

**THE LASALLIAN EDUCATOR
FACING TODAY'S CHALLENGES
(2/3)**

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**2. THREE SPECIAL CHALLENGES
FOR THE LASALLIAN EDUCATOR.**

**2.1 A CALL TO INCULTURATION IN A
GLOBALIZED WORLD.**

Being faithful to reality should bring us to experience inculturation. One of the great challenges for the educator is to see to it that global cybernetic civilization does not smother the national, local and family identity. The Chapter reminds us of this when it speaks of shared mission. *"Inculturation is an ongoing process. For the shared mission, formation to inculturation is necessary for both Brothers and lay persons. This formation includes a study of the language of the country, insertion into the life situation of the population, getting to know the young people, etc. To discover a culture requires patience and humility, with the realization that it will always remain a mystery for a foreigner"* (Circular 435, page 43).

The topic of culture today is a very current one. It was at the very heart of the controversy in Santo Domingo. Are we speaking of a coming culture in a society which is more and more global or about a popular culture still unrecognized?

We certainly cannot deny the influence of modern culture along with its great benefits: it has united people by means of social communication, it has improved conditions of life, it has made work more human and brought to awareness human dignity and human rights, there are new avenues for expression. Unfortunately, we also cannot deny its negative qualities.

"It is a culture which is deeply inhuman and cruel; it is a culture of money and capital; it is a Northern culture at the expense of the peoples from the South who each day grow more poor; it is an elitist culture for the few; it is a culture which is violent, aggressive, macho, materialistic, individualistic, hedonist; it is a culture with horizons that are not open to the transcendent; it is a culture which is thoroughly suffocating and decadent" (V. Codina).

The 42nd General Chapter points out this ambivalence to us in two different very beautiful and moving texts which we should consider: *"We assert our commitment to this world and we are...captivated by and accomplices with but we side with; exasperated, but we side with; angered, but we side with; powerless, but we side with..."* (Circular 435, pp. 18-19). *Our world today is the arena of many life-giving*

movements...But our world is also confronted with other challenges...Lasallians are at the heart of this world" (Circular 435, pp.50-51).

But there is also another culture which we cannot forget and which merits our attention and our respect. It is the culture of the different ethnic indigenous, the Afro-Americans, the farmers from the distant or marginalized areas.

"Popular and traditional cultures are connected to the earth and they possess a great richness in languages and customs, rites and celebrations. They are contemplative and religious cultures with a profound sense of life and death, that know how to celebrate times of transition (birth, puberty, marriage, death). They are very community-minded cultures, they are participatory with a sense of reciprocity and solidarity. They belong to towns who know well what daily hard work is, what austerity and sobriety is, the fight for life, for territory and for identity" (V. Codina).

It is in this sense that the Chapter invites us to be *"active witnesses to the urgent need for national and international programs which include specific cultural measures regarding the poor"* (Circular 435, p. 21). I would change the word "regarding" for "of" because it is most important that they themselves be the active subject of their own development.

A universal culture or a particular culture? Here more than denial there should be integration. Because as the Brazilian educator Regina Leite Garcia expressed it at the International Education Summit held in February, 1997 in Mexico: *"One can only be enriched when universal culture immerses itself in his own culture and then as it is soaked up totally within that culture it becomes capable of facing other cultures, while broadening and deepening its own. One can only open himself to the universal culture, without losing his own identity, perceiving it as an integral part of the universal patrimony. He who feels that his own particular culture is part of the universal culture and that the universal culture is part of his particular culture"*.

It is important to reflect on some concrete principles so that education is inculturated and for the inculturation of the Gospel:

1). First of all, a change of attitude is necessary. What is needed is to pass from imposing to listening; from commanding to sharing; from thinking that we already know everything to the humble and demanding task of preparing ourselves to evangelize in a new way in the world of education. We cannot forget that a people on whom are imposed ways of being and thinking which are distant from their culture will sooner or later reject these ways or they will treat them as something which belongs in the periphery or is artificial.

2). To see to it, not only in theory but also in practice, that God is made manifest in all cultures and by means of all religious manifestations. *"In every culture and every religion there can be found the seeds of the word of God and the power of the Spirit of God. This implies a respectful stance toward cultures and religions"* (Circular 435, p. 39). This is not easy because we are accustomed to thinking that we possess the truth and that our work is simply to transmit what we already possess without new investigations and an openness to the truth held by the other.

3). It is important also that there be an inculturation in the world of youth. The 5th commission of the first stage of our last General Chapter affirmed:

"We see that there is an abyss between the cultural universe of young people and the realities of the Institute and of

the Church. This obliges us to consciously commit all the Brothers - and we could add: all Lasallians - whether in developed countries or those in various stages of development, to intensify the process of inculturation in the world of youth of all cultures. This will permit us to be in harmony with their aspirations. In this way a new spirit of optimism and of vitality will have an effect on the entire Institute that will foster vocation ministry”.

4). Respect persons who think and who are different than ourselves, convinced that *“salvation becomes a reality in every culture, even outside the limits of the visible Church”* (Circular 435, p. 39). We should live out this attitude within the Church and also in our educational communities.

5). One practical aspect of inculturation presumes a certain type of stability in the places of the mission. Inculturation presumes a preparation and some psychological and spiritual changes that need time to mature and bear fruit.

6). We should be convinced that the Gospel is Good News for all cultures. *The Gospel ought to help a culture flourish by advancing God’s plan of salvation in human history, but directed to the promotion of the Kingdom of God, rather than exclusively to the conversion of individuals. This implies that differences be accepted and respected. I should not begin with myself in order to meet the other, but begin from the point of view of the other. This implies an openness to new perspectives, new concerns, new currents in philosophy and theology, etc.”* (Circular 435, pp. 39-40).

7). At the same time and without negating what has already been stated, what is specifically Christian should not be renounced, being as it is capable of purifying and enriching all cultures. The person and the message of Jesus of relationships, fraternity, unconditional love, unlimited pardon, are the primary riches that we can give to mankind in his religious relationship with God, with others and with the world. Today, like Peter, we can say to the man from an oppressed culture, misunderstood by many: *“I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”* (Acts 3:6).

2.2 CALLED TO BE SIGNS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN A CYBERNETIC WORLD.

The world today gives an extraordinary amount of importance to images. The world of computer science has reassessed the virtual one. Images tend to be more important than the work they contain. The area of communication has become the dynamic area of society. What is important in the area of work is not so much its production, as in the past, but the prestige that it gives. For a politician or businessman the interviews given for television or for the press are more important than their work.

In this view even war has turned into a spectacle. With regard to food we think of the symbolic role of Coca Cola or McDonald’s and what matters is not the quality of clothing but the “brand”. In respect to this Regina Leite García says: *“At the end of this century, in whatever corner of Latin America, our young people dress as the young in New York or in Europe, they listen to the same music, they see the same films, they follow the same television programs, they receive the same information, they have the same habits, they incorporate words into their daily language which they often do not even understand, they display advertising on their T-shirts and jeans which are of the same brand and which display the same statements”.*

A world such as this needs SIGNS that may serve to counteract this situation. We know that the primary victims of such a system are young people and, in the words of the Founder, they learn more by what they see than by what they hear: *“Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words, especially for children, and they ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them”* (Meditation 202.3).

Lasallian institutions should offer *“an alternative scale of values, a critique of the status quo, a model of inspiration for society”*. Our educational ministries should make this scale visible especially on these four levels:

GRATUITY: in a world where everything is measured by what is produced and where efficiency is the ultimate criterion we should experience community and educational relationships that are free, welcoming, celebratory and that are characterized by reconciliation, value for each person. These relationships should include the idea of offering our lives without expecting payment. On the other hand, let us recall that gratuity is one of the values of our Lasallian origins. Our first name was Teachers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools.

PARTICIPATION: that springs up as an alternative of the idea of power-service of the Gospel in juxtaposition to the idea of power-dominion of the world. This distinction is beautifully pointed out by Clodovis Boff. It also is a rejection of a world that leaves many outside it in order to progress: the world of those left out. We should live out this value in the community discernment of the will of God in the role which all members of the educational community play in our ministries and in the pedagogical methodology that we use.

SOLIDARITY: with all types of sadness, all types of poverty, with those who are excluded, particularly in the world of youth, as our Chapter has pointed out to us: *“In several regions of the world, many societies have been destabilized by the economic crisis, migratory movements, overcrowding in the cities. Many young people are the first victims of this upheaval, slipping into petty crime and delinquency: aimless drifting, unemployment, drugs, AIDS, prison, prostitution, violence. These young people, excluded and feeling rejected, quite often need a specific type of accompaniment...”* (Circular 435, p. 24). This compassion springs forth in us from Jesus whom we follow. The sketch that the Santo Domingo document presents to us, even more rooted in our reality, is no less dramatic:

“Many young people are victims of social impoverishment and marginalization, of the lack of job opportunities, of an education that does not respond to the needs of their lives, of drug trafficking, of war, of gangs, of prostitution, of alcoholism, of sexual abuse. Many live numbed by the methods of social communication and alienated by cultural impositions and by the immediate pragmatism that has generated new problems in the affective maturity of adolescents and young people” (Number 112).

HOPE in a world which today lives amidst skepticism and has faith in nothing. Here we are talking about Christian hope, which our Lasallian Christian communities, in spite of everything, should incarnate because we know along with the Gospel that mankind has a future if it opens itself to love and that its absolute future is God.

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