



## THE PIARIST MINISTRY: TO EVANGELIZE BY EDUCATING WITH CALASANZIAN STYLE

"I have found in Rome the definitive way to serve God doing good for the little ones. I will not leave it for anything in the world".

### INTRODUCTION

1. The personality of St. Joseph Calasanz and the prophetic intuition that impelled him to start in the Roman Trastevere "the first public, popular and gratuitous school of Europe"<sup>2</sup>, is the referential frame of the Piarist ministry. From the practical experience and the orientations written by Calasanz, the Piarist ministry was born; and it has been present and operative in the Church through the long historical road of the Pious Schools.
2. In the donation to the Christian educational ministry, the Piarists of the past and those of these current years, have found, as Calasanz did, the way to serve God by helping the little ones. And we are not going to leave them for anything in the world<sup>3</sup>. "Today, 400 years after Calasanz' foundation of the school for all, the General Chapter of the Piarist Fathers relies once again on that original intuition: the education of the person, begun at tender age, through the school institution, strengthens the energy that keeps societies in permanent improvement for the good of the citizens"<sup>4</sup>.

3. At the threshold of the Third Millennium, the Church considers education as an essential element of her mission in the world and one of the fundamental Areopagus of her evangelizing mission<sup>5</sup>. "The youths Calasanz used to see rioting and misbehaving along Roman streets ... can be found today in those who have lost the authentic sense of life and those who lack any impulse for an ideal; those who are not offered values and those who totally ignore the beauty of faith; those who bear the weight of destroyed families unable to love; those who often live situations of material and spiritual penury. They are slaves to new idols of a society, that not rarely, presents to them a future of unemployment and marginality<sup>6</sup> ... They are the new poor, especially poor of cultural, educational, religious poverty, besides a frequently striking material poverty<sup>7</sup>. In spite of the existence of broken families, unable to love - to whom we offer our educational work in the first place - we recognize that families go on being the first and principal educators<sup>8</sup>, of whom we profess ourselves to be collaborators. Thus, the Order affirms, "The educational and founding value of the family, is beyond any doubt"<sup>9</sup>.
  
4. The General Chapter, in its "Declaration on the school", agrees with those who consider education as a treasure and the school as the most efficacious to distribute knowledge equitably and thus make the progress of all, possible<sup>10</sup>. Because of it, we take as ours the considerations of the "Declaration of Jomtien" (Thailand, 3-9-90).
  - Education is a fundamental right for everybody, men and women, of all ages and in the whole world.

- Education can contribute to achieve a safer, healthier world, more prosperous and an environmentally purer one. At the same time, education promotes social, economic and cultural progress, as well as tolerance and international cooperation.
- Education is an indispensable, though not sufficient condition, for social and personal progress.
- The traditional knowledge and the autochthonous cultural patrimony are useful and worthy by themselves. The capacity to define and promote development lies in them.
- In general terms, the education today given has great deficiencies. Its adequation and quality must be improved and made available for all.
- An adequate basic education is fundamental to strengthen the upper levels of education and the scientific and technical formation and teaching. Thus, an autonomous development may be reached.
- The need to offer the present and future generations a wide scope of basic education and renewed commitment in its favor, to be able to face the extent and the complexity of such challenge”.

Not in vain have we celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> Centennial of the first Public, Popular and Free School of Europe - founded by St. Joseph Calasanz - under the motto of School for All, coincident with the afore-mentioned declaration of Jomtien.

5. The documents issued by the General Chapter of 1997 (Credo, Mission, The Piarist charism, The laity in the Pious School) are in direct relationship with the topic of our ministry. The General Congregation, in response to the mandate from the same Chapter and laying on the aforementioned documents, publishes “The Piarist ministry: to evangelize by educating with Calasanzian style”. Thus the chapter’s up-to-dated outlook and urgency as well as its projection of future are highly valued once again.

6. Likewise, in the brief document about our “Mission”, issued by the latest General Chapter, we are reminded of our legacy: our own history, spirituality and pedagogy, persons in communion, specific schools and institutions. Legacy we have to uphold and increase. “Today it urges us to place ourselves in the frontier of pedagogical innovation and cultural complexity, in order to give a response to the conditionings our children and youths bear nowadays”.<sup>11</sup>

I. The Piarist Ministry Lived by Calasanz
-------------------------------------------

A. A specific ministry.

7. Any ministry in the Church is a concrete way to collaborate in the mission of announcing and starting the Gospel of the Kingdom Jesus trusted to His disciples. Calasanz, moved by the peculiar charism received from the Spirit<sup>12</sup>, enriched the Church becoming a pioneer in the evangelizing mission.<sup>13</sup>
8. This charismatic mission is described by the Saint in important foundational documents: the Constitutions and Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti. In the Proem of the Constitutions, it is pointed out that our ministry of evangelizing children and youths by integral education has some characteristic priorities<sup>14</sup> - it is destined to children and youths, especially the poor, from their earliest years - and it can only be carried out from a personal choice of life for the Gospel. Only by integration of ministry and life, the Piarist educator will become a competent Cooperator with the Truth.<sup>15</sup>
9. In the Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti - an actual compendium of Calasanz’ foundational intuition - our Saint insist on the necessity to integrate in the Piarist vocation, both, the educational ministry and the evangelical commitment.<sup>16</sup>

He considers education as:

- The basis for a better society.
- A key ministry in the pastoral of the Church: it antecedes and opens the way for the other ministries.

- A service which looks at the person as a whole, “body and soul” in the classical formulation (spirituality and corporeity) to such an extent that it becomes indispensable for any other authentic pastoral.
- The compendium of all the other ministries of the Church.<sup>17</sup>
- The guarantee of the person’s future since it is in childhood and youth where the basic structures of personality and behavior are established.
- A task that, in normal circumstances, prepares and predisposes persons to receive the other ecclesial ministries with profit.<sup>16</sup>
- A vocation that rejoices he who carries it out.

10. Up to the last years of his life, Calasanz clarified and defended this ministry staunchly, as proper and specific of the Pious Schools. He did so in his writings as “Declarations about the Constitutions” (1637); in multiple letters and in various memoranda. Especially in that addressed to Cardinal Roma (1645)<sup>19</sup>, Calasanz begs not to deprive the Piarists from their commitment of whole consecration to God; not to deprive them from their possibility to educate children and youths integrally up to adult age and not to deprive them from living identified with the poor. Thus, he pretends that in the future, this ministry may not be diluted. A ministry which, from the very beginning, was considered as different, necessary<sup>20</sup> and specific in the Church<sup>21</sup>.

B. Carried out in the Calasanzian school.

11. Calasanz considers the school he founded, that is, the popular and Christian school<sup>22</sup>, graded from the first letters up to higher studies, as a privileged institution to exercise the specific Piarist ministry. In the Constitutions, he wrote that the aim our Congregation pursues by means of the school, is the education of children in Christian piety as well as in human letters, to reach the reform of the Christian society and the temporal and eternal happiness of all the persons.<sup>23</sup> The Calasanzian vision shaped in these constitutional texts, clearly designs the ultimate purpose of our ministry (to evangelize); a concrete way to carry it out (by educating) and a specific means to achieve it (popular and Christian school).
  
12. Thus, the Calasanzian school was conceived by his Founder, according to the pastoral-social purpose of our ministry, as a place of evangelization of persons and of cultures. Therefore in it, the formation in Christian life<sup>24</sup>, education in the faith and its celebration<sup>25</sup> occupy a privileged position.
  
13. The Calasanzian school was thought of as an institution at the service of popular classes and therefore, gratuitous, with a clear preferential option for the poor but open to all without any social or religious discrimination.<sup>26</sup>
  
14. From the very beginning, it was an institution to educate from the earliest years in the basic elements of faith and culture<sup>27</sup> but with vocation to accompany children and youths up to their maturity, centered on the integral development of the child with a marked educational character, of formation in virtues, understanding these, as energy for growth<sup>28</sup> and not as theoretical contents used only to stuff the child's interior as if he were a container.
  
15. These characteristic aims of Calasanzian education in a new institution, made of such institution a creative and innovating school which had to use simple, efficient, and if possible, brief methods.
  
16. Calasanz' school was an open institution whereas:
  - It extended its influence beyond the classroom.<sup>30</sup>

In this sense, it responded from that time, to what today is considered as the requirements of the Catholic school.<sup>31</sup>

- It had a clear projection towards the future of the students. In that time to come and in their possibilities of work, the institution was explicitly interested. With that purpose, the school provided them with special skills to earn their living, by means of a syllabus that included calligraphy, abacus and music.<sup>32</sup>
- It propitiated a transformation of the reality of his time<sup>33</sup>, giving way to a more democratic society: latin was taught to everybody.<sup>34</sup> At that time, the teaching of latin was reserved only to youths of noble and wealthy families. An igualitarian treatment was given to all and every student. No privilege for anyone.

17. The school of Calasanz was a pioneer in personalization.

- The passing to a higher course was not rigidly subjected to the calendar but to the educational process of each student.<sup>35</sup>
- The teacher was supposed to pay special attention to detect and promote the child's aptitudes.
- The cultivation of the student's interiority was carefully watched by means of personal accompaniment by teachers and confessors.<sup>36</sup>

18. In Calasanz' school, preventive education<sup>37</sup> was practiced and the simultaneous<sup>38</sup> method was applied. Following the terminology of our times, such method considers education as comprehensive and propedeutical. Comprehensive, inasmuch as it assures a basic and equal formation for all, providing those who will not take up higher studies, the necessary elements to undertake some trades to face the world. Propedeutical, inasmuch as it makes possible to go on with higher studies, at that time, by means of the teaching of latin.

19. To make this reality possible, Calasanz had a great preoccupation for the selection and specific preparation of the teaching staff, brothers and priests preferably.<sup>39</sup> He designed appropriate formation programs<sup>40</sup> to make them competent Cooperators with the Truth, as Calasanz called them.

C. Carried out in other environments.

20. The Piarist ministry, in the beginning of our Institute was accomplished almost exclusively at school. However, Calasanz always showed himself open to other ministry tasks, either prescribed in the Constitutions or in the practical field. However he always pointed out that only we, Piarists, had been approved by the Church to exercise this ministry of educating children and youths at school.<sup>42</sup>

21. Our Founder considered that the Superior had to procure not only that classes worked properly, but he also had to watch the associations (congregations), the students' oratories and the teaching of the Christian doctrine (catechesis) on feast days (extra-curricular activity), since all of it made up the mission of the Pious Schools.<sup>43</sup>

22. In Calasanz' time, it was common in all the foundations, to have a church for the students in the first place, but also for adult faithfuls, to whom they preached and confessed and with whom the Eucharist was celebrated within the limitations imposed by the canonical laws of the epoch.<sup>44</sup>

23. In these churches, besides, seglar confraternities<sup>45</sup> or congregations of one sex or the other, were welcomed. Their aim was the growth of spirituality and the practice of the works of mercy. These associations were assisted by the Piarists, who carried out the catechesis of children and adults not only in our own churches but also in other places outside our houses.<sup>46</sup>

24. In spite of all the limitations expressed in the Constitutions themselves, Calasanz allowed boarding students to be accepted; Piarists to take up higher teaching and to tutor already adult students. He himself had the spiritual direction of quite a few adults, laymen and religious.<sup>47</sup>