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# Make possible the Pious Schools

LETTER TO OUR  
BRETHREN  
NOVEMBER 2016

**W**e are living an exciting moment of our life as an Order, next to meet the 400 years since the Church accepted and approved the Congregation created by Saint Joseph Calasanz. It is very certain that all the historical phases of the Order have been exciting (full of plans, of difficulties, of struggles and failures, of bold options, etc.), but this one that we are living has a special feature: is it ours, it is the one given us to live in. Today and now we have to work to make possible the Pious Schools, knowing that the *future* only can be built starting from the present, but from a present *converted* to the Gospel, from a present anxious to follow-up the Lord. Not all the ways of living the present allow us to build the future.

This is the premise that inspires my reflection: *we only shall build the future from the present that we are living, but only if this present is full of Gospel*, if we are really what religious are called to be: people “mad for Christ”, passionate for the Lord.

I would like to focus this Letter to the Brothers in a reflection about “*the present that will make possible the future*”, to share with all of you some concerns and some dreams about this future.

From San Pantaleo we can contemplate the entire Order. It is an extraordinary place to “see the reality” with eyes on the progressive consolidation of Calasanz’ dream. We can contemplate the efforts of so many Provinces in strengthening their presences and opening new horizons. We see provinces firmly committed

in “going forward”, confident that “closing has never given life”; young Provinces that fight to get a clear Calasancian identity without references nearby; ancient Provinces which are opening new roads to continue responding to the entrusted mission; Provinces with such large a mission that they can’t find enough shoulders to support it; disoriented Provinces, without clarity on the road and feeling that everything is going to be very difficult; hopeful Provinces, amid hardships, because they are finding light, sometimes with the help of others; Provinces able to make a new foundation in another country, confident that this road, which has always paid off in the Order, will continue to do so, etc. The Order is in motion, in many simultaneous movements. One day it would be good to analyze all of them.

When we look at the struggles of the Pious Schools to continue building mission, we see many more realities that make our present more plural and with other opportunities. We see Piarist Fraternities whose consistency is growing slowly; a progressive stewardship of laity and religious in the Piarist mission; an increased effort to find resources that will make sustainable what we do; new mission places full of Piarist life that we need to know how to accompany... is an exciting present.

But in the middle of all these struggles and opportunities there is also a risk, something that we must have always in consideration if we want to avoid being caught in its networks and so being prevented of making the road we dream, the road of the Gospel: the temptation of the “vocational conformism”.

This is a disease that everyone can get and, no doubt, is at the base of many of the crises of Religious Life: a Christian and religious life without evangelical force, without radicalism. It is this risk of which I would like to speak now in this fraternal letter. I do it because I believe that this is the condition of possibility for the construction of the future.

**Looking at history.** Most of those who have written about it, agree in their analysis of the evolution of the Consecrated Life since Vatican II. There was a model which “went down in history”, a model characterized by three facts: large number of vocations, which made the measurable and quantifiable to acquire a value of Gospel, something that should never have happened; soundness of the institutions, which gave great visibility to Consecrated Life; community and spiritual practices very clearly defined.

We have travelled a long road, and we have to recognize that we have not engendered a new complete model, as it was complete the one that existed before and that our elders are capable of describing it with clarity when they remember their young years. The model of authority, community style, mission platforms and spiritual dynamics has changed. But we have not gotten a new response that is complete, we continue looking for, sometimes fumbling. Perhaps this is good, but we have to recognize that it is not easy. Maybe we should not seek a complete response, but a dynamic of authenticity that will help us to give valid answers.

What has happened? We can quote, between others things, the following:

we have got lost in digressions on the specificity of Religious Life, perhaps because of the emergency of a laity carrier of the fullness of Christian life; we have not found the necessary balance to live in fullness the three dimensions of our life (mission, fraternal life and experience of God); we have not been able to find appropriate, radically Evangelical answers to the demands of the post-modern world in which we are living.

These three difficulties (we could quote some more) mark us a clear path: the task of Religious life is not defining its specificity with respect to other Christian vocations, but reproducing, clearly, Christ's style of life. That is what we religious are, that is what we have to do. It always has been so, and always it will be. We do not find the balance in our life through "schedule arrangements" but by means of the fullness of life. And we will not find appropriate responses to the world which we live if we just adapt to it and we make decisions from it. This is not the way.

**A call to the vocational experience.** It is good to worry for the reception of new vocations, but it would not be wrong to take care also of the vocation of those who are already in the Order. I am not thinking this time from the point of view of perseverance (which is very important). I'm thinking of "*how we live our vocation*", that is, if we are living in a permanent "*state of vocational response*". Dear brothers, it is not enough to tell how our vocational call happened when we were young; on the contrary, it is essential to know how to live each stage of our life in an attitude of *vocational response*. Only from this dynamism there will be a "Piarist vocational culture" able to call new Piarists to the work of Calasanz.

Vocation consists in feeling called. Not in "having been called", but in "being called". And the response passes through denying himself. That is pure Gospel. But it does not fit too well with a very typical dynamic of our time that we might call "searching for self-fulfillment". When a person seeks himself, and believes that he responds to the call of God when, in the background, he is meeting his own expectations, vocational experience is not possible.

The religious vocation needs a dynamic of personal putting out of center that will allow us to live centered in Jesus. This is the basics of the following. The call of Jesus compels us to stop thinking about ourselves, and only in this way we can live in a vocational style. This is a complex task, but of primary importance.

I will share with you some examples taken from real life: religious concerned about their image instead of about their commitment; religious seekers of their personal success; religious closed to any change in life because their presence is essential in the mission which now they have. We can have religious who truly do well their work, but they do not live according to the vocational perspective, but searching their own interest. Do not forget that this can perfectly combine with doing things well, or at least apparently well. I am not concerned in the efficiency in the management, but in the authenticity with which we live what are called to be.

The foundation of the Piarist religious vocation is putting out ourselves of the center to live increasingly – we will never completely succeed - focused on the Lord. And from this background attitude, living the daily commitment to our mission and sharing life with the brothers of the community. This is the “real Piarist vocational culture” of which we spoke in our 47th General Chapter.

There is only one way, and it is authenticity. We will not find the future falling into the temptation of wanting to restore what it already happened, because it belongs to a different world and Church. We will not build the future looking at ourselves and thinking of our problems or of our aspirations. We will not live strongly our vocation based on “personal projects” built from optics to develop what I am, but lacking the true centre and without ability to cause real follow-up.

We will build it from a consistent vocational experience, cared day to day, happily shared, generously committed to the mission, and convener to a fullness that is desired by the youth to which the Lord calls to live as Him.

Only from these keys, we can build the future, because only in this way we will live a present that is full of Gospel, which is the present which allows us to build future Calasanz style.

May God grant the gift of helping us to walk along these paths, and to find the clues that can help us to do so.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

*Pedro Aguado*  
*General Father*