

### 3. The challenge of mission: reinventing the educational community

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In thinking about mission we find ourselves confronted by an especially delicate task due to the historical moment in which we live.

If we are concerned about this, it is not because we are few or many, with new works or ones already known, in one country or in many. The challenge of mission is not in the technical or material order. It is something much more remote. It does not refer to our work but to its meaning. Our problem is not how to work but rather what is our work.

Responding to this challenge requires us to look for the very roots of our identity.

It is wonderful to discover that the renewal of mission leads us as it were by the hand to the theme of Association.

#### 1. The Lasallian project and the change of epoch.

We can distinguish various challenges in the world of education.

The first of these is in relation to **the poor**. The poor, in fact, do not have the same access to educational resources as others do. This situation has worsened with the dynamic of a globalization that is increasing the distance between the better off and the marginalized. Moreover - and this is the most important aspect - the poor are victims of an educational and cultural model conceived usually for the exploitation of the world and its peoples.

There is also the challenge of **the disintegrating State**. Because of globalization, the poor are almost disappearing, missing out on the previously known forms of social care. The forces of global-

ization need to have societies free of every obstacle to their interests, so that they are continually dismantling all the known forms of local administration.

Globalization also presumes that all **the cultural forms change**. To increase the ease of interchange, new criteria for values have been appearing, new aesthetic principles and their own ways of thinking. At the same time, human relationships are marked by new forms of communication which become instruments and conditions of the new culture. All of this brings about a general uncertainty which causes great difficulty for the new social forms to see the point of the function of religion in the new models of life.

Finally, **the Lasallian heritage itself** is submitted to a similar historical turnaround and is changed into a challenge. The heritage we receive is not easy to take on in the new conditions of the world, so that we run the risk of it being badly understood or simply forgotten as we keep on distancing ourselves from the world in which it was born.

What does all this say to us? What does it mean?

### **At the source of all the challenges**

Obviously, much more could be said, but these four aspects are enough to evoke the challenge that we as Lasallians receive from what we have always dedicated ourselves to and called 'our mission'.

Without adding anything more, these four features already continue showing us how the world of our mission contains much more than new difficulties for us. When we speak about 'challenge' we are saying that below these difficulties there is a sign, a gesture of the Lord that jolts us.

Underneath the 'challenge of the mission' there is much more than an invitation to our ingenuity. The whole thing makes us feel insecure, as though before our very eyes everything we have known has disappeared and there is emerging a model we have not known. That is why we say that the challenge of mission is much more than a call to generosity.

In reality, what we are discovering in the world of education is a reflection of the great sign of our times: **the crisis of all the mod-**

**els of relationships**, the emerging of needs and new forms of living together. As in the major moments of history, people are looking for assurance in face of what is appearing, something that guarantees its human character and meaning in the paths of globalization.

It is from these educational plans that, in what is being prepared, there is hope for humanity...

## 2. Our ideal project.

In face of the different challenges to be confronted today, the Community of the Christian Schools turns in on itself seeking a solid reference point for what it wishes to be. It feels itself in a new world and looks within itself, questioning itself about its identity and its meaning among the institutions of these new societies. This we have seen in tracing the path of the General Chapters since 1946.

In the past fifty years, in obedience to the urgent necessity of understanding itself from within, the Institute as never before has studied its origins and its history. It could be said that its concern went ahead of what was happening and was the best indication that the times were changing. From this effort there has been emerging, among other things, **the evidence that the content of the first foundation was the Community of the Christian schools.** Nothing else.

Throughout this period we have gone on seeing our ideal or our main objective as offering a common project to our people, a 'school' where we lived together, a style and an offering that was shared.

Even if at times we forgot, living as we did in the midst of urgent needs and changes, we know that in the foundation period the concern was not so much to establish Christian schools but rather to establish communities to give life to them. We know this because otherwise there would have been no point in establishing the body of educators as they did. That is why we know also that the inherited value that has maintained our institutions over these 300 years of Modernity has been our educational community. Our heritage, therefore, is to share our same life project in an educational service with preference for the poor.

Our heritage, that is to say our identity and our social value through our educational projects in the service of which live a group of people, consists in offering them a clear Sign of Hope. Our community has always been the guarantee of our work: it has assured its stability and its meaning.

Our heritage consists in the ability to live the same project together in such a way that there is the same fidelity to those who are the recipients of our professional work as there is to those with whom we work.

### **Our specific ability in facing these new times.**

It is in this way, in the face of the challenges to education in a changing world, that we count on the value of the School lived as Community. Nowadays, it is clear that 'school' no longer means what it meant, for example in France, in 1850. On the other hand, whatever be the appearance of the educational plan for these new times, its appearance as community must continue to mean the same. This is our strength in face of the new challenges of our mission.

Throughout these past fifty years, nevertheless, the dynamic of globalization and the crisis of social institutions have imposed on us a certain loss of vision and a forgetting of all this. Throughout this period we have developed our ability for organization and our projects have become complex as never before. Moreover, because of the diminution of the number of Brothers, the new members involved in Lasallian projects were invited more in terms of their work than of their persons. As a result of this, the 'community' dimension, our inheritance, has known a certain imbalance.

Parallel to all this, nevertheless, we have seen develop everywhere a call for something more, as if commitment to the work was not sufficient when what was needed was commitment to people. This last aspect we call 'association'.

It is not difficult to interpret this double movement as the deepest challenge to the Lasallian heritage faced with these new times. Between the two, they help us recall and respond to the great question of what we wish to be.

Thus it is that before these new times we knew that our institutions were greater than the sum of their members. We know that above

all our titles and our memories we form part of a collective identity capable of sustaining hope among the poor.

This identity is much more than a refuge or fortress for us. It is the evidence that the world is much more than an organization. **If, in the midst of the dynamics of globalization there exist institutions such as ours, the future still remains possible.** The poor know that.

### 3. So that the mission be possible.

When we consider at the same time the challenges of the world of education and the value of our heritage, we immediately meet **the great aims of our institutional dynamic.**

We are a network of projects, an association with local roots, a complex organism that needs to propose objectives for itself to arrive at the vision it has of itself. That is why our way of perceiving this historical moment at the same time as our identity of three centuries sets out large fields of action. In them we go on realizing our mission.

Before everything else, just as it was three centuries ago, our mission is to be concrete in following out **a clear relationship between our educational projects and the needs of the new societies.**

Today, just like three centuries ago, for our educational projects to be a Sign of Hope faced with these new times, we need to be animated within by an intelligent and consistent strength to understand what is going on and to give an answer. For the new community of the Christian Schools to show itself at the height of its calling, there is a need to revise what we consider a valid educational project and revise it intelligently faced with the new needs for the development of people.

Seeking this coherence means that we need on occasions to re-design programs that seem to be too remote from our tradition. As happens in every social dynamic, not all the formulae can be consolidated because they deal more with opportunity or imagination than with something solid. But the logic of life requires that without initially accepting the possibility of differences no institution succeeds in responding to this social novelty.

This cannot be achieved **without an adequate institutional model.**

It was like this already three hundred years ago. We cannot forget, indeed, that in those days of the first foundation there was no Ministry of Education nor guaranteed systems of economic support that support the educational world of today. That is why the founding community had to invent everything: timetable, programs, formation, organization into a network, systems of thought, methodology etc. And all of this was done before Western administrators considered that education was their responsibility.

So just as it was three hundred years ago, our mission requires that we put forward the goal of setting up **new communities capable of doing all this.**

Each time it becomes more urgent for the Lasallian world to put forward its aims in order to live its mission. As an answer to the new conditions of history and of the Church, the heirs to the Lasallian tradition need to discover new ways of living and expressing their links with the new educational projects. They need to understand that all its members are potentially destined to hear the same call of God and that they can nourish their lives from the depths of their educational ministry.

**Discovering the face of the mission every day.**

The universality of our project is teaching us the diversity of possible models. They help us to take into account that schools and educating are not identical realities in all cultures and in all societies. But above all they show us that none of our projects need be exempt from the need to redefine itself, however conventional it may seem.

The crisis of social administration models proposed by globalization makes us see that underneath the diversity of our projects there is something much more important: the need to re-invent and to recreate the idea of school every day. That is where our Lasallian heritage has real value.

The work of the Community of the Christian Schools, just like other similar family traditions, offers the world a specific added value: the experience of belonging, of something common, of

shared fruitfulness. Today, as always, this institutional experience is the guarantee that the three indicated aims can be realized and give a face to the mission.

#### 4. Strategic priorities.

The distinct aims we can propose for our journey cannot be achieved without directions or strategic priorities. The Lasallian tradition has always known and has always sought directions, emphases, **values to help it.**

If we expect that our Lord and our people are hoping for something from our educational projects as Signs of Hope before the world that is coming, we have to project the necessary attitudes and procedures. We cannot indeed arrive at institutional designs that are coherent at the same time with the new needs of the world and with the values of our heritage if we do not articulate our programs on determined criteria.

In this case, today, just as three centuries ago, our community needs to live animated by faith, that is to say, by a responsible attention to the signs of the times.

Understood in this way, faith or the spirit of faith show that the fundamental criterion at every time of historical change is **fidelity.** That is our great priority.

At times of historical change as occurred at the time of foundation, what makes the institution valuable is not first of all its capacity for work and of organization but its intelligent and responsible fidelity to those for whom it is destined.

By definition, times of change know better what is not seen rather than the new and convenient. That is why they seek, experiment, verify. Afterwards, little by little, the waters become serene and a new course emerges which either coincides or does not with what preceded it. That is why times of change call us not to be popular but to be faithful.

In order to cultivate this value it is presumed that in the midst of our educational projects there is **a very clear awareness of what is needed to be Signs of Hope for the poor.** This awareness means to live by being animated by the responsibility in face of the new conditions of life that what matters most to us is the truthfulness

of our proposal rather than its immediate results or its social profitability.

### **Inventing and sharing responsibility.**

This feeling of responsibility does not allow us to save our efforts: at one time or another we will be steered towards results with contrasting values. We need our projects to be truly creative and free so that within them all the members feel they have something to say.

This so because fidelity is creative.

Fidelity unites and diversifies, it makes things uniform and distinguishes them at the same time. It insists that all persons have their own individuality, each needing a specific answer and capable of an original project. When an educational project is animated by fidelity, every person brings a specific way of answering needs and of offering something. In doing this they all resemble one another and yet they are all distinct. No one is limited to reproducing something. This is the risk of the Community that makes it capable of responding to the challenges of the new society.

In the new Lasallian communities, concretely, **the value of fidelity requires that the religious and the secular, the Christian and the person of good will, all meet.** All have the same concern to animate the educational project from their way of living their fidelity. By their very way of living, some emphasize efficiency, fruitfulness, and acceptance; others show mystery, hope and availability.

Everyone is animated by their awareness of their responsibility at this historical moment. That is how they share daily in the re-invention of the Sign of the Educational Community.