

## Interview with Father Oswaldo Espinoza



*Oswaldo is shy; he is 40 years old and is the youngest of the Grand Superiors of the Order. He lives and was born in Ecuador, where he was ordained a priest in 1995. He is in charge of the Provincial Vicarage of Ecuador- dependent on the Colombian province- that enjoys a strong vocational awakening, due to the fact that there are 20 piarists who work there.*

“I can say that I have been a piarist all my life, because since the piarists arrived at Cañar, I was linked to them and dreamt of being one of them. My family is very Christian and humble, and since Kindergarten, they made me go and study with them. That’s why I say that I have been a piarist all my life. When I entered to the piarists, at 17 years of age, it was especially difficult for my mother, but as always in these cases, after some time of seeing me happy, she unconditionally supported me. Now, in this moment, I feel that they continue to do so. My family are aware that there is a crisis in religious life and they always say to me “I hope that you are faithful my son”.

**So, let’s speak about vocation.**

Well, first I have to say that my family induced me to the Christian and humble vocation.

We are four brothers and one of my brothers was going to be a piarist too, but later, discovered that his path was going another way. I myself, since I was 11 years old, said that I wanted to be a piarist priest. I opened the house of” Formation of the Cuenca”, because here there wasn’t a house of formation and in that time (1984) the only option was to go and study in Colombia.

**What does it mean to you to be a grand superior?**

To have a conscience in service, to look out for religious members, to look out for those in vocation, to check that the communities are well, and now, too to take on the future of the Pious school, with all that this can imply in terms of changes and movements for all of us.

It's a very big responsibility, yes.

**Several times you have said that your family is "popular", what meaning does this have?**

It means that I come from a simple family that had to fight in order to get on. I am of mixed race, from the countryside, and humble.

**What was it of the piarists that drew your attention when you were 11 years old?**

The proximity of the religious members to children and youngsters. There was something different in these religious people that attracted me, that made me feel that there was something of God in all of this. But the most important, was to feel their closeness that they worried about me, that sometimes they would visit my house.

**And how is it now that you are on the other side? Do you maintain that closeness?**

Yes, yes. It's one of the things that I try to keep. I am told on many occasions that because of the way I am, that I am not like a priest, but the young people say "he's a priest that is with us:" I try to keep close, to know what the young people are up to and to feel united with them.

**What is the thing that you most appreciate in your current service as Superior?**

Having committed piarists, with complete availability and transparency. I feel a great commitment, without expecting anything in return. The piarists love Ecuador and want to help it go forward. Ecuador is an incredibly multicultural place. A country hit by corrupt governments. A country with great wealth, but in the hands of a few, and also with extreme poverty. A country impoverished by some governments and with a great "silent" poverty. It has a high level of emigration because the governments don't answer to the expectations of the people, many have to leave. We are 10 thousand inhabitants.

**“Ecuador, Ecuador, only the education will save you” was the motto chosen for the year 2006. Do you think that this is your basic mission?**

We are convinced of this. A great educative challenge exists, because, actually, the emigration has brought about as a consequence the deconstruction of the family, youngsters without orientation and due to all of this, there is a great need of education. We also are confronted with the corruption at all levels and due to this too, the education can change a way of life. To educate with honesty and with the dignity of being Ecuadorian. To help, especially, the poor, the indigenous and the peasants believe in themselves.

**Considering you had such a strong vocation as a youngster, did you have any crisis at that time?**

I had an important crisis when I was a novice, but this is the right time for this to happen. Now, at the moment, I struggle for the religious life, for the works, to do the job well and always find reasons to be happy in the midst of situations of harsh reality.

**What does it mean for you to be a piarist?**

It's a way of being, it is to find yourself made up of a charisma that “my god” gave you, that has as a characteristic a great love of children, and especially, of the poor and to find in children and youngsters “my god”, that wants to make great things of this child and youngster and wants to solve many things of this child and youngster. When one feels the pain of this child and finds out that one can do something and actually does it, then, you are a piarist.

**Would you like to say something to the rest of the piarists?**

Yes, what my parents say to me: one has to be faithful to god's gifts.

**When one speaks of restructuring, what is the first image that comes to you?**

The first thing that comes to mind is that you have to close down. Later, more positively, how to organize the houses, which religious members to join together, who can you collaborate with. Little by little, you discover that we are speaking about something a lot more important and profound, when we speak about restructuring.

**How are you enjoying the meeting? (Referring to the council of grand superiors carried out in Rome in October 2005)**

Happily and keenly. First, because, before coming here, we portrayed the topic of restructuring with a high level of tension, while here, we have realized it is complex, but possible. This experience gives me peace and has allowed me to discover a lot of sincerity in the colleagues that want to go ahead restructuring in order to make sure that the Pious School is what it should be: to live and open itself to a concrete reality of the world.

I like and am proud of the piarist life, the sincerity and simplicity that is lived here. We are all equal; there is no difference between the General Curia and everyone else, which is what sometimes happens in other places. That's how we are, that's how we live. Let's see what we can do without so much mystery. This is the best way for the vocation; show ourselves as we really are.

(By Julio César Boffano)