

Prayer Chain : Praying for the 'Mountain' of Education

May 2020

by Daniel Hakelbracht

Of the 'seven mountains of society', this is in my opinion one of the most influential, mainly because it is strongly linked to the mountain of politics/government. And **the importance of teaching** becomes clear when we see that Jesus was also a great Teacher, and that he exhorts us to proclaim and teach the Gospel to all nations. In our country, education has always been an object of great attention and because of its high quality (at international level) we are rather proud of it.

Already, when Belgium came into being in 1830, a bitter struggle was waged around this question of education (which, before this period in time, was monopolised by the Catholic church). Article 24 of **the Constitution** defines **freedom of education** as meaning the right for everyone to found a school.

Parents can choose between public schools, independent schools (based on a religious or philosophical view, e.g. Catholic) and home schooling. In some countries, citizens do not have this freedom and only a government-controlled education system exists. That turned into a long and violent school war between Catholics and liberals (free thinkers), because both had realised that whoever can influence young people, will direct the future.



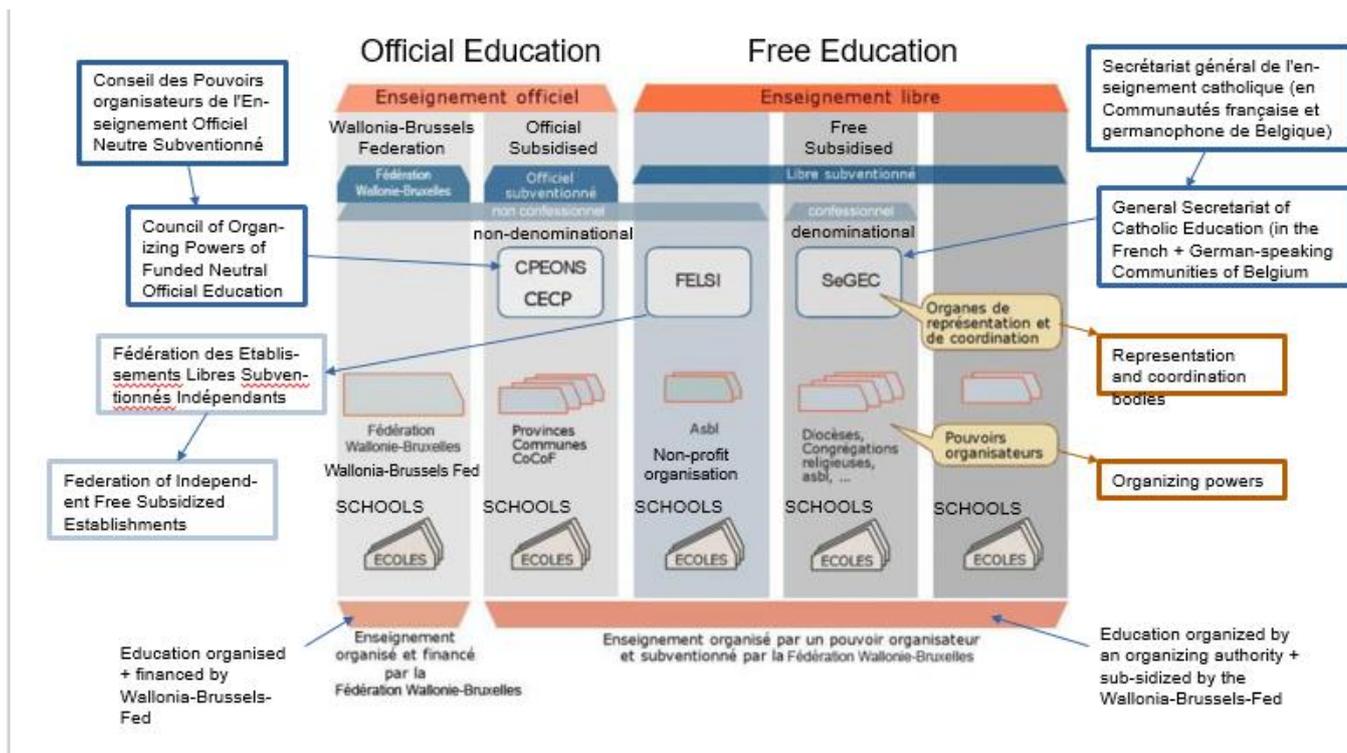
Due to the constitutional freedom of education, there are therefore two educational networks in Belgium: (1) **the official/public network**, which includes education organised by (Flemish/Wallonian) communities, provinces and municipalities; (2) **the free network** (organized by citizens, but co-financed by the government for payment of salaries, equipment and buildings. In this second category we can distinguish denominational schools (with a philosophical educational project, e.g. Catholic education, Protestant schools, Koranic schools, Jewish schools) and non-denominational schools (based on a cultural vision, such as schools following their own methodology, for example Steiner, Freinet...). The various successive reforms of the Belgian State led in 1988 to the transfer of the authority over education and training to the Flemish/Wallonian communities.

In Flanders, Ben Weyts (N-VA) is the minister in charge; in Wallonia Valérie Glatigny (MR) and Caroline Désir (PS); in Brussels Sven Gatz (Open VLD); in the German-speaking community Harold Mollers (ProDG) and Oliver Paasch (ProDG).

The weight (spiritual as well) of a department is also determined by the size of the financial portfolio it manages and the degree of employment it generates. And so, the annual subsidy granted by the Flemish and Wallonian Community to education and training amounts to roughly $\pm 25\%$ of the total budget. This for a staff and a school population of 1,4 million pupils/students (+ 150,000 teachers/professors) in Flanders, and 889,000 students (+ 100,000 teachers) in Wallonia.



Education Structure Wallonia-Brussels



In the official network, parents are always free to choose **a course in religion**, either Catholic, Islamic, Israelite, Orthodox, Protestant-Evangelical, Anglican or non-confessional ethics (in Flanders 2h/week, in Wallonia since 2016 1h/week). But voices are constantly being raised that want to remove all form of religion from schools (secularism), so that only one kind of vague 'moral' education (a 'citizenship' course) remains.

In the Flemish and French Community, the **Protestant and Evangelical** religious education is being organised by an ARPEE/CACPE committee, made up of representatives from several denominations: they are selecting and appointing applicant teachers, writing the course program, etc. In Flanders 7600 children choose this course, and 450 teachers teach it (there are no statistics for Wallonia).

In Flanders there are 11 **Protestant primary schools** ('Scholen met de Bijbel', IPCO): in Aarschot, Antwerpen, Bilzen, Brussel, Genk, Gent, Kortrijk, Mechelen, Lommel and Brugge. In the French Community, there are 6 Protestant primary schools: Charleroi-Marcinelle, Colfontaine, Braine-L'Alleud, Mouscron, Monceau-sur-Sambre, Anderlecht; these last two have a secondary school too.

Protestant **Higher Education** is offered in 3 places: Continental Theological Seminary (CTS, Sint Pieters Leeuw), Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (ETF, Heverlee, Dutch and English program) en Faculteit voor Protestantse Theologie en Religiestudie (FPTR Brussel, Dutch and French program), each with different theological accents. In Brussels there is also The Biblical Institute of Brussels (French speaking).

For students in universities and colleges of Higher Education, there is, on the Flemish side, **Ichtus**, which organises student bible groups in seven cities (Antwerpen, Brugge, Brussel, Gent, Hasselt, Kortrijk and Leuven). In the French speaking part there are **GBU's, University Bible Groups**. These interfaith evangelical student organisations are committed to supporting young students who will probably be the leaders of our society in the next generations, so that they can fill their minds not only with knowledge, but also with the Spirit of God.

The impact of the government apparatus on education is very important: it always determines the learning objectives and the study programs. These are sometimes at odds with the beliefs of most evangelicals, for example regarding creation or evolution, the Big Bang theory, gender issues and

related themes. So let us take **our own responsibility as parents and churches** in a very conscientious way (and not "delegate" it to the government): may we teach our children at home and on Sunday mornings, but also, for example, in Christian camps for children. And let us not forget that "education" is much more than the transfer of cognitive knowledge: we are all role models for everyday life in some area.

Jesus himself was a great teacher and a wonderful pedagogue: "He opened his mouth and taught them" on the mountain (Matt. 5: 1). By his acts and his miracles he demonstrated the reality of the Kingdom of God. God also commands us: "You shall teach them (God's instructions) diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (Deut. 6.7 NKJV). "Train up a child in the way he should go," (Prov.22:6). "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge,..."(Hosea 4:6). **Paul** repeatedly emphasizes the teaching and training of the believer to make him fit for the tasks of service: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). And didn't Jesus Himself give the Great Commission with this command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;" (Matt.28:19-20)?

The world of science is also linked to education and universities. In our culture, science is too often seen as being opposed to religion, even as the enemy of faith. Free-thinkers or atheists use (abuse) science as a weapon against the church and religion, as a "rational" substitute for them, thereby giving it a quasi-religious character. God can never be threatened by science, for He is the Creator of rationality and natural laws. We also note that at different levels, the world of science is no longer objective, but very biased towards all that is religious, even intolerant. For example, regarding the origin of the world (Evolution and the Big Bang Theory), Creationism (or "Intelligent Design") is not even given a place. People laugh about it, as if it were the Middle Ages (and evolutionism is still being constantly propagated). Fortunately, there are also top scientists who are strong believers and are not ashamed of it.

Pray

- For all **decision-makers** (local, regional and federal) to have wisdom as regards how to implement education policy; for the constitutional freedom of education in Belgium to never be compromised in favour of saving money or on the grounds of ideological (humanist) motivations.
- That the "influencers" on this mountain would meet God, or at least respect Him, and that the impact of born again believers would increase among these influencers or decision makers.
- That our teaching would once again **honour the Creator** and respect His creation. (Not only human beings, but also the environment).
- That those who want to abuse education for the benefit of their own **(ideological) agendas** would be removed.
- That the educational reforms of recent years might be adequately implemented and evaluated before new challenges are deployed.
- For **teachers of integrity** who are competent enough, for whom teaching is more than just delivering a class, but that they would take their educational role seriously.
- For teachers to renew their strength, especially those who are tired and have become overloaded throughout the years (Come to Him!), or who are discouraged by the changes they are undergoing.
- That the number of hours given to **religious education classes** would NOT be replaced by other subjects such as philosophy or citizenship courses. That these religion classes will be evaluated positively. (Unfortunately in the French-speaking Community the 2 hours of religion classes per week have already been reduced to a single hour per week in favor of one hour of philosophy and citizenship lessons for all pupils. Let's continue to pray for this hour of religious education class to be maintained).
- That **Catholic schools** (still the big majority in Belgium) do not become even more diluted and do not compromise their Christian identity

- Let's pray for the (Flemish and Wallonian) Committees responsible for the proper functioning of **Protestant-Evangelical religion classes**: for wisdom, faith, vision, strength, and for all these teachers of religion, so that they can stand in faith, teach in an inspired and motivating way, and can sow many good seeds.
- Pray for all the **protestant schools** to persevere and grow in their impact and their charisma, as well as be strong in their Christian identity.
- For a renewed respect for **Christian heritage and values**, and for a healthy image of man and of God in colleges and universities and in the field of science. May scientists who are believers bear witness to their faith without shame.
- May **Ichtus and the GBU** (University Bible Groups) be able to reach our generation of students effectively and inspire them to grow in their faith and in spirit.
- Pray for **Protestant colleges and universities** (CTS, The Protestant Faculty in Brussels, Bible Institute of Brussels, Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven) to pass on to theological students (future church leaders) not only academic knowledge, but also faith and the knowledge of God himself.
- May **our children and young people** be strong enough spiritually not to be influenced by all the worldly thinking, but on the contrary, may they be strong witnesses! ("Mums in Prayer" prays in a very targeted and specific way!)
- For **sex education** in schools (also concerning gender identity) to be healthy, respectful and balanced.
- That **collaboration** in the field of education among born-again Christians might improve even further, thereby having a positive impact on other spheres of influence.
- For the false opposition between **religion and science** to be broken again and again, and for scientists who are also believers to testify more boldly to their faith.
- For an opening to come, to be able (at least) to discuss **creation and creationism**, and for there to be clear voices that denounce the lies and break all the taboos.