
Educating in Justice and Solidarity

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Introduction

Love for others and in the first place love for the poor, is made concrete in the *promotion of justice*. This can never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment. Only such awareness can give the courage needed to face the risk and the change involved in every authentic attempt to come to the aid of another. It is not merely a matter of "giving from one's surplus," but of helping entire peoples who are at present excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies (*Centesimus Annus*).²

In fact there are many needs in our time which question Christian sensitivity. Our world is beginning this new millennium weighed down with the contradictions of an economic, cultural and technological growth which offers great opportunities to a fortunate few, while leaving millions and millions of persons not just on the margins of progress but in living conditions well below the minimum required by human dignity. How is it possible that in our times, there are still people dying of hunger; there are still people condemned to be illiterate; there are people lacking the most elementary medical care; there are those with no roof over their heads? Now is the hour for a new *creativity in charity*, which will ensure not only the efficacy of the aid given, but the capacity for being close and in solidarity with those who suffer, so that the gesture of help will not be seen as a humiliating hand-out, but as a fraternal sharing (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*).³

These are some of the characteristics which allow us to identify a center as Lasallian in reference to the educational service of the poor: to have a plan of education for Justice and Solidarity which directs the activities which are being carried out, the experiences which are being proposed to the young and the style of relationships which are being established (43rd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools).⁴

Education for justice should not be merely a specific subject area but a common thread which runs through the whole curriculum. This common thread should be reinforced by daily practice within the school. It is important to create a kind of micro-climate which offers an alternative, miniature model that does not support the anti-values which society often presents to us. It is important that within the school there exists an experience of justice in which values such as solidarity, communion and participation are top priorities. Otherwise the school runs the risk of duplicating the system and preparing students for a society of privileges, training them in the competitive struggle where there is no solidarity (Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC).⁵

Our World

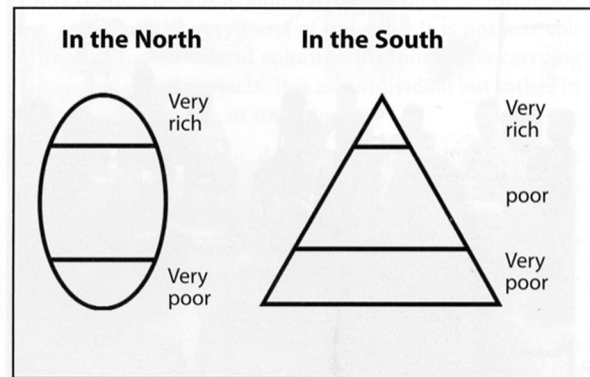
The Twenty-First Century

We live in a society of rapid changes. We are watching the “planetarization” of our culture, which generates uniformity and threatens our local culture. As a counterpoint to this we have the rise of intolerance, the fear of the new, seeing “the other” as dangerous. We are in a vulnerable society which is full of risks rather than dangers: the risk of contamination, of accidents, of illnesses . . . We are continually on the defensive, we’re afraid, we have a disproportionate eagerness for insuring our lives. We are afraid of changes. We are becoming all the time more competitive. At the planetary level we are meeting a very difficult situation, the result of the economic system and of individualism which produces constant injustices. We are 6,000 million inhabitants where only 20% of the population enjoys more than 80% of the goods. Of the present 6,000 million inhabitants, 3,000 million subsist on less than 2 dollars a day and 1,300 million on less than 1 dollar a day. If we continue in this way,

it is possible that the number of conflicts will multiply, that the quality of the environment will deteriorate and that the differences between the rich and the poor will increase.⁶

The rich become richer every day in contrast to the poor who become poorer every day. In the north there are 200 million poor people, that is to say 16% of the population. In Chicago every day 10,000 persons queue to receive a free plate of soup. In the south, on the other hand, there are rich areas. Brazil, for example, is the country with the largest number of private jets. There exist 400 million persons living a life of luxury (we include ourselves), of whom 50 million live in extreme luxury, while 1,800 million live in conditions of not only poverty but of extreme poverty. Children are the principal victims of our socio-economic problems and few governments carry out policies which face up to this situation. There are in the world 150 million street children, aged between three and eighteen. Forty percent of them have nowhere to live. The remaining 60% work in the streets to support their families. They cannot go to school. Millions of children are victims of sexual abuse, which, in many cases, is caused by members of their own families or close friends. Twelve million children of less than five years of age die each year in developing countries as a result of health problems: hunger, malnutrition, AIDS, malaria, common infections, lack of immunization, unhealthy water and generalized poverty. It is calculated that some 250 million children of less than 10 years of age serve in the armed forces or in armed opposition groups. Young people aged between 12 and 16 constitute 85% of the rebel forces of some countries. Many young people are not motivated and remain in school against their will. The official police force is taking over normal security and discipline functions in some schools. There is a growing problem of youth violence. In some countries the average child spends 900 hours per year in school and 1,500 hours watching TV. Many parents have given up supervising what their children look at.

As can be seen in the graphics on this page the north takes the shape of an egg, with the top part showing the very rich, the bottom part the very poor and with the middle class in the middle. The south has the form of a pyramid where the very rich are situated at the top and coming down from there the poor and the very poor. In Brazil the 10% richest own 53% of the country's wealth and the 50% poorest have to make do with 3% of the country's wealth. These are just some statistics. Why? How does this situation come about? What is the fundamental cause?



Why Is the World the Way It Is?

When we ask ourselves why this has happened or what are the causes which have led to this situation, the answer is simple: *injustice*. That is to say, already from the year 1600, a Dutch company was making 1,000% profit on cargos of tea which it was transporting to Europe. Seventy years ago the merchants of the north took over for themselves, in an almost gratuitous manner, the raw materials of the south by military force. In the south people are paid little and work a lot. The exploitation of workers and children, apart from being evident and bloody, is of the order of the day. In Europe a worker is paid a minimum of 15 euro an hour; in Vietnam or in India he gets one euro. In the case of children it is much less. With this wage they can pay for only 20% of the basic needs of themselves and their families. And the rest? Another factor which has generated this situation has been, and continues to be, the External Debt. For this there is no human or reasonable solution other than immediate cancellation. The IMF, the only body which has got through with policies of structural adjustment, has made the situation worse. This has led to unjust work, unjust wages and sub-human working conditions; since it is a question of working a lot and earning little with a view to reducing the Debt. And here, as earlier, we could continue adding to the list of reasons.

What Can Be Done at School Level?

We quote here the words of Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former director-general of UNESCO:

These days more than ever we need values, points of reference, and it is necessary and urgent to have an educational plan of action based on three great pillars: non-violence, equality and liberty. These should be the basis of education in all countries, whatever their beliefs, religious principles or cultural sensibilities. The aim, therefore, is to create a new humanism for the twenty-first century.

We would assert that the educational plan should revolve around Justice and Solidarity. The school ought to plan itself clearly as the place for this type of education, developed with three great objectives: to arouse the hope of living and struggling for justice; to form students in attitudes favoring the improvement of the person and succeeding in renewing much more human, free and supportive relations. Or what comes to the same thing, to educate for Utopia, for

consistency of life and for a fraternal society. These three objectives are, it is true, very general, but we need to be very clear about them. They become clearer with time in aspects which are visible and can be evaluated. The school which calls itself Christian and even more so Lasallian must not contribute to reproducing injustice. Justice is a constituent element of the Gospel. To announce the Gospel is to announce the justice of God. Therefore, educating in and for Justice starting from the school is

to expect a new type of person and of society in which each person has the opportunity to be fully human and each one accepts the responsibility of promoting the human development of the rest.⁷

The Concept of Justice and Solidarity

It is important in this section that we make very clear what we understand by Justice and Solidarity, since there are many ways of understanding it, one as different as the other. You need only look around you to notice them. The mass media sell us an idea of solidarity very remote from what we mean here. For that reason, we need to begin with what it is not, with a view to unmasking false concepts which could even exist among us and in our education centers.

It Is Not

When we speak of justice we do not mean a justice which reduces itself to the field of personal ethics, to what my conscience dictates. Educating for justice, in this context, is synonymous with forming persons for faithfully fulfilling the existing legal order. This order must be maintained and not questioned. There is no concept of a questioning of anything anterior to the established order, that is to say a questioning of the basis on which the criteria of justice of this established order rest. Neither do we understand by justice the faithful fulfilling of the law . . . this justice in which “each one does what is his to do” or in which “each one is given what is his.”⁸ This is the source of the traditional understanding of justice which entails excessive insistence on a subjective attitude, strict equality between what is given and what is received, and the prevalence of commutative justice over distributive. If this were the case, everything would continue exactly the same. And justice is precisely the opposite . . . it is that things change. It is not giving alms, but rather that no one has to ask for them.

It Is

Rather justice has to be understood as a virtue proper to man, which implies the formation of attitudes in the person favorable to improving himself and others. We can also understand it as loving and respecting persons, that is to say, living on the basis of the Utopian ideal of equality. We understand Justice as the direction and the force for making change dynamic. We find ourselves in sympathy with the definition of Ildefonso Camacho:

the creation and maintenance of a social order where every person can, as both subject and protagonist, develop his own dignity.

This definition takes into account a series of important aspects which we must not forget.

The Social Order

- Cannot be reduced to momentary actions.
- Goes way beyond the sphere of personal comportment.
- Is related to the social order where structures and relations, etc.

Subject and Protagonist

- This social order is not discharged by government structures or in the law of responsibility.
- It must arise from the concrete situations in which each subject lives.
- It is achieved through direct steps and participation.

Every Person

- According to the principle of equality.

Human Dignity

- This means that the person builds himself and for this there must be means for all persons. Dignity means having all the primary and basic needs covered . . . not just economic but those involving family, love, affective life . . .
- The concept of maintenance – this is related to something dynamic and not static.
- There must be a form of justice that is continually being revised and brought up-to-date . . .

Solidarity

When we speak of Solidarity we must understand this as the personal and group development of a series of values, which make a person approach disadvantaged human situations with the aim of helping to overcome them. Therefore Solidarity is not mere benevolence, but attacking the very roots of injustice. It is not just volunteering for the sake of volunteering, but rather carrying out well-planned projects. It is not individual but rather in groups, associations, in community. We are left with the definition of Pope John Paul II, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which defines solidarity as

the firm and persevering determination to become involved in the common good: that is to say, for the good of one and all, so that we can all be truly responsible for everybody.⁹

We are also left with the concept of solidarity as an encounter, proposed by Luis A. Aranguren Gonzalo in his book *Reinventar la Solidaridad – Voluntariado y educación*.¹⁰ Solidarity implies “having the experience of meeting the world of pain and injustice and not remaining indifferent.” Also, he adds:

to have sufficient capacity for thinking and living in another way, a capacity for thinking, that is to say, for analyzing in the most objective way possible the reality of inhumanity and injustice in which we are living, without the weight of this analysis overwhelming us. And to live in such a way that solidarity constitutes a basic pillar in the project of life of whoever we take to ourselves through solidarity.

Justice Which Arises from Faith

And we do not stop here, but our Justice is a Justice which arises from faith. Up till now we have been speaking at a human level, but faith gives strength to all which has gone before: there should be no Christian who does not vibrate with the theme of Justice. From the beginning God hears the cries of the oppressed, and these cries reach the heart of Jesus, and have an effect. Throughout the history of salvation we have had a number of prophets who fought for widows, the poor, the sick; prophets who strongly criticized the rich, the dominant class. As a significant example of the fight for justice by the prophets we could take Amos. He presents to us a God who demands that justice be done. He had heard the call of God precisely when he was “herding his cows.” He was a southern farmer who was going to sell the products of his land in the capital of the north. He sold them at the houses of the capital and at the gates of the national sanctuary of Siquen. Since he was a keen observer, he knew well the customs and the religiousness of the upper classes of Samaria. He frequently went into the houses to sell his products and he observed with amazement at the gate of the temple how his wealthy customers showed off their pious actions. It was natural that he, an honest peasant believer, would be scandalized and angered when faced with such hypocrisy. In his anger he felt that God was present, which obliged him to denounce what he saw. For this purpose he rejected with great force the “insolent luxuries” of a few at the expense of the misery of the majority.

“Lying on ivory beds . . . they drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest oil for anointing themselves but about the ruin of my people they do not care at all.”¹¹ The God of Amos wants justice and honesty.

“But let justice flow like water and integrity like an unfailing stream.”¹² In short, we have a God-Mother, with a merciful and tender heart who listens to the cries of man. “Where is your brother?” is the question of the Christian, the question of a supportive God. This question is very well answered by Jesus; we could say it is answered with distinction. Jesus opted for the poor, the crippled, the marginalized, the sick, the lame, the blind . . . and he took their part for life. Jesus asks the same of us. Jesus is the great champion of Justice. Also in the earliest Christian communities, it was understood that faith in Jesus was linked to opting for the poor. So we find Peter curing a paralytic and the many actions of the first followers of Jesus. Also in the tradition of the Church it has been understood that faith in Jesus cannot be separated from the struggle for justice. There are many Fathers of the Church, many saints . . . who made Justice the motive for their struggle and for their hope. Saint Paul had hard words about meals which were not shared and at which the first places were for the richest . . . Saint James says, “God has chosen the poor” and “faith without works is dead.” Saint Jerome affirms that “the rich person is so because he is a robber and the heir of a robber.” Saint Benedict says:

Tell me, What things are yours? It's as if someone, after taking his seat in the theater in order to see, were then to prevent those who came in from seeing, thinking that what is put there for the use of all belongs to him. It is the same with the rich. Why do they go on picking up the things which belong to all and appropriating them?

For the Holy Fathers, Justice consists in restoring to the poor what has been stolen from them. For the believer who contemplates the action of God, this justice is

the type of love which seeks to effectively humanize, give life and give it in plenty to all the poor and oppressed of humanity.¹³

It is the justice of Jesus who comes to announce the face of God to the poor through his own life and the signs of love, the miracles which are his acts of salvation.

Justice Which Is the Expression of Charity

At times charity has been contrasted with justice. They have even gone so far as to say "what will the Christians do with charity when the non-believers have invented justice." I don't think the claim is true. Justice and charity both belong to the patrimony of the Christian faith; and at no time has charity been a substitute for justice. Charity is not outside justice but within it. Justice is a form of charity, its political form. The opposite of justice is not charity but injustice. And where there is injustice it is a sign there is not charity. Charity refers to the nature of motivation and relation, justice refers to structural reality and political practice. Charity is the touchstone for overcoming the legalistic conception of justice, its dynamism of the minimum when it is interpreted in a purely legal way.

The Lasallian School Today

A very important text for us such as the *Declaration*, says

The preferred orientation of the Institute toward the education of the poor does not exclude the Brothers from involvement with other social classes . . . but it is important that they nonetheless be identified with concern for the poor and the work of the Institute in their favor. Whatever the circumstances, the Brothers will strive to awaken consciences by giving suitable doctrinal and social teaching to stimulate effective participation in the struggle in favor of justice and peace to which we are called by the Church.¹⁴

Likewise the previous Superior General comments that,

if our centers devoted to children from well-to-do backgrounds do not form them in a commitment to Justice, they will have no reason to exist.¹⁵

If the Lasallian school is characterized by anything it is by its diversity, the quality of its structures and the interest of its educators. All for the service of the poor.

This Institute [and its educational and religious structures] is concerned above all for the educational needs of the poor as they strive to become aware of and to live and to be recognized as human beings and children of God. The Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to what the Kingdom of God requires.¹⁶

We must be open to Justice and to make the Lasallian centers structures of justice and solidarity. For this, we need not only good intentions but also the brains to ask ourselves what we have to do and in what we need to educate. We need heart so that we like what we are doing, so that it will be vocational, so that we can vibrate and be in tune with what we are doing. We need the capacity to imagine preparation, experience, knowledge, formation. We need a risk-taking disposition, that is to say being ready to run the risks which the plans demand; and above all we need to see the poor as a “theological place.” By means of them God talks to us. The Lasallian school has as its aim that the one being educated should know, interpret and transform the world, that is to say be a responsible person and a responsible citizen of the world and an active member of the Church. For this purpose the Lasallian school invites the pupils to formulate questions and above all questions of solidarity. It invites the pupil to be in search of answers. The answer for justice comes in developing a conscience, an awareness, offering channels for commitments of solidarity, and learning to know the roots of injustice. Many schools do not educate in Justice because they have a Plan for Education in Justice, without Justice being converted into an element of identity and “backbone.” The latter means making Justice the axis on which is constructed the thought, the values, the knowledge. To build the center around Justice means that the educator, in the first place, lives justice and truly creates it, and, in the second place, that all activities are pervaded with this concept. The educational capacity of a center is related intimately to the “climate” and internal context of the center. If the values of Justice and Solidarity are not lived in the Center, it will be difficult to pass these on. These values are often transmitted by osmosis, because they are in the environment, because they are preached and lived, because the Center is run in this way and not in another, because there are attitudes proper to “our way of doing things” and others which do not belong to this style of functioning and being. This “humus” of the running of the Center is created by and among all. It is not just the task of the teacher

Educating in Justice and Solidarity

To succeed in producing a school which looks after most needs and educates in Justice and Solidarity the educational community needs to question itself about the *purpose* of its task and *re-orientate* its activity in order to reach the ends which it proposes.

Points to Be Taken into Account

First: The first is one we take from Ignacio Ellacuría, who reminds us that we need to “place solidarity in its historic context.” This does not mean telling the history of a concept but putting it in relation with its concrete history, that is to say, situating it from a social, economic, political and cultural point of view. The truth of the concept of solidarity will be given by its practical fulfillment and not by its theoretical structure. In educational terms, putting solidarity in its historical context implies following four steps. These steps have been carefully studied by Luis A. Aranguren Gonzalo. The first is the “unmasking” of the false methods of achieving solidarity,

throwing light on the contradictions of the “fashion” of solidarity and discovering the mechanisms which promote this solidarity. The second is to “verify” the proposed value of solidarity, to investigate where, when, how and by what means the value of solidarity in our days can be verified. The third is to “esteem” the value of solidarity. Something is “estimable” in the measure in which it is presented to us as a valued reality. The fourth is the “fulfillment.” Esteem is followed by the personal necessity of fulfilling the value of solidarity. Solidarity becomes a possibility more or less to be valued, from the moment in which each one opts for and appropriates this humanizing possibility which constitutes solidarity.

Second: Another important point to keep in mind is the change of viewpoint in education . . . not to think of the individual good but of the collective. This presupposes carrying out an integral education starting out from the problems which affect people today: family, work, the economy, politics, religion . . . from human rights, individual and collective; from an education based on collaboration, understanding and peace.

Third: A third point will be to change the structures: an education which reads history from the viewpoint of “those at the bottom”; developing capacities for criticism, creativity and risk-taking; making the school a place in harmony with life; participating in structures which are committed to the promotion of justice.

Fourth: The fourth step will be to analyze and reflect on unjust realities; on our own individual mechanisms for resisting change; to learn to live in peace in the midst of conflict.

Fifth: The fifth will be to bring about an education in values involving all the school subjects; to develop transversal themes, specifically in Justice; to introduce concrete and efficient plans which will cover the whole school environment. In any case Education in Justice presupposes living in such a way as to be capable of communicating our worries about Justice. In education the first verb is “to live” not “to teach.”

Difficulties in Educating in Justice and Solidarity

A first difficulty is the present style of life, the “new way of life” which “post modernism” presents to us, and with which, without wanting it, the school is being contaminated: the *fragmentation* of the global sense of existence; the *coming-out of history* without attaching any importance to what went before or imagining what might come after, the only things that matter being the present moment and the *individualism* which is pre-occupied with narcissistic pleasure as the ultimate criterion of existence. Another difficulty is the idea that the social conscience is projected onto the school. The school continues to be the place where you go for the certificate which allows you to live in the best possible way. It doesn’t matter what values it teaches, all that matters is the quality of the teaching and the seriousness of the education process. Social competition is also giving rise to competition between schools, which have to share out, especially in some countries, the number of pupils which each year is getting smaller. This frequently causes the school to give in to pressure and resign itself to not reaching its ideals in educating in values, in the name of better academic results. The Synod of Bishops of 1971 speaking on the subject of Justice in the world said:

The education method still currently in force very often in our times encourages a closed individualism. One part of the human family lives as if submerged in a mentality which exalts possessions. The school and the mass media, hindered frequently by the established order, allow for the forming of the kind of human beings which that established order wishes, that is to say, a person in their image; not a new man but the reproduction of man as he was.

And along the same lines, Adam Curle says:

Education as it is carried out in the majority of cases, does not so much liberate man from ignorance, tradition and servility as it chains him to the values and aspirations of a middle class which it is probable many never reach.¹⁷

Certainly, the school is a small-scale model of society where its tensions and ways of behaving are reproduced and if we are not very careful, these will influence the whole educational task. A school which does not face up openly to its aim of promoting justice will be out of the running and neutral with regard to the established social order in society. It will be, in reality, the major contribution to the state of injustice deeply rooted in our world. Another difficulty is the limitation that the school has in space and time for its educative action. The school without walls is still to come. It is true that there is a constant aspiration toward the school opening up, but it is also true that it is very centered on the transmission of contents. Therefore the educators themselves, with the multiplicity of tasks which the school asks of them, see themselves overwhelmed as they try to get nearer to reality. On the other hand, the school ends when the person is able to develop his life project. At that moment, at the beginning of youth, the school hands on those it is educating to the university or to work and cuts off the whole process of direct action in their regard. Both aspects, lack of time and space, must be taken into account by the school if it really wants to make efficient plans.

Endnotes

1. Brother Jorge Meneses is a Brother of the Christian Schools of the Sector of Valladolid in the District of ARLEP (Spain and Portugal). This article originally appeared in *Bulletin 249: Educating in Justice* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2004), pages 4-11.
2. *Centesimus Annus* (Vatican City, 1991), #58.
3. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Vatican City, 2001), #50.
4. Cf. *Circular 447: The Documents 43rd General Chapter* (Rome, 2000).
5. *Pastoral Letter to the Brothers* by Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría (December 2003).
6. Information from *Programme des Nations Unis pour le développement* (PNUD, 1998).

7. Javier Garcia Forcada.
8. Marciano Vidal, *Diccionario de Etica Teologica*, pages 329-330.
9. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Vatican City, 1987).
10. Cf. *Reinventar la Solidaridad – Voluntariado y educación* by Luis A. Aranguren Gonzalo (PPC, 1998).
11. *Amos* 6:4-6.
12. *Amos* 5:24.
13. Jon Sobrino.
14. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, #32.1.
15. Brother John Johnston, FSC.
16. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 1987), #11.
17. Adam Curle, *Educación liberadora* (Herder, 1977), page 13.