

Hello to everyone,

I've known G. Mariano for 15 years and we usually see each other at meetings of AGESC (an association of parents in Catholic schools). Whenever I meet him, who is an ex-Jesuit student, I try to get some new information about Pope Francis or about the Superior of the Jesuit congregation from Venezuela, just appointed. I feel moved when I think that in his first speech he spoke about "being courageous against all odds".

When Giuseppe, President of Unaec Europe, asked me if I could give him a hand with the European Association of ex-students from Catholic Schools, I did not hesitate to accept. At university I focused my interest on teaching methods and school management, but after becoming a priest, I worked both with young people doing their civil service and in youth centres in the outskirts of Turin. Now I've been living in an institute for 16 years and education has become my first interest. In 2015 I wrote an e-book where I tell my experiences in methodology both in Italy and in Europe. Meanwhile I was planning an innovative school for entrepreneurs and I tried to involve some teachers in this adventure.

This e-book starts with a casual meeting. I was getting on a plane to London when I came across an ex-student, Edoardo. While we were chatting away and remembered the past years spent together in a Catholic school, I asked him about his impressions on this type of education in relation to his current job in England. His opinions confirmed my ideas on the Italian Catholic School. During the two World Wars, this type of schools offered great opportunities to young people who wanted to study and learn work skills. At that time families were numerous and the teachers were mainly religious men and women. Many youngsters used to live far from a school so they could not have had the opportunity to study without these institutions.

Now, the teachers are not part of a Congregation so they need to be paid and many schools must be renovated for safety reasons. All these factors are affecting badly the economy of these institutes, which are forced to close down. Many families, especially the ones who are not so well-off, feel they can't afford to send their children to a church school.

Despite these elements I am well aware of, I would like to see our school in pole position as far as new methodology is concerned. I firmly believe that the educational value of a school is to be seen in its quality of methodology, in how deeply its teachers feel the need of being formed and being innovative in order to advance in their career. At some important Italian conferences on education I haven't seen many teachers from our schools, but quite a lot from state schools. Don Bosco used to encourage his Salesians to be always up to date while I sometimes fear most Catholic schools look back on their glorious past and do not go ahead.

Who lives in the working world, like Edoardo, perfectly knows that you must constantly get updated if you want to succeed and from my experience as a headmaster, I've found several ex-students ready to offer some breakthroughs as regards the relationship between education and work. Wandering about Europe I've met Catholic Education Centres which have focused on teachers' development courses.

To conclude, I hope that international associations like Unaec Europe might give everyone the opportunity to widen their horizons and that ex-students may help Catholic Institutions to live the Jesuits' motto "towards the open sea where it's at its deepest".

*Edoardo Zanini*