

HOLD EVENTS OR DEVELOP DYNAMISMS

'In the light of the XLVIII GC of the Pious Schools'

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I am asked to reflect 'with criterion' on our Piarist ministry in the light of the recent General Chapter. It is curious that the term 'criterion' has the same Greek root as the word 'crisis', so I will be very etymological and I will offer a reflection on crisis because the final horizon of a crisis is to know more and better the truth. At least, I will try to bring some light.

The Piarists have been full of anniversaries for a few years, all of them around the center and foundation of the charism: our evangelizing mission among children through education. And to celebrate is to remember. In the same General Chapter we have signified the 400 years of the Magna Carta of Christian popular education (Memorial to Cardinal Tonti) and of the

constitutional text of our Order.

What does it mean today to celebrate the different embodiments of the intuition of Saint Joseph Calasanz?

For some, organize and animate events that publicly mean what we want to celebrate. And that's fine. The celebratory dimension of life is a fundamental aspect that denotes the good health of a group or institution. Only the one who thanks celebrates, and only the one who becomes aware of the good received appreciates.

But there is another way to celebrate that does not materialize in events but in developing dynamisms of life or, in other words, welcoming the spirit that moved the founder to update him in our reality. It is not to repeat or imitate, but to embody the profound dynamics that moved Calasanz to be the creator of the first Christian popular school in Europe. The Second Vatican Council called it "back to the sources." And this is not easy. I am convinced that, in the face of the serious crisis that the Catholic school is going through in various parts of the world, if the Piarists are able to assume these dynamisms, we will be one of the architects of the new Catholic popular school.

I dare to give some keys that point to these dynamisms that should be embodied:

1. **The irreplaceable value of the school.** As is, as it sounds, and without anesthesia. Either we renew our faith in the school institution, or we will be complicit in its dissolution. The school is much more than structures (which can always be renovated); more than a group of people (whose relational dynamics are more important than their resumes); more than very well-equipped facilities (which sometimes mask reality); more than a story or a trophy cabinet or a wall full of recognitions and plaques. The school is a mother's womb that nourishes, accompanies, cares for, and develops those who are in it. We are called to recover this womb, this experience of motherhood and fatherhood. There are other platforms, necessary and convenient, but the routine exercise of school is an irreplaceable gestating process. This is how Calasanz lived it, and this is confirmed by the CVII (GE 5).
2. **To evangelize.** The Catholic school and in particular the calasanzian school was born to evangelize, no matter what. Calasanz did not set up an NGO (Brotherhood of his time) nor did he move a merely social cause (the situation of poor children), Joseph is moved by Jesus Christ. Only establishing this truth in all our schools and platforms that develop our ministry is the guarantee

of charismatic fidelity. And evangelizing is not just announcing or implementing pastoral processes; we must remember that the first step of missionary work according to the Decree *Ad gentes* of the Council is the witness of the Christian life (a term most used throughout the document along with evangelization after the word Christ).

- 3. For the poor.** The Piarist ministry has a very clear purpose: the poor. Also, the others (rich or not), but without ever losing the main objective. Once again, the CVII recovers this calasanzian intuition and states unequivocally that it is proper for the Catholic school "to attend to the needs of the poor, to those who are deprived of the help and affection of the family or who do not participate in the gift of faith." (GE 9). If we look for excuses, beautiful consoling periphrasis, and other pretexts to convince ourselves that being with the upper-middle classes is 'our thing' we will hardly go through this challenge. Social education, volunteering, service-learning... they are certain processes that can give light and 'return' us to the charismatic purpose. But 'let's not forget the poor'.
- 4. Clear horizon and good travel companions.** Listening to and contemplating in the General Chapter the reality of the Pious Schools, only one feeling is born: shock. To feel 'moved' with others in a beautiful update of the Piarist charisma. Much to change and transform, to renew and purify, together with new realities and missionary impulses that excite and 'clear' our horizon. The Piarists, religious and laity, we have it clear, and this is fundamental for there to be renewal. Another thing is the companions on the way to travel towards that horizon. In this journey, sometimes we allow ourselves to be accompanied in our ministry by realities that are more typical of the business, capitalist-gimmicky or consumerist-technocratic world, 'coaching' processes, quality, and very interesting methodologies whose purposes corrupt our charismatic horizon sibilinally. We need to stop and analyze with courage and discernment who and how we are letting ourselves be accompanied in our educational processes.

Frodo Baggins to carry out his great mission to get rid of the ring, he needed a community to accompany him and preserve him from the seductive power of the ring. And education today is an invaluable weapon for many interests.

There are those four dynamisms that can be a help (I hope with criteria), to renew and update our Piarist ministry.

