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## **Burn the Ships and Gamble the Remains: A Call for Utopia and Hope**

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### **Introduction**

What a great honor and responsibility to be able to address you in this World Congress of Lasallian Education, celebrated on the occasion of the Tercentenary of the Easter of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, in Latin American lands, in which Mexico not only welcomes us with its legendary hospitality and excessive beauty, but with a rich number of cultures, miscegenation, quests, and struggles.

Latin American history expresses the hopes and sufferings of peoples who have defended their traditions, but are open to the world, with their own identity essentially characterized by their generosity, their sincere experience of a vibrant Christianity, a social environment marked by inequality and exclusion, political realities that go from democracies that roughly respect the rights of others to totalitarian governments and despots, educational systems that reflect social inequality, which represents the closing of opportunities for many of our children and young people, in addition to the replication of unjust and excluding social systems.

Beyond the difficulties, Latin American people are also characterized by their contagious joy, their colors that amaze the eye, their music that attracts with its sounds, their solidarity that they freely share, their warm hospitality, their variety expressed by their resources, their trust in God which communicates faith, their hope that nurtures their struggles, their flavors that caress the palate, their fraternity that makes us brothers and sisters, and their fertility that foreshadows the fulfillment of their dreams and the flowering of utopias and better times.

We share with the whole world the vertiginous social processes due to the fact that migration is changing societies, the disruptive innovations that have transformed our way of living, the predatory consumerism that has changed the natural landscape and threatens our survival, the political dynamics that have cracked democracy, the science and biotechnology that have altered the concept of life and death, the breakdown of mega-narratives that has shaken religions and ethical systems, and the advent of the fourth stage of the industrial revolution or, better said, the first of the digital era, that has shown the inability of many nation-states to regulate or govern themselves. Thus, change is permanent and characterized by uncertainty.

We live these times as heirs of a three-hundred-year tradition that unites us and calls us to think about education for the new generations in midst of the turbulence of the present and the current challenges of being relevant for children and youths and all those entrusted to our educational care. Nevertheless, it is clear that a tradition is dead if we cannot update it and re-read it within new realities and in challenging places. It would be outdated to transfer the methods and processes of a former time without a context and reflection that allows us to understand how the

fundamental values and primitive intuitions can enlighten the actions of the present. Doing this is exciting, not as an intellectual disquisition but as an opportunity to create, risk, decide, and act.

In this Mexican land, five centuries ago, Hernán Cortés, having understood that he had to take some risks in order to achieve his goal, emulated Alexander the Great in his conquest of the Phoenician coast. At the insistence of his hosts to leave and go back, he gave the order to “burn the ships.” Thus, I am convinced that the Lasallian mission in today’s world can be quite meaningful, but I also believe that these are times of making prophetic and radical decisions so that we do not spend our lives winding the clock backward without running the risk of setting it one hour forward, and that will joyfully allow us, being in God’s hands, to burn the ships. Yes, burn the ships and do not go back and stay in comfort zones; and, I must add, not only burn the ships, but gamble the remains, and with and through hope, creativity, and commitment respond to the present and help build the future.

### **About the Three Founding Lasallian Values**

The word Lasallian has to do with a style, a methodology, and a tradition, especially in a rich, constructive, and personalized educational interrelation, inspired by a spirituality supported by *faith*, *fraternity*, and *ardent zeal* that, correlatively, has to be redefined in today’s world.

*Faith* not only should refer us to a relationship with God who acts through the teacher as described in the classic De La Salle quote “not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and attribute everything to God,” but *faith* should also generate a distinctive and differentiating pedagogical relation.<sup>3</sup> In Latin America, this proposal was reread through the concepts of contemplation, discernment, and abandonment, respectively. The spirit of faith, today, demands several personal and community dynamics, consistent with the pedagogical mediation generating self-reliance and trust in others, in humanity, and transcendence toward the continuous presence of God whom we can contemplate in the educational activity.

Thus, “faith as the foundation of a hope that translates itself into commitment.”<sup>4</sup> An active, committed faith in “coming out” of the quietness of our communities and the comfort zones of our missions. A faith that seeks, a faith that risks, a faith that commits itself, a faith that discovers God in the ups and downs of history, and a faith that finds Jesus Christ in the new peripheries and in the faces of the excluded and those perceived as irrelevant.

*Fraternity* today acquires essential connotations in both an individualistic and a global world. I am under the impression that Lasallian education, although it has emphasized a community dimension, has been very narcissistic. It has overemphasized personal achievement and not solidarity, reflecting the modern ideal of the man/woman who owns, lord/lady of the world, and measure of all things. We are too concerned about the rankings; we love our illustrious graduates (those who are successful in the political, financial, and religious worlds), leading to the deification of men/women within the community and the society. The fascination for “the best” limits our ability to identify what is irrelevant; these are perhaps the blind, wounded, and lame of the Gospel.

Fraternity is also manifested by those with whom we share our table and pathway: not only in the endogamy of those who believe and think like us but in those who think differently, those whose religious options are different or none, with those who contradict and question us, but with whom we can also find common dreams. In the field of dissent, roads and innovation are more likely to be found than in a world of self-centeredness and common praises.

*Ardent zeal* translates into passion, commitment, perseverance, and joy of and in being part of the “touching hearts” mission; pointing out horizons, inspiring dreams, and participating in the educational processes that open the doors to opportunities, contributing to the construction of equity, and strengthening the democratization of societies. Joy, commitment, availability, and adherence to the common project must be the characteristics of the Lasallian project; and if zeal is ardent, fire and passion must be our banners.

## **Education: Fundamental Pillar for Humanization and the Creation of Inclusive and Just Societies**

### ***Clear options and non-neutrality***

Lasallian education is not neutral, because it is rooted in the Gospel and in “the promotion of human dignity, solidarity among all human beings, and integral and sustainable development.”<sup>5</sup> When we opt for humanization and justice as inspiration, fundamental educational input and output, neutrality is not possible.

The origin of the Lasallian mission was the result of an intentional and deliberate attitude “to be impressed by the human and spiritual helplessness of the children of artisans and of the poor,”<sup>6</sup> for which the school as an institution was rethought and recast to make it accessible to the poor and offer it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of Salvation. To opt means to choose, to privilege, to prefer, to distinguish, and to decide. It is not about excluding, but about understanding that “not everything is valid,” that something must die so that life can be fully manifested, and that it is not possible to keep things going without transforming them. Our options undoubtedly go through essential dimensions from where our educational proposals are prepared, carried out, and evaluated.

Non-neutrality refers us to conceptual and vital clarities defined, among other aspects, by the social place, the communities to be served, sociopolitical contexts, the educational and pedagogical models, the theological-ecclesial approaches, the defense of life and the protection of the Earth, the conception of the role of science and technology, the ethics of responsibility, and the formation of citizens.

The social place can be understood as the position from which we place ourselves to interpret the world, human relations, political systems, social systems, and economic realities. It has to do with our images of society, social justice, distribution of wealth, and environmental issues; of our interpretation of integral ecology and the model of society that it entails. The social place is expressed in the paradigm in which we place ourselves to carry out our educational projects.

Since the beginning, De La Salle made clear choices in favor of “the children of artisans and of the poor.” In our current reality, there are many educational urgencies, with economic poverty high on that list making it not difficult to identify those populations that shall be privileged in our mission. In fact, the educational service of the poor is what makes “the Institute unique.”<sup>7</sup> It is not about excluding other human groups; in fact, the Lasallian family is present in various social, political, and economic scenarios. The Institute, 40 years ago, pointed out that the educational service of the poor cannot be separated from the promotion of justice; and, obviously, the poor are not only those who cannot live in dignity, but those who are excluded, denied, and made irrelevant,<sup>8</sup> which seems to be a new category to define them.

The global world that seemed so promising at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the opening of economies, the flow of knowledge and capital, and the emergence of the “global village,” today shows facets that reveal that illusion gave way to disappointment. New walls segregate countries, doors have closed for immigrants, xenophobia is everywhere, entire communities are entrenched in their fear of being “different” taking radical positions which lead to violence and racism; they no longer understand that history is one, interconnected and common, and that the fate of humanity is in danger. Advances in organizations that shared more than the economy and opened their borders seem to be falling apart; the ghosts of heinous models reappear, manifesting themselves in unstoppable outbreaks of fascistic adventures, dictatorships, and despotic regimes that manipulate, violate freedom, and condemn entire peoples to misery.

Furthermore, we have to understand our theological-ecclesial approaches that define a particular conception of God and of the Church. Theological paradigms are also transformed. Today, issues that were relatively solved a few decades ago, such as the role of religion in the social life, the relationship between human beings and transcendence, salvation, and spiritual awareness beyond religion seem to be more complex and complicated, or at least different. The understanding of the role of the Church in a pluralistic world, and of believers within the Church, is important in determining the same evangelizing and catechetical processes, while a very important number of Lasallians, students and professors, belong to other Christian denominations, different creeds, and religious traditions, or live a deep personal spirituality without affiliations. This also involves important challenges such as the Lasallian role in ecumenism, freedom of religion, and intercultural aspects.

The questions that arise must be contemplated through the meaning of evangelization, catechesis, the study of religious traditions, the communication of common values, the preaching of Jesus Christ, and the mystery of the Church. For Catholics, and obviously, the Brothers are in this group – religious lay people – who definitely must renounce any form of clericalism so common in our Church and so tempting, curiously among important groups of Brothers who long for the “good old times” of a Church where hierarchy was more important than the concept of a pilgrim Church founded on service and not on power, in a model that easily relativizes the following of Jesus Christ and the passion for men and women of all times and cultures – beyond a religious affiliation – replacing it with asphyxiating liturgical practices and yearning for the “top positions.”

Fortunately, the concept of a *synodal* Church emerges which breaks, along the axis, an ecclesiastical paradigm entrenched in hierarchies of power and not in service. This Lasallian

Institute was born lay, its consecrated members are lay religious, and it has an impressive presence of lay associates and collaborators; how else can we understand the Church if it is not under a *synodal* perspective? Furthermore, if one of the founding values is fraternity, this is also the essential value of *synodality*: we are all brothers (and sisters) who discern, not only people who obey.

### ***Toward characterizing the essential elements of Lasallian education***

#### *Educational processes privilege the formation of critical thinking*

We are facing the urgent need to educate for contemplation, interiority, and depth. In short, to formulate our own opinions, analytical skills, opportunities for critical thinking, the doubt that seeks; to take the time to ingest and digest information through contemplation and reflection and use it to understand the world and its relations, and be able to communicate with others through our own rational and contended thoughts: to educate for patience, pedagogies for mental rumination, to educate slowly, to simmer.<sup>9</sup>

It is imperative to promote reading pedagogies that lead to discussions that open the way for new arguments and generate personal opinions based on research, to provide a clear and precise training to face and easily conceptualize the striking fragmentation from digital reading; the ability to hyperlink and move from one idea to another and from one author to another; and the overload of information makes it impossible for people to fully understand a text. Reading printed books, analyzing and discussing them, leads us to a meta-analysis, to a dialogue with the author and helps us understand other perspectives; these are essential conditions to overcome the imposed superficiality.

In this globalized world, which favors emptiness, it feels like Lasallians are called to provide means that favor reflection, awareness, and options that encourage answers to questions about the meaning of life. If superficiality and the indifferent conceptions of life are raw and hard realities, there are more matters to worry about. We live under the rule of the “post-truth,” where objective facts matter less to public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs.

Thus, the truth is replaced by repeated lies, exacerbating feelings, and bringing out positions that disarticulate what is felt and thought with what is said. It comes to the institutionalization of the lie with that secret morbidity in which political decisions based on fallacies are accepted uncritically, while something else is being proclaimed in the speech. The worst of it all is that those who govern this “liquid” world lie openly and manage to be convincing; they deny the undeniable (global warming, evolution of life, rights of minorities), promise the unattainable, and awaken the anarchist, racist, homophobic, narcissistic elements that are frequently housed in our hearts.

#### *Lasallian education is humanistic and humanizing: In defense of the humanities*

I understand humanism as the constant search for what is deeply human, the meaning of values, and the significance of relationships between people, all meaningful aspects that cannot be fully explained by scientific method, by overwhelming technology, by messianic politics, by uncritical

dogma, by religion on demand, or by any kind of fundamentalism. I think of humanism as the strengthening of the free and critical spirit, in solidarity with the history and fate of the world, that transcends and is always dissatisfied, that believes in the possibilities and strengths of humanity, that enjoys life, that seeks and admires beauty, that is committed to the achievement of shared ideals beyond the inspirational referents of humanism itself, and that transcends itself in trying to find inspiration, serenity, strength, and perseverance in God.

Therefore, saying that the Lasallian educational tradition is humanistic is a pleonasm. Our formative bet has been guarding and preserving what is human, not under the excluding logics of anthropocentrism, but, precisely, under the very basis of existence. This matter is enriched in its constant movement that opens the way, that is questioned by its conditions, possibilities, and forms of expression. Forms that are, in the end, the core dynamics of education.

Ethics training is essential in our proposal. Traditionally, we have undertaken the guiding principles of Christian thinking about ethics. Nevertheless, the understanding of Christian ethics in apparently secularized contexts is beyond the dogmatic or autistic interpretation of their values, in the constant effective deployment of their bets, that is, in the updating of their relevance in environments, which are, more than ever, heterogeneous and even hostile.

However, there are not so pragmatically addressed tensions in this path because they maintain deep antagonisms permeated by moral traditions that require a reconceptualization. Thus, in some current aspects the urgency is not to seek a reconciliation between tensions, but, first, to establish a dialogue that enhances their understanding. Example: How does the protection of human life work and dialogue – Christian principle and the basis of constitutional rights – with the selective causes of abortion based on criminal acts or with those who put the mother's life at risk? How do we understand the complexity of the values of justice – between the civil relations of rights and duties and those of gratuity, mercy, and communion – in the face of complex social issues such as the recognition of women's rights, marginalized communities, or marital rights of same-sex couples?

The tensions between Christian and civil ethics are behind our ability to understand what the possibilities for us are to influence the construction and care of the present society and its future. From the inspiration of Christian faith as well as other religious traditions: *telos*, which is the testimony of the divine in its guiding criteria of moral action, or the highly regarded development of technology that offers, as *telos*, unlimited technological innovation in the era of globalization, aspects such as the humanization of justice, commitment to social and political responsibility, and the protection for rights and promotion of duties will be ethical and spiritual roots to establish a solid dialogue regarding the contradictions that arise from human actions.

These are very sensitive topics for Lasallian education. Furthermore, they are significantly more critical and distressing in their approach to the university setting, in which they cannot be evaded nor can they become dogmatic proposals. A language of faith, ethics, and reason will always enrich the Christian proposal in dialogue with current contexts.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, our schools cannot ignore a crucial role: to form citizens capable of exercising their rights, fulfilling their duties, defending the public, strengthening the social fabric, participating in

democratic processes, taking an interest in politics and the political, possessing a civic ethic that is consequently manifested itself in their daily actions in decency, solidarity, transparency, responsibility, and compassion.

Education is politics, although sometimes we don't like that word. Politics involves the search for the common good and this is precisely what allows us to form citizens. Obviously, I am not referring to partisan militancy. Education is politics because whether it is in the public or private sphere it has an essential objective: the construction and defence of the public. Moreover, the Lasallian school anywhere in the world cannot escape these reflections, these debates, or these contradictions, which does not mean that we are renouncing the essence of Christian principles. What I want to say, rather, is that in dialogue we are going to strengthen the principles that are going to govern our lives.

### *The school that becomes school*

Being a school is a substantive issue and the Lasallian school cannot be alien to the impressive evolution within the last decades of the educational institution. A high-quality school knows that trust has to be earned to reaffirm its ability to create suitable conditions for the current context, one that teaches to learn, offering possibilities and opportunities. Thus, its instruction, pedagogy, and methodology go hand-in-hand with educational theory and best practices in order to address the internationally accepted evaluation systems. You cannot turn your back on these current demands.

Lasallian education cannot fall into the trap of being isolated and "successful" in a self-referential autism, divorced from the world. Being part of educational networks can strengthen our possibilities, expand our vision, implement joint projects, live the catholicity of the Church, and optimize our resources. We cannot continue betting on temptations that allow us to create or maintain successful schools and universities in frustrated and ruined societies; nor inadequate schools and universities in transformed societies and developed worlds. We cannot run the risk of being popular institutions in non-viable societies.

### *Quality for all: Never a poor education for the poor*

It is clear that the preferential option for the poor and the educational service of the most vulnerable and irrelevant are omnipresent. Both question and reference the work of Lasallian education. Tensions continue to exist within our educational projects. On the one hand, our desire and commitment to serve numerous social groups and the option for the poor and on the other hand the tension of making education possible for the poor and achieving financial sustainability that allows us to maintain quality education.

It is clear that quality education is expensive; but at the same time, there is no better investment than educating with quality. Poor education for the poor strengthens the vicious circles that generate injustice and inequity. This is a tension, or better said, it is a dilemma, for Lasallian education. Poor education for the poor perpetuates poverty.

The great challenge that arises is how to maintain the well-known quality of our project while being inclusive and accessible to the most vulnerable human groups with less access to and opportunities for basic, middle, and higher education. Achieving this implies being able to promote the balance between accessibility, inclusiveness, financial sustainability, finding funding sources, and managing projects and agreements with companies and governmental and non-governmental organizations, both national and international. There is no better scenario in which the graduates and friends of Lasallian educational institutions can converge and flourish: solidarity with and philanthropy for strengthening the quality in the educational service of the poor.

### **Toward Other Horizons**

As Lasallians, we have to live deep processes of re-enchantment of our mission. The realities of the world urge us to assume proactive and non-reactive positions, which should put us at the forefront of educational innovation and creative projects that allow educational proposals for current contexts characterized by, among other things, the disappearance of borders and the relative autonomy of physics, biology, and digital technologies that have favored the emergence of bioinformatics, biotechnology, and info technology that, in turn, challenge all ethical, philosophical, political, social, and historical models and positions.

There are so many realities that are so difficult to understand! In addition, they vary depending on the places and stories; but without a doubt, they impact the same life, species, and the future. Whether we live in the jungle or in the metropolis, climate change, genetic manipulation, the monopoly on information will end up transforming, destroying, or breaking the threads of history, at short notice and without prior consultation. It is of little use to lament or long for past times. The ages of history are no longer measured by centuries but, perhaps, by decades.

### ***In permanent dialogue, in a pluralistic society and in a secular world***

The Lasallian proposal, now present in different countries, social models, religious traditions, political systems and educational levels, has the responsibility to find in permanent dialogue the ability of communicating the founding values of our tradition together with the essential competences for today's world. Endogamy and self-centeredness are not valid. We are not a self-sufficient proposal in the sense of thinking that we are carriers of a worldview with a unifying role. However, our presence does have a great convening power and, in this reality, it can be a constant liaison between pluralist dialogues in favor of the defense of the human being, of humanism, of mercy, of inclusion and of opportunities for all.

In fact, it is evident that our educational institutions, open to all, feel that they are people of different religious inspirations or none, of diverse cultural, professional, and political traditions and, gladly, find respect, freedom, truth, and unity. We do not deny our history; on the contrary, we make the best of it: the person as the center of educational processes and the search for projects that may unite us.

Gone are the days of indoctrination and uniformity, of uncritical imposition, of the unconscious assumption of sociopolitical models that attempted against humanity itself and the survival of the



“human.” I believe that in a plural world, the dialogue between identities is important. The essential elements of our tradition are clear and that is why they can facilitate this dialogue.

### ***The prophetic voice of universities***

Where will the intellectuals stand before what is about to come? How far will go the defense of the most vulnerable, of those who do not have opportunities, of whom we deny the same human dignity? Will they have a guiding word in the face of the complexity that characterizes reality? Impossible to know; but, undoubtedly, it is an issue of great importance for the Lasallian university, focused on positions more than on ideals, on their research, on their publications, on their practices, as part of the ethical conscience of the peoples where they are inserted.

The Lasallian university has grown steadily in recent decades. It is not alien to the deep questions that hover over the very idea of a university. There are several questions that emerge with the same intensity but that do not have recipes or accept simple answers. For example, what is the university of the future? And, certainly, I am not thinking about the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but about five or ten years from now. It is evident that many universities in the world are closing the doors or merging with other institutions. Large companies open “corporate universities” or directly train their officials.

However, research is one of the essential functions of the university. A few years ago, the International Association of La Salle Universities (IALU) established a common research agenda of topics that could bring together researchers, groups and joint projects. Issues, undoubtedly essential: food problems, education and inclusion, and environmental issues. It is still valid, then, to ask ourselves, what are the research topics that should favor and lead our researchers to commit? Have we really advanced toward a new perspective of internationalization, beyond trying to have international students? The internationalization of a university is defined by its capacity to observe and understand the world as a whole, and to make consistent proposals, and not by the recruitment of young people who come across the seas and continents, or go on to live academic experiences in other places and cultures.

I am convinced that Lasallian universities can provide clues if, indeed, we ask ourselves the right and pertinent questions. It’s not about surviving; it’s about creating; it’s about understanding that something has to die so that something else can be born.

### ***To my Brothers***

I want to say a word to my Brothers who, like me, have publicly vowed to commit their life “entirely,” “together and by association to the educational service of the poor.”<sup>11</sup> We have gladly understood, in these fertile years that the mission is shared; but we also understand, as the *Rule* tells us that we are “heart, memory and guarantor.”<sup>12</sup>

Age does not matter to live re-enchantment processes.<sup>13</sup> What counts is the true willingness to start over, to renew the faith in the promise of the good God, to apprehend the hope that comes from placing our trust in the One who has loved us first, to rekindle the fire of charity, love and mercy.

Do we not close our eyes once in a while and go after Jesus through the steps of De La Salle? Was it not with absolute sincerity that we came prepared for everything? Do we not sublimate other possibilities and opportunities to experience the joy of a risky mission? Do we not give up promising loves and possibly more lucrative companies? Do we not kneel down one day, freely, to consecrate our life “entirely,” with others and by association, for the educational service of the poor?<sup>14</sup>

Obviously in the way we find thorns, slander, difficulties, betrayals, briars, falls. We were never told that it would be easy. If that had been the case, we would have taken the wrong path. The consecrated life has always been conceived as the vanguard of the mission of the Church; so we often get entrenched in the rear.

Those who preceded us in the sign of faith were fighters who risked everything. Saint John Baptist de La Salle was a creator, a generous fighter, and the guide to create a unique space for evangelization and social transformation out of education. Those who began the Lasallian deed in Latin America had it clear; but the same has happened in all the Continents: help to build countries torn by conflicts and helping them find opportunities to value their geographical and natural wealth, to create educational opportunities for those who lived in the thresholds of marginalization, and believe in themselves and in their own potential. It achieved it in many ways, although the first intentions have not yet been achieved; they could continue inspiring our current options.

There are many Brothers of the past and the present who have devoted their whole lives to educational causes in a heroic way. Many times, anonymous heroes who have left an undying imprint and, most importantly, did not seek fame, but reached greatness. They remained in the hearts of the people: the only place where a Brother can aspire to be for all eternity. Praise and glory to those who continue to do so at the borders of dehumanization, exclusions and irrelevance.

We have to fight for Brothers to be everywhere. Everything depends on God and much of our testimony. Vocations are important, and we must be generous and worthy of them. We cannot renounce to live intensely our vocation and to tell others that it is possible and meaningful to be a Brother in this fascinating world in which we are fortunate to live.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Burn the ships and bet on the remains: A call for hope***

*Gaudium et Spes* ends with the phrase that for so many years has nurtured us and that today takes on an unusual force: “The future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.”<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the *Rule* of the Brothers expresses that

Since the time of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, “this Institute has been very necessary.” Young people, the poor, the world and the Church need the witness and ministry of the

Brothers. By making gratuity a fundamental characteristic of his foundation, De La Salle invited the Brothers to manifest the gratuity of the love of God. His disciples, like himself, experience personally that the Lord does not abandon “his work” but “is pleased to make it bear fruit from day to day.

Today with their Partners, the Brothers wish to respond in a creative way to the educational and spiritual needs of young people, especially of those who are the most vulnerable.<sup>16</sup>

I don't want to come across like an iconoclast and disagree with the Founder, but I think it needs to be reread. First, the future does not depend on us. Nor are we essential. However, we can be immensely significant, to the extent that we are able to look with hope at the horizons that are presented to us, to strive to understand the dynamics of the global and diverse world of today, to help build meaning, to become men and women that lead and take risks, to be faithful to the founding spirit and not to the structures we have built for other times, to embrace our limitations, to feel part of a Church that is no longer a monopoly but that represents the people of God who walk between lights and shadows, to identify “a” proposal in the midst of diversity and to have the audacity to believe and create, even if we make mistakes.

We have all the potential and capabilities to be immensely significant if we understand education as a mobilizer and transformer of society, and for the poor, for those who were born and for whom we must continue to fight. Here I find our future in many places of the world, and the opportunity to be a ferment evangelizer in this moment of history. Thus, we will be generators of hope and enablers of meaning.

Hope can only be given based on the acceptance of reality and the search for a proactive attitude that allows subverting it. Nothing is more revealing of the death of hope than the fatalism that leads to immobility and entrenchment in religious language and incoherent symbols disjointed in contrast with current dynamics, trapped in an unconscious religion, or the nostalgia for the past.

This hope goes hand in hand with faith and convictions, with the ability to believe in others and the passion to generate life. These are times to “bet on the remains” and “burn the ships”: there is no turning back. In a reality marked by the undermined and exhausted credibility in the Church-institution, by forces that pull vigorously into the past, by an Institute that, in several parts of the world, experiences accelerated aging processes and little perseverance of young people but, at the same time, with courageous Brothers who nourish hope beyond their strength, of committed and generous lay people who passionately dedicate their lives to education, for a mission that demands creativity and innovative ideas, for Networks of Schools that nourish their vitality in the passion for the education of the poor, by Peoples that seem to find paths after overcoming various problems, although they are still marked by inequality and injustice, we must fervently let hope shine and bet on utopias that glimpse horizons, hint clues, and inspire commitments. In a few words, to recover our utopian vocation, that answers the present and inspires the future, that gathers together through hope and bets for a better world.

And how would this world be if we actually understood and communicated through our educational projects that sustainable development is possible, that we can take steps toward an

ecological conversion, that science and technology can be allies of social justice and the preservation of life and the planet? What would happen if we fully contributed to communicate a new paradigm about the human being, society, politics and ethics? Where would we get if we could reliably testify that education humanizes, forms happy people, touches hearts to create meaning and generate solidarity and commitment to justice?<sup>17</sup> What would a new Lasallian spring be like if everyone here were never tired of sowing hope in the hearts of every child and young person we educate? What would happen if together and by association we reaffirm that our life will continue to be consumed in the construction of a better world, a utopia of peace, concord, love and equity?

Let me finish with a two-handed verse by two illustrious Latin Americans, Fernando Birri and Eduardo Galeano,

Utopia lies at the horizon.  
When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps.  
If I proceed ten steps forward, it swiftly slips ten steps ahead.  
No matter how far I go, I can never reach it.  
What, then, is the purpose of utopia?  
It is to cause us to advance.

## Endnotes

1. This is a translation from a Spanish-language text delivered at the World Congress of Lasallian Education, which was held at Universidad La Salle in Mexico City from 14 to 16 March 2019.
2. Brother Carlos Gabriel Gómez Restrepo, FSC is the Provincial Visitor of the District of Bogota of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and a former Rector of Universidad La Salle in Bogota, Colombia. He earned his doctorate in educational leadership at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.
3. "The Rule of 1718" in *Rule and Foundational Documents* by John Baptist de La Salle and translated and edited by Augustine Loes, FSC and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), #2.2, pages 16-17.
4. Cf. "The Two Missing Chapters of the 1981 English-Language Translation of *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*" by Michel Sauvage, FSC and Miguel Campos, FSC and translated by Cyril Ory, FSC in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (2012), pages 11-14.
5. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 2015), #17.1.
6. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, #1.
7. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, #11.

8. Yuval Noah Harari, *Twenty-One Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Random House, 2018).

9. Joan Domenech Francesch, *Elogio de la educación lenta* (Editorial Graó, 2009).

10. It is neither a question of “practical relativism” nor of a “doctrinal relativism” as defined by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican, 2013) and *Laudato Si’* (Vatican, 2015); on the contrary, it is necessary to accept the references of the natural law and revealed truth, which put realities into context without, for that reason, giving “priority to circumstantial convenience.”

11. “The Formula of Consecration” in *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, #25.

12. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, #157.

13. Álvaro Rodríguez FSC, “El encanto de la Vida Consagrada” in *Clausura del Congreso de la Vida Religiosa*

[[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&ersc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwig9tPQ2tbeAhUQ2IMKHVU4DsMQFjAAegQIBRAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.svdargentina.org.ar%2Fhermanos%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2010%2F10%2Fencanto\\_vida\\_consegrada.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3LECP4QUfsW\\_5q\\_cU3d0zz](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&ersc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwig9tPQ2tbeAhUQ2IMKHVU4DsMQFjAAegQIBRAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.svdargentina.org.ar%2Fhermanos%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2010%2F10%2Fencanto_vida_consegrada.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3LECP4QUfsW_5q_cU3d0zz)].

14. Cf. “The Formula of Consecration” in *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, #25.

15. *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican, 1965), # 31.

16. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, #152 & #153.

17. *Laudato Si’*, #215.