacher must know his pupils and their behaviour so as to be able to discriminate between different cases:

Some require great mildness, while others need to be directed with firmness. Some require much patience; others need to be goaded on. It is necessary to punish and reprehend some, in order to correct their defects, whereas others need to be continually watched, lest they should wander and perish [MD 33,1].

To this should be added pedagogical responsibility, for the task of teaching takes over the life of the Lasallian teacher. It absorbs all his life and requires total dedication. The personality of the Lasallian teacher is characterised by this activity. He has to be an expert in the subject he teaches. That means he must have mastery over the culture and science he has to communicate. He has to master the teaching methods he uses when teaching. All this means that he must be a good teacher.

There is also another kind of responsibility De La Salle mentions in his writings: spiritual responsibility for the pupils. According to De La Salle, it is Providence that makes teachers responsible for teaching the pupils (MD 37,1). This meditation indicates the kind of responsibility the teacher has: to train pupils in piety, because God holds him responsible for their salvation. He is obliged to supply their spiritual and social needs.

In Lasallian spirituality, pupils do not come to school by chance. It is God who entrusts them to the teachers, and places them under their guardianship. Teachers are intercessors with God and mediators for their pupils (MF 157,2). The educational relationship according to De La Salle is that of a master and his disciples. The pupil must become a “disciple”. The master-disciple relationship goes further than the transmission of knowledge : it goes as far as forming consciences in order to transmit life-values (MF 116,2; 92,3; 135,2) : “God destines you to be the spiritual father of the children whom you instruct...You are called to engender children in Christ, and even to produce and engender Jesus Christ in their hearts.” (MF 157,1).

The Word of God inspires all that the teacher does and, in particular, and it puts his responsibility as a teacher into the context of faith. When these different kinds of responsibility are assumed, the teacher becomes a brother for his pupils, and that is the way to be a Lasallian teacher of children: it is the gift of brotherhood. That is what should characterise the relationship of teachers with one another, with parents and with the young people.

Part III:

An ethical approach to the responsibility of teachers in West Africa

We believe that the Good News of Jesus Christ and the experience of Christian teachers of the past should inspire the way educational work is considered and carried out, and serve as its basis. The aim of education is to help children and young people to take root in their family, in the social and cultural heritage, and so develop as they come into contact with its novelty. Education should contribute to the germination of a new world. Teachers are called to be attentive to this process of germination of a new world. This project is big and requires a keener sense of responsibility, a gift, an extra grace. We wish to propose this responsibility as an ethical stance in order to promote a better kind

of commitment on the part of teachers.

The problem of the educational crisis will be posed in ethical terms, the responsibility for which is attributable primarily to teachers and their assistants. First, we shall do a comparative analysis of the teacher, and in particular, of the Christian teacher. Next, we shall propose the ideal teacher, from a Christian point of view. Finally, we shall bring out the ethical principles governing the responsibility of the teacher.

Chapter 7: ***Education as an assumed responsibility***

We suggest that education should be seen in a new context. It is in fact one of the constitutive elements and one of the fundamental aims of our growth as human beings. Given this, we need to take a fresh look at the training of future teachers so as to nurture in them the human qualities conducive to a new approach to their responsibility regarding their work as teachers and the education of young people. It is a question of helping people grow up; often of accompanying “strangers” to develop more fully.

The social crisis or divide which characterises several countries in West Africa is also a moral crisis and is accompanied by a growth in violence, impunity and corruption. If it is the role of the teacher to transmit a heritage in an intelligent manner, and to help young people to become adults, then we can no longer being satisfied with a repetitive form of training which does not challenge the lifestyle and practices of the teacher. He has to be a bench-mark, a point of reference. The question asked by Raymond Chappuis is very much to the point:

Are teachers psychologically prepared to be ‘models to be imitated’ by their way of showing their solidarity with their pupils in their search for a more human life, for one with more relationships? [49].

Chapter 8: ***Teachers from a Christian perspective***

From a Christian perspective, human actions are rooted in the Spirit the Christ gives his disciples. In the context of education, Christ is the teacher *par excellence*, his preaching and life being intimately linked. He speaks and his actions confirm his message. He speaks and acts in accordance with what he says. Christ was not satisfied with simply teaching the Beatitudes. His contact with people was inspired by the spirit of the Beatitudes: he was poor in spirit, gentle, peaceful, merciful. The danger for a teacher is to be more virtuous in his words than in his actions. We could say with St John: “Our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active” (Cf. 1 Jn 3,18).

In other words: “The teacher must show children and young people by his own example the behaviour he advocates and wants them to adopt” [50]. And so, from a Christian perspective, an ethical approach to the responsibility of teachers is necessary. The profession of a teacher can be compared with that of a guide (Jn 10,1-6): the Good Shepherd “leads them out” to a place he considers to be better. The Shepherd portrayed by St John is like a responsible teacher who “is worried for his sheep”. In fact, St John presents Jesus as the model teacher and guide, by contrast with those who pursue only their own interests. Africa can be reborn only to the extent that teachers give an example

of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, without which life cannot be communicated. The communication of life, which characterises St John's portrayal of Christ, is of great importance in education: it means leading people to fulfil themselves in the image of God as a communicator of life. This is possible only if the focus of education is the person, the whole person, and to the extent that the teacher is a model of self-sacrifice.

That is why De La Salle chose Christ the Good Shepherd as the symbolic figure for his Brothers and for Christian teachers. Education should be envisaged as a parable of the Kingdom, in which the mustard seed grows and germinates slowly. The teacher, accompanying young people as they grow up, can be compared with a gardener. His attitude must be that of the father of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15,11-32), or of the Companion of the Disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35).

We shall examine the scriptural and the theological basis for the ethical responsibility of teachers, so as to understand better the meaning of this profession for Christians.

Chapter 9:

The principles characterising the responsibility of teachers

In a world where there are few clear guidelines, the teacher needs to be seen as an example of educational dynamism, making it a model, reacting against and resisting everything which dishonours human dignity. That is why we want to highlight in this chapter a number of principles on which the lifestyle and work of the teacher should be based: dignity in his private life and the example of a good life; devotedness to other people, to strangers, characterised by humanity; honesty in his teaching profession which will inspire trust in all and sundry. His ultimate responsibility is that of caring for souls, which calls for initial and ongoing formation. All this is possible only if the presence of the teacher is characterised by "educational love", "pedagogical tact" and "the authority of an educator" [51].

De La Salle's Christian approach to pedagogy sees education as a work of salvation and the teacher as a collaborator of God. Education by offering models of behaviour preserves this meaning and is still effective: it is a transmission of life which derives its meaning from the mystery of the Incarnation [52].

General conclusion

The educational crisis spoken about at the Jomtien Conference in 1990, and the World Forum on Education at Dakar in 2000, etc., is primarily not a question of pedagogy, and of massive recruitment of teachers, but of ethics. For over a decade, schools as a whole in West Africa have gone from one crisis to another which have ended up by damaging their credibility. There have been strikes by teachers, strikes by pupils and students, cancelled and/or invalidated academic years, a growth in violence, and massive fraud in examinations. The responsibility of teachers for this situation cannot be ignored. Those who are called teachers have to understand that, although they are public servants, they do not work for any politician, any minister or any government, but for their children, their nation.

The profession of teaching by example and by instruction should not be thought of as skilled craft but as a vocation, a charism. This implies an extra commitment, a serious dedication, supported by extra authority which comes from what every teacher has received. The role of the teacher will be seen as that of an intercessor, of a Good Shepherd who gives values a human face. The focus of education in schools is the search for humanity. Only the Spirit, the Teacher of people, can guide teachers in their daily work at school. The plan “to make human beings” cannot be accomplished except through Christ, who took on our human condition and has ever since represented us in the Trinity in his Risen body.

Footnotes

[1] Cf. UNESCO, *Education for everyone. Is the world on the right path?* World follow-up report on education for everyone, Paris, UNESCO Publications, 2002, p.13

[2] Ibid., p.174

[3] Ibid., p.154. This is one of the remarks regarding the psychological quality and quality of life of teachers.

[4] Emile Durkheim, *Education et sociologie*, Paris, PUF, 1966.

[5] Meaning the one who institutes, founds, who lays the foundations of society, of a community. A three-day meeting for national coordinators of a teacher-training project instigated by UNESCO for sub-Saharan Africa was held in Dakar (Senegal) on March 6th 2006.

[6] A meeting of experts noted that in several of the less developed countries of sub-Saharan Africa primary school teachers “*have at the most a qualification no higher than a secondary school-leaving certificate, and that a number have had no professional training*” (cf. www.UNESCO.org/EducationAfrique). The 2002 Report noted that most teacher-training establishments in sub-Saharan Africa were built in the 60's and 70's and they are currently in a state of disrepair and poorly equipped. The implementation of the aims proposed by UNESCO after the 2000 conference at Dakar poses an enormous problem. (Cf. UNESCO, *Education for everyone*. op.cit.). See also UNESCO *World Report on education 1998. Teachers and education in a changing world*, Paris, UNESCO publications, p.37.

[7] The BEPC is the qualification required to become a primary school teacher in Burkina Faso and in several countries in West Africa, such as Ivory Coast, Mali and Togo. This qualification is generally obtained at about 15 or 17 years of age! This means that at the age of 17, a young adolescent can become a primary school teacher. At this age, the qualification does not make him a point of reference. It does not give him the required weight. The value of age is to be a symbol of maturity and wisdom.

[8] West Africa, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Chad and Mauritania share the same history of education which Albert Antonioli, following the lead of UNESCO experts, identifies as “the Sudanese-Sahelian latitude of illiteracy”. Cf. Albert Antonioli *Le droit d'apprendre. Une école pour tous en Afrique*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1993, p.82. Cf. Also Hilaire Sikounmo, *L'école du sous-développement. Gros plan sur l'enseignement secondaire en Afrique*, Paris, Karthala, 1992.

[9] In 1961: Addis-Abeba Conference (atmosphere of decolonialisation, schools the driving force of development); 1964: Abidjan Conference (pedagogical concerns); 1968: Nairobi Conference (crisis in educational systems); 1976: Lagos Conference (primary education, educational crisis); 1982: Harare Conference (illusion maintained regarding schools and their funding); 1991: Dakar Conference (eradication of illiteracy); 1998: Durban Conference (the weight of international technocracy). See also World Conferences on Education. In 1990: World Conference at Jomtien (education for everyone by 2000); 2000: World Conference at Dakar (reduce poverty in the world by education).

[10] Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Eduquer ou périr*, Paris, UNICEF-UNESCO, 1990, p.87.

[11] Ibid., p.88. Cf. Gaston Sanon, *L'école et mon village*. Doctoral thesis, Strasbourg, 1982.

[12] Ibid., p.101.

- [13] Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *L'éducation permanente en Afrique*, *Revue Orientations* 43 (1972), p. 13.
- [14] Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Éduquer ou périr*, pp. 114-116.
- [15] Hilaire Sikounmo, *L'école du sous-développement. Gros plan sur l'enseignement secondaire en Afrique*, Paris, Karthala, 1992, p.14.
- [16] Ibid., p.234.
- [17] Hilaire Sikounmo, *Jeunesse et éducation en Afrique noire*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995.
- [18] Ibid., p.160.
- [19] Joseph Brandolin, *Réinventer l'éducation en Afrique*, 2nd impression, Serres/Cap, Editions Afrique, 1996, p.85.
- [20] Ibid., p.87.
- [21] Ibid., p.121.
- [22] This last point was the subject of a UNESCO report in 1998. The Report recalled the situation of teaching staff as described in 1966 and made an official Recommendation. This Recommendation, intended to improve the situation of teachers, proposed to the countries guiding principles regarding professional training, recruitment and conditions of employment of teachers (Cf. Report 1998, p.17, p.40). The insistence on the social and material situation of teaching staff did not bring about the expected results. In 1991, a small extraordinary session was held in Paris under the aegis of UNESCO to identify the aspects that should be reinforced: initial and ongoing formation. Unfortunately, the various recommendations are not legally binding on signatory States. It is impossible to assess what has been achieved in the field: "It is difficult to find in any region in the world evident signs of improvement in the economic situation of teachers. Perhaps even, there are no countries where it is possible to affirm with any certitude the existence of any such tendency" Cf. UNESCO, *World Report on Education 1998. Teachers and education in a changing world*. Paris, UNESCO Publications, 1998, p. 41.
- [23] Cf. Charles Hadji, *Penser et agir l'éducation*, Pédagogie séries, Paris, Ed. ESF, 1992, p.130.
- [24] Cf. Joseph Brandolin, op.cit. Pp.103-105. See also the present situation: Michel Amani N'Guessan (interview), "Revendication des enseignants" in *Fraternité Matin* 12689 (2007), 2-3. Cf. TAO Abdoulaye and Jacques Théodore Balima, "Le ras-le-bol des enseignants" in the Burkinabe independent daily *Le Pays* 3710 (2006), 10-11 and 18-19.
- [25] Abdou Moumouni, *L'éducation en Afrique*, 3rd edition, Paris, Editions François Maspéro, 1998, p.193-194 and 367-371.
- [26] 1st edition in 1964, 2nd in 1967, 3rd edition, Paris, in *Présence Africaine*, 1998.
- [27] Ibid., p.372
- [28] Ibid., p.368
- [29] Julius Nyerere, *Indépendance et éducation*, "Point de vue 10" series, Yaoundé, Editions CLE, p.169-172.
- [30] Ibid., p.70.
- [31] Tidiane Diakité, *L'Afrique malade d'elle-même*, Paris, Karthala, 1986, p.116-123.
- [32] Ibid., p.118.
- [33] Ibid., p.16.
- [34] Marcus Ndongmo, *Education scolaire et lien social en Afrique noire. Perspectives éthiques et théologiques de la mise en place d'une nouvelle philosophie d'éducation*, Cameroon, ICERH impression, 2004, p.7.
- [35] Ibid., p.63.
- [36] Ibid., p.183.
- [37] Ibid., p.184.
- [38] Ibid. p.186-187.
- [39] John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations*, No. 39,2.
- [40] Ibid., No. 64,2.
- [41] Tidiane Diakité, *L'Afrique malade d'elle-même*, Paris, Karthala, 1986, p.117.
- [42] Bouma Bazié, "Pour une approche métaphorique de l'éducation : sur les autoroutes...du sens ?", *Revue interdisciplinaire de philosophie morale et politique*, 91-92-93 (2001), p.229.
- [43] Jacques Delors, *L'éducation, un trésor est caché dedans*, Paris, Editions UNESCO/Odile Jacob, 1996, p.134.

[44] Tidiane Diakité, op.cit., p.122.

[45] Jacques Delors, op.cit., p.159.

[46] Hans Jonas, *Le principe responsabilité, une éthique pour la civilisation technologique*. Translated into French from German by Jean Greisch, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1997, p. 301.

[47] Cf. FSC Rules, art. 53

[48] In Meditation 186, the Christian teacher is referred to the life of the parents of St Marcellinus (1st point); to St Marcellinus as a priest and his interior and non-ministerial qualities (2nd point); and to St Marcellinus as a bishop (3rd point). In this 3rd point, De La Salle develops an aspect of teaching he returns to often: vigilance. He is very explicit: “*You are held to watch over those who compose this flock which God has confided to you*”. Cf. also MR 199. This meditation as a whole give a clear picture of the role and mission of the teacher as envisaged by De La Salle.

[49] Cf. “*Conduite des Ecoles*” in the *Œuvres Complètes* of St John-Baptist de La Salle, Rome, 1993, No. 15,6.

[50] Raymond Chappuis, *La solidarité, l'éthique des relations humaines*, “Que sais-je ?” Séries, Paris, PUF, 1999, p.90.

[51] Armelle de la Tribouille, *L'éducation à la lumière de la Révélation*, Mame-Cap, “Cahiers de l'Ecole Cathédrale” séries, Paris, 1996, p.64.

[52] Cf., Lucino Cian, *Don Bosco et l'éducateur d'aujourd'hui*, “Sciences de l'éducation” séries, Paris, Editions Don Bosco, 1999, p.13.

[53] Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, No.21, 7.

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¹ * = books not yet read or investigated or charged.

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