

OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS IN AFRICAN EDUCATION

By J.W.C. DOUGALL

Educational expansion in Africa is a great cause of embarrassment to mission policy. The resources of churches and governments are already taxed but we are only at the beginning of African education. Figures are only approximate but we know enough to say that only a small proportion of children are yet receiving any education. The present rate of improvement is so small when increase of population is taken into account that we seem to be facing a quite impossible task.

The strain is felt by societies in three directions: finding sufficient teachers, paying educational costs and maintaining unity of missionary purpose.

I

Recruiting experience reveals a shortage of men and women of the type wanted. Boards are not satisfied that the teachers and students who offer have evangelistic zeal. Recruits are not clear themselves about their motive and do not define it in religious terms.

Educationists often feel that the boards do not believe in education for itself or regard teaching as a missionary call. Preaching seems to be more appreciated. Teachers are therefore put off. There is an impression that missions do not find much place for the values of Christian humanism or interest themselves in the improvement of the environment and the community-aspect of education.

There is truth on both sides. Boards realise that humanitarian interests are not enough to make a missionary. Only personal religion will keep people on the mission field doing a work that matters fundamentally to Africans. Boards are right in requiring convictions and experience which will mark off Christian schools from those where no religious aim is central.

The Church, however, is the instrument of evangelism, worship and ministry. If the teacher is truly a member of the Church he or she is taking part in that threefold task.

Teachers should not be expected to be evangelists in the strict sense. Their work is in school and with pupils in a community. It is friendship rather than 'personal work'. Teaching itself is their witness, the medium of the contact of person with person, the opportunity of engaging boys and girls in worthwhile pursuits. Their share in the work of the Church lies just here.

Thus questions of recruiting suggest two main requirements - a fuller recognition of the evangelistic task of the Church as a whole, the missionary responsibility of every Christian; and a fuller understanding of the diversity of functions of the layman in the Church. The work of the Church has to be done in the secular life by religious men and women. Until this is better realised we shall fall short in educational drive and thoroughness.

II

Next comes the question of ownership of schools and control of teachers. Owing to the expansion of the service missions are driven to claim more state assistance or are induced to take it for the sake of efficiency. Salaries are paid by the Government direct in South Africa. Buildings may be rented from the missions. In West Africa also teachers' salaries are paid. Mission teachers thus tend to regard themselves as government servants. Control may become pervasive and cover details. There is room for anxiety as to the final result of such tendencies.

In South Africa the Native Affairs Commission recently recommended that native schools should be transferred from mission to state control. The 'Makerere' Report of last September urged the payment of salary grants direct to mission teachers and the control over appointments of teachers in schools where Government was asked to assist with capital expenditure.

Governments generally are exerting closer control over education and often claiming the monopoly in this field. The cleavage in South Africa is due to the recognition that education is one of the most powerful instruments of national policy. Native policy, it is said, is committed to segregation. Segregation, therefore, should be the frame of reference and test for curriculum and method in native education.

'Biological differences' may be a pretext for depriving the African of an education which is equal in range and standard to the education offered to white children. At the same time mission education may and does suffer because it neglects the physical environment and ignores the value of African institutions. The case for mission schools would be stronger if we were more alive to the right kind of adaptation and could show the opponents of assimilation that we realise the values of African society while adjusting our material and methods to the inevitable changes.

Educational policy cannot be divorced from the political and economic reality which will surround the pupil. Mission schools, therefore, do not help Africans if they do not teach him to face facts. Where there is a divergence between the Christian understanding of life and the assumptions of the social and economic system it is all the more important that Christian teachers should be free so far as conditions of recruiting and appointment and control can ensure this. The differentia of the Christian school, in distinction from the service of Christian teachers in state schools, lies in the common fundamentals accepted by the staff and their freedom to share these with their pupils in a community which is bound together by an accepted faith and sense of mission.

Payment of staff is therefore a vital matter. We need to admit our share of responsibility. The case for government control is strengthened by the appeal of mission teachers for government salaries and pensions; and by our failure to secure, on our own terms, men and women with the technical qualifications required by Government.

III

The third question concerns the administration of mission or church schools. It is important to keep the association of the Church with the knowledge and skill offered by the new learning. Yet the Church as an organisation is not adapted for the administration of schools. It is too exclusively clerical. Yet the Church ought also to mean in this connection those with a Christian vocation to teaching. Schools may be administered by an ad hoc committee (which would also contain representatives of the clerical authority) or by the creation of a special committee of the church council with laymen of the necessary experience.

Devices of this kind are important to secure educational efficiency and to utilise the full service of the teaching profession in the Church. Education deserves to be regarded like medicine as a specialised job. As such it demands a measure of autonomy. This does not rule out the assistance of members of the clergy who can supplement or qualify the standpoint of the professional teacher.

IV

The most difficult matter is to select the objectives in an expanding system. Missions cannot undertake more than a share. They would not so readily adopt a 'dog in the manger' attitude to government schools if they were concentrating already on the really vital issues. Government schools are bound to increase. For the most part that means a secular idea of education with religion at best as a subject. It need not involve the loss of all influence by the Church because there will be Christian teachers in government schools and Christians serving in local and central boards of education. We need to see clearly, however, at what points the Christian forces are to be concentrated.

Teacher-training is one such point and probably it should be regarded as the most vital of all. It needs a high ratio of staff to students and, because it may be the originating centre for variation, it should have priority in staffing needs. The fact that government Normal Schools will increase makes it all the more important that we should have in each territory one or two centres which have a strong and distinctive staff and are resistant to non-Christian standards and assumptions. Indian experience shows what one such centre can do. We need therefore to emphasise this and to go out for originality, experiment and the conditions where these can function best.

Next comes rural community supervision. This is also a question of personnel. It is not possible to confine this to education in the strict sense. Supervision should contemplate a combined attack on ignorance, disease and evil. What is done in school is part of this programme. The rest is done in the home and garden, in the workshop and dispensary. The supervisor is to be eyes and vision to the teacher. These men and women, European and African, need to be selected with the greatest care. The European should have a team of Africans whom he or

she trains if there is no special centre for this purpose. The right people are able to bracket education with agriculture or home improvement or some other special activity. In every variety of qualification our aim must be to link an evangelistic and pastoral concern with another province of secular experience.

Selection of these two objectives does not mean rejection of present work but caution in new undertakings. The official Church should try to offload its responsibilities to bodies of Christian managers or governors. Experience should be sought from other fields.

Selection is always a delicate matter. It should be part of a positive programme and involve the co-operation of different societies. If properly used it will be found to involve concerted planning. This again suggests the need in each area for a full-time person to study the whole situation and to help the boards individually and as a group to choose their undertakings in the light of their combined resources and so to meet the needs of each most adequately.

Collection Number: AD843

XUMA, A.B., Papers

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.