

Education is too selective, elitist, pope says

The alliance among families, schools and society places profit over people.



The educational alliance among families, schools and states is broken, causing a serious situation that leads to selecting to educate only "supermen" chosen solely based on intelligence or wealth, Pope Francis said.

"Behind this, there is always the ghost of money — always," he said. Education has become "too selective and elitist. It seems that only those people or persons who are at a certain level or have a certain capacity have the right to an education."

The pope held an impromptu question-and-answer session Nov. 21 during an audience with more than 2,000 participants in a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education and the 25th anniversary of "Ex Corde Ecclesiae," St. John Paul II's apostolic constitution on Catholic universities.

Taking questions from administrators and faculty members, the pope spoke about Catholic identity in education and warned about the dangers of exclusion and educating within "the walls" of a selective and safe culture.

Roberto Zappala, headmaster of Milan's Gonzaga Institute, asked the pope what makes a school "truly Christian." Christian education, the pope responded, is not just about providing catechesis, but requires educating children and young people "in human values," particularly the value of transcendence.

Educating that is too focused on the tangible and ignores the spiritual dimension of existence is "the biggest crisis" facing Christian education, he said.

"We must prepare hearts so the Lord can manifest himself," which requires an education that strives to reflect "the fullness of humanity that has this dimension of transcendence," he said.

A broken alliance

Spanish Lasallian Christian Brother Juan Antonio Ojeda, a professor at the University of Malaga, asked the pope how educators can foster a culture of encounter and restore the broken bonds among schools, families and society.

The pope said Catholic educators must overcome a tendency of being selective and must work to restore the broken "educational alliance" among families, schools and society, which tends to place profit over people.

"This is a shameful global reality," the pope said. "It is a reality that leads us toward a human selectivity that, instead of bringing people together, it distances them; it distances the rich from the poor; it distances one culture from another."

Educators, he continued, "are among the worst-paid workers: what does this mean? It means that the state simply has no interest. If it did, things wouldn't go that way. The educational alliance is broken. And this is our job, to find new paths."

The pope called on both families and educators to take "reasonable risks" in educating children and youth, helping them to grow.

When asked how Catholic schools could contribute to building peace in the world, the pope called on them to educate the poor and the marginalized even if that meant cutting the staff at some of their schools in wealthier neighborhoods.

"They have something that youth from rich neighborhoods do not through no fault of their own, but it is a sociological reality: they have the experience of survival, of cruelty, of hunger, of injustice. They have a wounded humanity. And I think about the fact that our salvation comes from the wounds of a man injured on the cross," he said.

Junno Arocho Esteves - CNS