



## *The challenge of interculturality*

*Letter to our  
brethren*  
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Our 48th General Chapter opted for interculturality as one of the fundamental keys to the path of “building Pious Schools” that we want to accomplish. It was a clearly defined bet. I recall the formulation of the approved option for the entire Order: “To advance decisively in the dynamics of a Going Forth, Intercultural and Missionary Pious Schools”.

By associating the three concepts “Going forth”, “intercultural”, and “missionary”, our Chapter gives us an unmistakable message: all three explain and understand each other, and all three indicate different points of view of the same reality: Pious Schools capable of placing themselves in a plural, challenging and complex world, within a Church eager to proclaim the proposal of the Gospel and in youth as diverse as it is a seeker of meaning. There we are, and there we must try to situate ourselves. This is the challenge.

I plan to go into some of the issues in this challenge. I will share with you three aspects that are three conditions of possibility to grow in what the Chapter asks of us. We will not go to intercultural and missionary Pious Schools if we do not assume three keys that challenge us deeply.

The first is to accept, with serene peace and defiance, that we are a minority. But, then, to open ourselves to others in sincere dialogue, which is the only way to transmit our convictions so they can be heard, is to feel small. But not a smallness that leads us to insignificance, but on the contrary, an experience

of being and knowing ourselves to be a minority, but creative and transmitting a necessary treasure for all.

Some words of Jesus have always struck me in the Gospel in which he announces the greatest through the smallest: to be salt of the earth[1], to be leaven in the dough[2], to be a mustard seed,[3] etc. I think there is an excellent message in these examples, and I believe that Calasanz understood them very well when he proposed to us, “get down to be able to give light to children”.

In the current sociocultural debate in which we find ourselves, in which we perceive so many proposals so far from those that truly make us more human, our position as people of the Church and as educators should not be that of those who want to impose (it would not work) or speak from the place of those who are correct, and others are wrong, but that of those who have a treasure to offer and who do so with clarity, pedagogy and respect.

Entering the intercultural is a risk because you accept vulnerability and questioning. But it allows you to offer your identity and your convictions without falling into two mistakes that do not help: adapting to what the world thinks, avoiding problems, and considering that your way of living and doing things is the only possible one. And I am not referring to our Gospel message but to the keys and models from which we embody it.

I remember Benedict XVI's insistence on speaking of the Church as a minority but a creative minority. Pope Benedict thought that “it is creative minorities who determine the future and, in this sense, the Church must conceive herself as a minority carrying a great heritage of values that are not of the past, but alive and current. [4]”.

Our role remains what it has always been: to inspire a new world and work for it, from what is most ours, evangelizing education. We educate for a world that does not yet exist but that we want to collaborate to build. And we offer our students the inspiration, training and dynamism that make them capable of building it. And we do this in a very open context, in which dialogue,

announcement, listening, and even failures and mistakes are inevitable – and necessary. Only in this way will we be the Church and the Order that is needed. We are not looking for a Church that moves with the world but a Church that moves the world. But for that, you have to be in it.

The Order does not seek, nor does it want self-sufficiency. Sometimes, depending on how we understand certain concepts, we become puzzled. For example, in economic language, we sometimes speak of “self-sufficiency.” And that confuses us. Among other things, because it does not exist. Self-sufficiency, nor economic self-sufficiency, is not possible in our world. We all have a certain degree of dependence. That is why we speak better of “integral sustainability”, which is the concept coined in our Chapter.

The self-sufficiency to which I refer is another. It is related to the feeling of superiority of self-referentiality. The dynamic of “Going forth” demands us to cultivate an awareness of humility and a desire for collaboration, learning, and listening to different. Only in this way will we get that different one to listen to us.

The second is to understand that our identity is at the same time missionary, or it will never be leaven in the dough, which is what it is all about. What was said in the previous point has much to do with many of the things we live in, such as how we understand our identity. The identity is essentially transparent. But we are discovering that it is also missionary and therefore open. Its keys are known and published, inspiring the educational project, but not closed; quite the opposite. Our identity is open because it is a missionary and enrichment process. It's not in the freezer because if it were, it would let it serve what it should help. But being a missionary, it is clear it does not need to be reinvented.

The challenge is to know how to combine both dynamisms well: the clarity and consistency of the identity and its capacity for openness and welcoming dialogue. For example, this is what the Global Education Compact process is teaching us. We need to think and write a lot about this matter.

The third condition of possibility that I want to talk about is conviction. To fully understand the challenge of interculturality and its correlation with “inculturation”, we must dare to combine three “keywords”: dialogue, culture and the Gospel. All three at once.

Just as Pope Francis has said that “synodality is the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium[5],” Pope St. Paul VI defined the Church as “dialogue.” And this has profoundly marked Christian life: “The Church must go towards dialogue with the world in which she lives. The Church becomes a word; the Church becomes a message; the Church becomes a colloquium.” [6] These are powerfully inspiring words for us.

Culture, rather cultures, are the dynamisms from which human life is expressed in the various contexts, with their values and counter-values, which usually coexist. Many scholars reflect today, for example, on the clash between the spiritual soul of Eastern culture and the aggressive and omnipresent materialism that invades it (and I am not talking about the Western, woven from a seminal Christian inspiration and touched today by a formidable lack of spiritual horizons) or other human cultures, which are many.

In this reflection that we are carrying forward, it is also essential to recognize that the encounter with cultures helps the Church herself, and consequently us, to reflect more on the content of the Gospel message that she must preach and make heard. Every culture asks us questions. This is what intercultural dialogue is all about. We, Piarists, people dedicated to education, must understand the formidable challenge we face when we proclaim our conviction that interculturality is central to our life and mission.

All cultures seek and need a soul. Even most millenary cultures are looking for a soul, a reality that allows them to make the synthesis between the past, rich in history and values, and the present, which threatens to overwhelm everything from materialism. And it is here that we must situate the dynamism of inculturation. The inculturation of the Gospel, which we promote from

our charism of integral education, does not seek to give a “superficial varnish” but to provoke that faith and evangelical values can genuinely transform the lives of individuals and societies. And this is an eternal task.

I conclude by quoting some proposals to move decisively forward, as proposed by our General Chapter.

Our Order must open an institutional space for reflection on interculturality. That is why we have created a general team that will try to get into depth on these issues. An in-depth review is necessary, as listening to diverse positions, reading, publications, and studying. Interculturality does not consist simply in the realization of diversity but in the challenge of deepening everything that this means for us.

I also believe that we must deepen the three paths that the Chapter pointed out: the dynamic “Going forth”, the commitment to the missionary and the concrete intercultural steps approved. Among them are the missionary experiences of our young people, intercultural groups of formators, etc. The Lines of Action of this “key to life” are suggestive and demanding.

The momentum of the Global Education Compact to which we are committed carries many of these dynamics with it. It will help us rethink them in a new way because it opens us to collaboration and networking. Our Order has a great opportunity from the cultural diversity in which we move. Enhancing our Piarist network dynamics is also an opportunity that we can and must develop.

A specific reflection linked to Initial Formation is needed. Our houses of formation are also a “sounding board” of the challenge of the intercultural. Not only because young people from very different cultures live together in it but because formative work is needed on all these themes, a position at once intellectual, academic, pastoral, spiritual and experiential. The formators must “open this book” and read it thoroughly with the young people in their care.

Our General Chapter in the document on interculturality talks a lot about things like “conversion”, “unlearning”, “learning to learn”, “listening to the other”, “learning to value the gifts of others”, etc. Many of these dynamisms are seen in this document from the point of view of community life. We must reflect on “intercultural community life”, collecting the diverse and varied experiences we have, which can help us recognize the difficulties and deepen the possibilities.

At the time, the Order carried out a “Seminar on Interculturality”. It was published in 2017, in number 57 of the collection “Materials” in Ediciones Calasancias. Some training brochures on the subject were also published. It would be good to take up all the contents of this seminar to better use all the work done.

Well, I leave the reflection here. Undoubtedly, we are facing an exciting challenge for the Pious Schools and the whole Church. Courage!

Receive a fraternal embrace

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[1] Mt 5:13

[2] Mt 13, 33

[3] Mk 4:30-32

[4] BENEDICT XVI. Press conference on the trip to the Czech Republic. September 26, 2009.

[5] FRANCIS. Address to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015.

[6] Paul VI. Encyclical “Ecclesiam Suam” n. 34, the year 1964.