

Multiformity

In the time of the pillarization, the Catholic school was a school for, from and by Catholics. The goal of the Catholic school was to train students to become true and virtuous Catholics. That time is gone forever. At this moment most Catholic schools have a diverse school population and teacher base. Catholic schools have in fact become multireligious schools with all the consequences that entails. Children with a different cultural and/or philosophical background are welcome and take part in religious education and celebrations. This does not mean that Catholic schools can no longer work from the same view of man - man as a relational being with the right to full development of his gifts - and the same religious source(s) of inspiration. In this situation, Catholic education emphasizes its diaconal function, offering its services to the whole of society and not to a certain part of the population. The Christian faith and the Catholic tradition still have a privileged position in this respect, but in no way do they prefer to exclude the contribution of other sources of inspiration. The Catholic school of the 21st century is different from that of the pillarization (first half of the 20th century). For example, in recent years there has also been a renewed interest in the Catholic identity of schools and research shows that most Catholic schools do not want to lose their identity but want to deepen it.

Quality

Catholic education stands for quality education. Every school that respects itself will say so of itself. And often rightly so. Yet we have two reasons to start with this. Firstly, Catholic schools, like other schools, are social institutions that society expects to provide high quality education; secondly, Catholic schools design educational quality in such a way that it gives those schools something of their own. That is what we want to talk about.

Pedagogical mission

If all goes well, a Catholic school will not suffice to teach students to do arithmetic, to spell, in short, to get to know the world. Besides controlling this, Catholic schools will also challenge students to learn to appreciate the world. For this you need a compass, in this case a human image or a vision of how people should be.

Human image

How do Catholic schools get such a human image? Well, they derive this from the Catholic faith, based on Scripture, tradition and ecclesiastical authority. What can we say about this Catholic image of man? That it has two striking characteristics. It is relational and focuses on the whole person. This means that (young) people are social beings who are in relation to themselves, others, the world and to God and that their gifts may develop as broadly as possible. God is a God who is love and has created the world. From this view of man, Catholic schools form their pupils into 'whole' people.

Pedagogical concept

We have seen that Catholic schools are guided in their education by a human image, a vision of how people should be. But that is not all. The question now is how such a human image affects daily school practice. For this a school needs a pedagogical concept (school vision). In this concept it tries to establish a relationship between on the one hand: pedagogical objectives, ways of learning and teaching, school climate and on the other hand: the values from the human image. Establishing relationships is not (always) easy and often there is a tension between the different parts. This also

means that over time, under the influence of changes, we have to adapt or adjust the concept again. We can say of every school that it has its own pedagogical concept that reflects local circumstances.

A positive image of mankind

The Catholic image of man is a positive one. It focuses, we saw, on our relationships with others, our development to completeness, but also on just relationships in society, on care for one another. The great source of inspiration behind all these values is ultimately the message and life of Jesus of Nazareth who is recognized by Catholics (Christians) as God's own Son. From this view of man, Catholic schools are positively critical of society and criticize, for example, the one-sided emphasis on the economic usefulness of young people as future workers.

Community of values

Drawing up a pedagogical concept is not just a matter for the school management or the school board but for all those who are connected to the school. So it is also a matter of teachers, pupils and parents and educational support staff. They all have to identify with it by contributing to it.

Values

Because of the pedagogical concept we call a school community a value or moral community. Being involved in values is not only a matter of the mind but also of the heart. The latter means that we must personally confess to these values and make them our own.

Faith

It remains a challenge for a Catholic school to constantly express and clarify the Catholic religious tradition. When and where should you say what? Of course, the composition of the school team and the student population must be taken into account. They can be very diverse from an ideological point of view. But however diverse it may be, a Catholic school cannot avoid expressing its connection with the Catholic religious tradition. It is part of her task to work on real tolerance in a religiously pluralistic society. It is not a question of indifference towards philosophical and religious diversity, but of actively appreciating differences.

Carriers of Catholic identity

We have a pedagogical concept and talk about the school as a community of values. But how do we prevent these things from becoming a paper reality? In other words, we need a practical translation. Very important here are the teachers, they are in the middle of the primary process on the shop floor. The question is how strong and authentic a teacher is when it comes to Catholic identity. Can he bring them into conversation with students, colleagues and parents? Which language and which knowledge does he need for this? Besides a familiarity with the Catholic religious community and culture, it also presupposes knowledge of the Christian faith and the Catholic tradition. This applies all the more to teachers in primary education because they are also responsible for the subject religion/philosophy of life. Are they, for example, able to bring up their own religiosity in this?

Besides teachers, a school leader, a director, but also parents and in some cases pupils can act as bearers of Catholic identity. In very general terms, we can say that a Catholic school cannot do so without a certain quota of teachers, which is clearly a matter of faith and meaning.

Recognizability of a Catholic school

The quality of a Catholic school can only be given its own interpretation if the pedagogical concept is translated into the workplace.