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SOCIETY'S REFORM



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SOCIETY'S REFORM

The purpose of our action is to help children and young people discover that they live in a society, beyond their individual reality, and to commit themselves to building a more just and fraternal world in the light of the Gospel.

THE PIOUS SCHOOLS: A MEAN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were crucial years in history. Along with the project of a new society in the recently conquered America, the war left European Christianity confronted with different religious creeds. The desire to build a new world that the humanists had captured in their books seemed only a mirage because society remained as immobile and classist as it had always been.

Calasanz established a close relationship with a great humanist: Thomas Campanella, author of “The City of the Sun” (1602) in which he had stressed the equality of all human beings, the importance of knowledge, for its ability to improve ethical behavior, as well as the defense of Christianity for its rational character, that is, for its coherence with human nature. Almost 30 years later, he wrote a defense in favor of the Pious Schools, arguing the legitimate right of the poor to a good education in the face of detractors who saw it as a danger that they be educated in the same conditions as the rich.

Joseph of Calasanz founded the Pious Schools for the poor *because our Institute was founded for them. And what is done for them is done for Christ, and the same is not said of the rich* (EP. 2812). In the autumn of 1597, he made the crucial decision that the little school of St. Dorothea would be completely free, precisely to favor the access of all to education.

The defense of the rights of the poor to education is a constant in the thought and practice of Calasanz, as it already appears in a memorial of 1626: *It is proper to the Institute of the Pious Schools to teach boys and particularly the poor, many of whom because of poverty or neglect of parents do not go to school, nor learn any trade or exercise, but are lost and idle and thus easily indulge in various games, particularly that of cards, and it is necessary that, when they have no money to play, they steal in their own home first, and then where they can, or find money in other lousy ways*¹.

Francisco Castelli, in his “Apology for the Pious Schools” addressed to the Deputy Commission, vehemently defends the right of the poor to education: *“The Pious Schools, it is said, are harmful to society because they are contrary to good policy...because with so much ease of study, every poor person is given the opportunity to aspire to a higher state, to abandon the arts and crafts... But if good education is a good thing, why should so many deserving poor people be excluded from it? Are not the poor the ones who sustain the world by their*

¹ Memorial a los cardenales del Santo Oficio, pidiendo ayuda para los escolares pobres En: FAUBELL, V (2004) Nueva Antología Pedagógica Calasancia. Publicaciones Universidad Pontificia Calasancia. Salamanca. Pág 65.

“Calasanz designed a curriculum and one organization school that prepared the students, to contribute to build a society fairer and solidarity”

toils? And who have been the inventors and perfectors of the arts? Is it not true that the greatest and most difficult businesses are the thoughts of poor men, who, to achieve something, must be vigilant while the rich sleep, and when everything is already done appear on the scene to authorize and guarantee the business of the poor themselves? And what would you perhaps be, you who are reading this, if your ideas had been held by the rich in the time of the last poor of your lineage?”².

With time and attracted by the good educational quality of the Pious Schools, children from wealthier families who could pay began to enter. However, Calasanz always insisted on absolute gratuity, both for the poor and the rich.

A great social service of the Pious Schools - it is a duty to remember this - was the social education given to all their pupils, nobles and commoners, poor and rich, without distinction of any kind. The fact that in the Pious Schools both nobles and non-nobles were educated together and, as far as possible, without any distinction of class, had an indisputable social significance. The nobles could admire and esteem the talent and diligence of many of the poor, and the poor, for their part, could admire and esteem the civil conduct and good manners of the nobles³.

The wish of the founder was that the rich and the poor be educated together without distinction of class. In this way, the nobles could admire and esteem the talent and diligence of many of the poor, and the poor in turn could admire the civil conduct and good manners of the nobles. Within the School, no one was to have privileges for any reason other than integrity of manners or greater diligence in study. He wanted everyone, rich and poor, to dress equally and to mingle in all activities. *No one in our school should claim preeminence or any privilege over others, except for his greater integrity of morals, for his greater diligence and for his greater diligence in study⁴.*

This mixing of poor children with rich children was a great novelty. Within the walls of the school, he made possible a new society where all children would have the same social opportunities. He understood that social reform was not in the class struggle but in a profound social dialogue from an early age, so that together we could undertake the construction of a more just society.

The way to a new society based on merit and not on the cradle was thus being paved, albeit without too much fanfare. But it was necessary to go further and present a global alternative to the dominant social block, that is, to attempt an all-encompassing educational vision: the sphere of human formation and its extracurricular repercussions, for example, in the family, and the sphere of Christian formation. In such a way that the human and social spheres - to be useful citizens, for example - and the spiritual one - mature believers - would appear inseparably united, in such a way that, on the one hand, it would be possible to overcome poverty through education and work for the reform of society, and, on the other, to achieve the ultimate purpose of the human being, that is, eternal life⁵.

The peculiar way in which Calasanz contributed to social change was the proposal of an inclusive school model that favored a quality education for all. This brilliant intuition is expressed in a lapidary way in the Constitutions of the Pious Schools: *The reform of Christian society lies in the diligent practice of such a mission, because if from childhood the child is diligently imbued in Piety and Letters, the happy course of his life is to be foreseen (CC n^o 2).*

2 (Sántha-Vilá: Epistolarium Coetaneorum, p. 2832-2833)

3 SHANTA, G. (1984) Obra Pedagógica. Oc P. 402

4 Regulations of the Pious Schools of Campi. In: FAUBELL.

5 FERRER, E (2017) A SCHOOL FOR THE POOR AND THE REFORM OF SOCIETY: SAINT JOSEPH CALASANZ. Corinthians XIII. October-December 2017 / n.º 164.



Thus, one of the aims of the Pious Schools is the reform of society, as it is also explicitly expressed: *It (the educational ministry) is also necessary to Him who from the earliest years helps the good life, on which depends the good death, the peace and tranquility of peoples, the good government of cities and princes, the obedience and fidelity of subjects, the propagation of the faith, the conservation and preservation of heresies, **the reform of the whole of Christendom** by employing men of apostolic life (Tonti no. 26).*

To this end, Calasanz designed a curriculum and a school organization that prepared students not only to obtain a decent job, but also to contribute to building a more just and caring society.

THE “REFORM OF SOCIETY” IN THE PIARIST PRESENT

Four centuries later, the Pious Schools continue to be a powerful means for the reform of society as long as they remain faithful to the principles that inspired them: preferential attention to the poor, integral education, openness to the community, centrality of Jesus and social inclusion.

The school transforms people and society if it can liberate them from the slavery of ignorance and sin: *Our school promote the renewal of society as a critical and active instance, in the light of the Gospel, being a school that works for peace, justice and solidarity and opts for respect and care for the environment and a healthy ecology. As an Institution, it must be a prophetic voice to highlight the roots of evil, proposing interventions that give social, political, and economic structures a more just and supportive configuration (General Congregation 1999 no. 29-6).*

Many initiatives have been promoted recently to make visible this desire for social change through education: youth movements, peace campaigns, social action volunteering, development and environmental education, participation in forums for social participation. But, above all, the greatest contribution made to the students of the Pious Schools is the proposal of a critical curriculum where education for solidarity is a core element. In fact, “social action” appears as one of the transversal axes of the Piarist educational project, which implies:

- a) *To form critical people committed to social progress, justice, and peace.*
- b) *To program in our schools a systematic analysis of society, according to the age of the students.*
- c) *Contact and collaboration with those who fight for a better world: NGOs, volunteers, and solidarity movements.*
- d) *Actions-signs of help and service that induce the student to broader and more organic commitments.*
- e) *Reorient –and relocate if necessary– our schools and works to needier sectors of the population and places (General Congregation 1999 no. 33).*

To carry out this program, the General Chapter of 1997 promoted a line of action that has marked the recent history of the Order: *To systematically educate our children and young people in justice, peace, and solidarity, proposing tasks in favor of the poor and marginalized, involving families and educators.*

Since then, there has been a firm will in the Pious Schools to promote a critical education that awakens sensitivity towards the poorest and proposes real actions to improve society.

An analysis of the new foundations in the last 20 years of the Order’s history shows a clear inclination towards popular works and in countries in great need of education. Along with this, the foundations and especially the “Itaka Escolapios Network”, which connects a good part of the social works, are gaining prominence.

PROPOSALS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

The Piarist educational proposal should be oriented to the education of active Christians and responsible citizens for the betterment of the Church and society. From the first years of school, students should already experience that a better world is possible. Some guidelines to consider for an educational project to have social relevance are⁶:

1. Integrate students from diverse social backgrounds in the same school, offering them the same educational opportunities.
2. Identify and develop the talents of students regardless of their social background.
3. Educate students to love their community, involving them in citizenship responsibilities.
4. To offer training opportunities that help students to find decent employment.
5. To develop intellectual and moral competencies that help students to be active protagonists in the

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6 ALONSO, J (2017) Holiness for social change. PPC.

construction of a new society: capacity for dialogue, social commitment, critical sense, respect for diversity, honesty, and professional competence.

6. To link the school with other social institutions in community development projects.
7. To put students in contact with reality, so that they acquire a greater social conscience.
8. Educate students in the responsible use of goods and care for the environment.
9. Contribute to the Church’s social programs.
10. To study, in a critical way, the different subjects to find a social function for them.

PROFILE OF AN EDUCATOR WHO EDUCATES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

1. Knows and critically analyzes the social and political reality of the environment.
2. Knows some social realities of poverty and exclusion.
3. Has had or is having the experience of working as a volunteer in a nonprofit organization.
4. Offers a critical social perspective on the subjects he teaches in the classroom.
5. Can work as part of a team with peers.
6. Applies methodologies that help analysis and social change.
7. Pays special attention to topics such as ecology, solidarity, respect for life and culture.
8. Exercises democratic leadership.
9. Develops teamwork skills and accept conflicts, and even mistakes, as opportunities for the development of new learning.



REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS

- *Why does the Calasanz proposal helps social reform?*
- *What proposal does your school make to educate students in justice, solidarity, and peace? How do you value it?*
- *With what social sensitivity do students leave school?*
- *Tell a personal experience of volunteer work, what does it give you?*
- *How do you approach the subjects you teach in class from a social perspective?*
- *What is the school's proposal to promote volunteerism?*



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