

02

THE OPTION FOR **THE POOR**



**Piarist Identity
Notebooks**

www.coedupia.com

 **coeduPIA** 3.0

SC  **LOPI**



Piarist Identity Notebooks SUMMARY 02

- 3 THE OPTION FOR THE POOR
IN CALASANZIAN PEDAGOGY
- 5 THE OPTION FOR THE POOR TODAY
IN PIARIST
- 6 PROPOSALS FOR THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROJEC
- 7 REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS



Author: General Secretariat
of Ministry
Edition: September 2020
Piarist Identity Notebooks
www.coedupia.com

SCOLOPI

coeduPia 3.0

THE OPTION FOR **THE POOR**

Background orientation of our action by which we open our Works to those who need it most, educate from the perspective of the poor, offer our educational proposal to those who do not have access to formal education and try to respond to the challenge posed by the new poverty that afflicts children and youth.

THE OPTION FOR THE POOR IN CALASANZIAN PEDAGOGY

On March 17, 1646, Mr. José Palamolla, secretary of Cardinal Vicar Ginetti, arrived at San Pantaleo, and before the community gathered in the oratory of San Pantaleo, he read a brief apostolic by which, the Pope ordered the reduction of the Order of Schools Pious; a decree that condemned a work so beneficial to the poor to almost extinction.

We do not enter into the specific reasons why the decree was issued; but yes, the attitude that Saint Calasanz had in front of such devastating news. He was aware that it was an unfair decree: *With this, I warn VR. that, even if they write to you that our religion will be destroyed, do not give credit to such news, because we hope that blessed Christ and his Blessed Mother will be on our side and will disrupt all the machinations of the adversaries.* (EP 4344).

The same afternoon of reading the decree, he writes a letter to several communities in which he communicates the fatal decision of the Pope and encourages the religious to move forward in the mission: *Do not cease to continue the Institute with joy and to be united and in peace, hoping that God will remedy everything.* (EP 4342).

The Pious Schools had been born and sustained over time thanks to divine providence and he was convinced that God would not abandon the poor who were educated in their classrooms.

In his old age, Calasanz is devastated humanly but very optimistic because he was certain that God will restore the Pious Schools: *I can not quite understand that an Institute so useful and required throughout Europe and still praised by heretics, can human malice destroy it so easily, and as long as I stay breath I will hope to see him restored in his pristine state.* (EP 4341)

God did not grant him the grace to see the Order restored; but many of the religious; especially the Central European group worked very diligently to restore it after a period of purification that lasted a few more years.

When the saint wrote in the Constitutions that **poverty will be the strongest defense of our congregation** (CC 137), he was very clear about the profound truth that it contained. Actually, the service that the Pious Schools did to the poor was the best guarantee of their survival. How would an Institute disappear that the Church solemnly approved years ago (1622) and that has done so much good for the education of the poor?

“The children of whom Calasanz deals with, the innocent victims of an unfair social structure”

Many religious left the Pious Schools but not a single school was closed, clear evidence of how useful they were in many places because they educated the children of the town. If schools were closed, where would children be educated ...? There was no way to replace the social function that the Pious Schools exercised. 23 years later the Church restored the Order in its previous state. The love of poverty and poor children has been the best guarantee of survival.

In his first years of stay in Rome, Calasanz came into direct contact with a very unequal and unfair social reality. At this time, Calasanz undergoes a personal conversion that leads him to become increasingly involved in working with the poor, assuming responsibility for a school that already existed in the *Santa Dorotea* parish where the first letters were taught to poor children. This was the founding germ of the Pious Schools: the sacristy of a parish in the Trastevere neighborhood where the poorest children were treated for free.

As the school was free, poor children from Rome attended massively. *In November 1597, after some members of the Christian Doctrine society had promised their cooperation, the first free popular public school could be born there* (Ludwig Von Pastor).

Calasanz himself tells Fr. Berro how the Pious Schools began: *“He himself wrote to me in a letter that having found a large number of children who because of poverty could not be sent by their parents to school ..., pushed him, as himself told me, because of this extreme need of the poor ... and since in Rome, among so many charities, there was no way to help the poor children, he thought that God had given him this assignment, and trusting in His divine mercy, He submitted to this divine love with such affection, that he thought of doing a very pleasant thing to God helping the poor children ... And for this reason he deliberated to open the schools ... And he began in that District (Trastevere), as the poorest in Rome, calling Pious Schools, so that no type of emolument was requested, but only the glory of God and the good of souls.”*

For Calasanz, poor children who are those who do not have their basic needs covered (clothing, home, food, family); the smallest ones who cannot fend for themselves, those who have been orphaned and live from begging, those who are idle in the streets and condemned to vices and those who do not have money to pay a teacher.

The children of whom Calasanz deals with, the innocent victims of an unfair social structure that originated many homeless, sick and, above all, poor diet families. Under-employed families abounded, on the threshold of homelessness, which transmitted poverty and social exclusion to their children in a cycle of permanent deprivation.

In this context of structural poverty, children under the age of fifteen had very specific risk factors: infant mortality, insufficient feeding - working adults had food preference - frequent abandonment, child labor and the impossibility of attend school

We cannot forget the link that Calasanz makes between Christ and the poor children: *“What you did to one of these little ones, you did to me”* (CC n° 4). And in Calasanz’s frequent quotations of this principle there seems to be a growing identification with the person of Christ: *“what is done for them (poor children) is done for Blessed Christ.”* And he comes to a true identification when he affirms that *“what is done for a poor child is received by Christ in his own person.”*

1 Berro: Annotazioni, tomo I, *Archivium* 21-22 pp. 72-73.



THE OPTION FOR THE POOR TODAY IN PIARIST

After four centuries, and despite social advances, there are still deep class divisions and children do not have the same educational opportunities. The Pious Schools are called to integrate the social difference that already exists, preferably opting for the poorest, *whom we will not belittle under any circumstances* (CC 4), as the same founder in the Constitutions reminds us

Today, new ones have joined new ones. The Holy See document, published in 1997, reminds us of the new poverty that the Catholic school must address: *“The Catholic school directs these new poor people with a spirit of love. In that sense, she, born of the desire to offer to all, especially the poorest and most marginalized, the possibility of being educated, of professional training and of human and Christian formation, can and should be found, in the context of the old and new poverty, that original synthesis of educational passion and love, expression of Christ’s love for the poor, the little ones, for the multitudes in search of truth.”* (The Catholic School on the threshold of the third millennium No. 15)

The Pious Schools will maintain their charismatic vitality as long as they maintain a decided *“option for poor children.”* The Holy Spirit that has maintained the Order for 400 years will open new paths for children to find a place where they can *sanctify themselves and be great in heaven, but also to promote and ennoble themselves and their homeland.* (Memorial to Cardinal Tonti No. 14)

Maintaining the option for the poor in the Pious Schools implies a commitment to make education accessible to all; especially to the poor.

This free school commitment is only possible if some entity pays the expenses: teacher salaries, building maintenance, school supplies and equipment.

Since the founding of the Pious Schools, attempts have been made to maintain gratuity by seeking the help of patronages, agreements with municipalities and other mechanisms. Maintaining popular character was always easier in schools where the majority of employees were religious; but as the help of lay editors was needed, school costs began to rise.

Without a doubt, the best and most reliable financing model is the help of the public administration as long as it respects a minimum of identity in the educational

Calasanz does not intend to found a charity where to take care of poor children. There were already others who were taking care of it. He wanted something else; that is, a school that will help the poor to get out of the dynamics of exclusion by promoting themselves socially with a good education in piety and letters.

Calasanz writes that the religious *who has no spirit to teach the poor does not have the vocation of our Institute* (EP 1319) A poverty that manifests itself in patience and humility, in treatment and, above all, in generosity with the one that performs the ministry. The calasanzian teacher cannot be a wage earner who doesn’t care about sheep. He offers his personal qualities and his time and even his goods makes them available to the poor. With great pretensions and particular demands, with excessive attachment to worldly goods and comforts, this mission would be impossible.

Only the spirit of poverty that does not expect favors or human retributions, gives the educator the freedom and independence of the influence of any institution, of ideologies and of the affections of the families. The calasanzian educator is independent and free, immune to the corruption of the world.

2 Congregación para la Educación Católica, *La Escuela Católica en los umbrales del tercer milenio* nº 15.

project. Some countries recognize without problems the capacity and competence of the Church in making a good public school; in others, it is necessary to resort to other means of financing.

Whenever possible, the Pious Schools have entered into public financing agreements trying to safeguard their own Catholic identity and of course, being an open and inclusive school.

In countries where it is not possible with a financing agreement with the State, there is no choice but to keep the school private with the consequent touch of social exclusivity. In this case and to keep the spirit of the founder alive, a percentage of scholarships are offered to those most in need and it is about promoting an educational project where students are educated in the sense of justice and solidarity. In no way should the Pious Schools be elitist.

Another way to update the “option for the poor” is to open non-formal education educational programs. This has been a practice that has been strongly promoted in the Pious Schools; especially after the 2009 General Chapter where “*charismatic officiality*” was given to Non-Formal Education: *The Order is currently adopting the NFE as a legitimate and desirable way for the Piarist mission. The school is not wanted to be replaced as our preferential place, but with the NFE the implementation of the calasanzian imperative of serving the poorest and responding effectively and briefly to their social and formative urgencies is reinforced.*³

The non-formal education initiatives that are being promoted through the different foundations that the Pious Schools have are a good bet because

- They improve the lives of many people reaching out where other public or private institutions do not intervene;
- They are an educational and evangelizing factor for the Piarist Christian community as they facilitate our closeness and commitment to the cause of the impoverished,
- It is a concrete way of expressing co-responsibility in the works between Order and Fraternities, where they exist, and in general between religious and laity in all places.
- They provide an educational bonus to schools by complementing from the non-formal level what is done formally, mobilizing volunteering, providing training and social sensitivity to the youth of the schools.

.....

³ DOCERE AUDEO (2009). Documentos del Capítulo General 2009. Educaciones Calasancias Roma/Madrid

PROPOSALS FOR THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Picking up some ideas and practices of the Piarist tradition on the access of the poor to education, we offer some guidance for the Pious Schools to maintain the really popular style of its origin

1. To promote the operation of schools full-time, offering facilities such as non-formal educational spaces, evangelizing, etc.
2. The percentage of social investment and the needs related to the option for the poorest are reflected in the school budget.
3. To promote remedial, educational and support processes for recipients with special personal and training needs (physical, cognitive, relational).
4. Mechanisms are provided to guarantee services to scholarship recipients and free of charge.
5. The option is reflected by simplicity and attitudes of proximity, welcome and inclusion in the lifestyles and organization we lead.
6. Our willingness to be an open and inclusive entity is publicly expressed.
7. Networking with social agents, ecclesial institutions, social services and public administrations is verified and enhanced.
8. To establish economic collaboration agreements with public administrations to reduce school costs and offer better service.
9. To offer in each school a good scholarship program for children in need.
10. To help finance the poorest schools through the support mechanisms offered by the foundations.
11. To sponsor with our Calasanzian Ideary popular schools already formed, although we have neither the property nor the administration.
12. To promote Education for Social Action within the framework of the Educational Project.
13. To promote in our schools the programs of labor insertion in an increasingly demanding and flexible market.



14. To transform some of our Middle schools into technical-vocational training centers.
15. To offer our students instruments and resources to access with guarantee a decent job:
16. To adapt the school spaces for the integration of physical or sensory handicapped in schools.
17. To offer free compensatory education programs to students who need it most.
18. To strengthen the guidance team of the school to serve the most needy students.
19. To open our schools to the community through cultural activities, sports clubs and community development programs.
20. To integrate ethnic minorities in school.
21. To promote non-formal education initiatives for the poorest children through homework classrooms, libraries, canteens and day centers.
22. To promote youth volunteering among the most vulnerable children.



REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS

- *Share in the group what vision Calasanz has about the education of poor children.*
- *Which are the poorest of the school where you work?*
- *What features should a school have to be really for the people.*
- *What proposal does the school make to integrate the most disadvantaged children? How do you value it?*
- *How is the School open to the surrounding community?*
- *Count some significant service experience among the poorest.*
- *How is the school curriculum inclusive?*