

An educational community "going forth"

EDUCATING TO BUILD COMMUNITY (1)

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At the Piarist Education Congress held in April 2017, Professor María Nieves Tapia shared with us a paper that gives us guidelines to promote the Education Pact in our schools. Due to its topicality, we have decided to publish it in three parts in the four official languages of the Order.



Thank you very much for the invitation. I am very sorry that I cannot be physically for health reasons, but thanks to new communication technologies I can invite all of you to my house and share with you the prayer and the meeting.

I am very happy to be able to participate also because I know a lot about the charism and work of the Piarists. I was educated with the Salesians - a charism younger than yours - and I grew up within the Church in the Focolare movement, an even more recent charism, and I have to tell you that it is an enormous source of hope for me to see that the oldest charisms are still alive, that they continue to bear fruit, that they continue to make their founder present in the contemporary world as you do in this meeting. . It gives me great hope that even the younger charisms will be able to keep them alive, to make our founders present even as the years go by, so their anniversary is also an occasion of celebration for me and for many others in the Church.

The title they proposed for my presentation is "Educating to build community", a topic that surely is not new to you. That is why I do not think I can tell you anything that is radically new to you, but I would simply like to be a stimulus to rethink central issues for educational life and to question how we can do to improve, to always be one step further.

1- An educational community "going forward"

I would like to begin by quoting a presentation that Father Aguado made when we were at the International Education Congress in Rome in 2015 (if you have not seen it yet on video, I recommend it to you¹). There, he spoke of some priorities for Catholic education among which I would like to return to two that seem fundamental to me in relation to the title of this block, what does this mean to "build the community". On the one hand, he called for "*creating a referential Christian community*" understood as an "*incarnate soul*" involving identity, a "*project enriched by the charism*". On the other hand, to "*change society, prefer the poor, evangelize people and culture.*"

On the one hand, there is this perhaps more intimate, more "inward" dimension of the school, the dimension of our own school as a *Christian community*. From this dimension, we could question to what extent our schools are Christian communities that can serve as a reference, as a starting point for the life and faith of our students. Father Aguado calls it "*an incarnate soul*," and it seemed to me a key expression because many times Catholic schools are tempted to offer many discourses and little

¹ <https://youtu.be/TIkseYwasGo><https://youtu.be/TIkseYwasGo>

incarnation. We are very good at speeches and homilies, we know everything we have to do, and also that it is not always so easy to put the Gospel into practice, but we need not stop trying to incarnate it, or we are not whom we say we are.

In this dimension of building the Christian community, a Piarist school is not just any school: there is a project enriched by the charism of St. Joseph Calasanz. And it seems to me that this word "charisms" is not always used with the awareness of the enormity that it implies: it is the Holy Spirit himself, that breath of understanding of the life of God that reaches a founder in a certain place and time, but that is a gift to make present the "God with us" throughout our history. It is the Spirit who wants to make *himself* present in our present, in circumstances as diverse as our schools, and our communities, are geographically and culturally diverse.

When we think of our educational community as a Christian community, I am always challenged by two phrases that refer to the life of the first Christians: "*All believers stood together and put their own in common*" (Acts 2:42), and Tertullian who says that pagans recognized Christians because they said of them "*Look at how they love each other*" (Tertullian, Rev. 39). I always wonder: if someone enters our teachers' room, they could say of us "look how they love each other", if entering a classroom, they could say of the bond between our teachers and our students "look at how they love each other", if we could say of our educational community that we stay united and putting each one of their own in common...

Surely, building our own educational community as an "incarnate soul" requires a permanent conversion, especially in weaving moment by moment truly fraternal bonds with those closest to us. Paraphrasing the Hymn to Charity of St. Paul, we can have the best laboratories and the most advanced computer equipment, the best results in PISA, and the best projects in Science Fair, but if you cannot say of us "look how you love each other", maybe we are just bells that ring (I Cor 13:1)...

Along with this more "interior" dimension of our communities, there is a second broader dimension that I would like to address, which has to do with the "*change of society, preferring the poor, evangelizing people and culture*" that Father Aguado proposed. This dimension requires us to consider what is the scope of our community, and what kind of links we want to build with our environment.

The preparatory document for the World Congress of Education organized by the Vatican in 2015 (CEC, 2014) ² included an open consultation that was answered by thousands of Catholic educational institutions. From the analysis of that report, presented at the World Congress³, two images emerge of how Catholic educational communities see themselves: a minority identifies itself as a *fortress*, a kind of medieval castle or abbey that preserves within its walls the truth against the onslaught of the secularized world. Most, on the other hand, identify rather with the image of a *fountain* that can offer "living water" in an open way to all who want to approach.

² Instrumentum Laboris,

[http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-today-and-domani_it.html#a\) La sfida dell'E2%80%99identit%C3%A0](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-today-and-domani_it.html#a) La_sfida_dell%E2%80%99identit%C3%A0)

³ Presentation by Prof. Italo Fiorin, LUMSA University of Rome, in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican, World Congress of Education, November 18, 2015.

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In this regard, the concluding document of the Congress stated:

"... mission constitutes the dynamic and fruitful expression of identity, since - as the parable of the talents suggests - identity is not a treasure to be kept by jealously hiding it in a safe place, but it is a patrimony that must be "invested" and made available as a gift, so that it bears fruit.

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It seems evident to me that this vision of our mission and identity as a Catholic school is closely linked to the mission and evangelizing identity of the Church in these times when Pope Francis calls us to be a "Church going forth" towards the "existential peripheries":

*"The Church must come out of herself. Where? Towards the **existential peripheries**, whatever they may be. But get out. Jesus tells us, "Go into all the world Go. Preach. Bear witness to the Gospel" (cf. Mk 16:15). **I prefer a thousand times a troubled Church to a Church sick from locking itself up.**" (Pope Francis, Vigil of Pentecost 2013)⁷*

I would like to recall how the then Cardinal Bergoglio defined – during the Conclave in which he was elected Pope – the meaning of these "peripheries":

*"The Church is called to leave herself and go to the peripheries, not only the geographical ones, but also the **existential peripheries**: those of the mystery of sin, those of pain, those of injustice, those of ignorance and religious dispensation, those of thought, those of all misery." ⁸*

I believe that this call to be "Church going forth" challenges us not only personally but also as communities. In general, when educators talk about "educational community", usually the first thing we think of is that basic nucleus formed by students, their families, and teaching and non-teaching staff, stretching a little maybe we include alumni, some benefactors ... But the reality is that we do not always consider that the territory, the community that surrounds us, can also be part of our educational community because it is the place where our students live because it can be our field of evangelization and, as we will see later because it can be an extension of the classrooms as a learning space.

⁴ Instrumentum Laboris,

[http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-today-and-domani_it.html#a\) La sfida dell'E2%80%99identit%C3%A0](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-today-and-domani_it.html#a) La_sfida_dell%E2%80%99identit%C3%A0)

⁵ Presentation by Prof. Italo Fiorin, LUMSA University of Rome, in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican, World Congress of Education, November 18, 2015.

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http://es.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/11/21/no_se_puede_hablar_de_educaci%C3%B3n_cat%C3%B3lica_sin_hablar_de_hum/1188557

⁷ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130518_veglia-pentecoste.html

⁸ https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140823_messaggio-meeting-amicizia-popoli.html

In authentically "Catholic" terms in the sense of universal, to build the educational community is to build the community with all our brothers, with those we have closer, with those around us, and also with those who are perhaps farther from us in geography or in thought.

When Pope Francis spoke to educators in Quito in some way, he made it explicit to us what it means to be an educational community "going forth," when he asked us.

Do you watch over your students, helping them to develop a critical spirit, a free spirit, capable of taking care of today's world? A spirit that can seek new answers to the many challenges that society today poses to humanity, and are they able to stimulate them not to disregard the reality that surrounds them?

For that you must take them out of the classroom, their mind has to leave the classroom, their heart has to leave the classroom.

How does it enter the curriculum or the different areas of educational work, the life that surrounds us, with its questions, its questions, its questions? ⁹

It seems that the Pope is posing a paradox: on the one hand, it seems that he is telling us that to be a good school we must *leave* school, and at the same time, he is telling us that the reality of the community has to *enter* our curriculum and our educational work. It seems to me that it is in this dynamic of dialogue between what happens inside and outside the school, it is in this solidarity dialogue that the new paradigm of "school out" becomes a reality.

Precisely the proposal of service-learning aims to generate a "virtuous circle" by which the knowledge developed in the classrooms is put at the service of the transformation of the reality that surrounds us, and the contact with reality and with our brothers challenges theories and academic knowledge, and motivate our students to want to know more and leads us educators to review the relevance and relevance of our curricula, and perhaps to research together with our students to be able to solve complex problems in our community.

Returning then to what Father Aguado said at the World Congress of Education of the Vatican, on the one hand we want to "*create a referential Christian community*", an "*incarnate soul*", a "*project enriched by the charism*". On the other, we are called to "*change society, prefer the poor, evangelize people and culture*." In other words: for us to evangelize and change the world should always be the same, it should be the way to embody our identity as an educational community.

We will see below how this call to be "educational communities going forth" relates to what our century is asking of the school today.

⁹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150707_ecuador-scuola-universita.html