

SOME DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MARIST IHE

I would like to begin this reflection by greeting all the persons taking part in this 4th Meeting of the rectors and representatives of the Marist International Network of Institutions of Higher Education. Many of those here today were also at Curitiba, 6 years ago, taking part in the first meeting. At that time, there were more questions than answers. I believe that since then we have traversed a very positive path, with obvious fruits. We know ourselves more and better; we have begun to collaborate and work together; we have deepened the identity of the IHE within the Marist Institute.

So thank you all for being here today. Thank you for your invitation to me to share my reflections with you.

The title indicated for this talk in the meeting programme seemed very ambitious to me, since it required me to speak about « what the Marist Institute expects of its IHE ». I could have changed it to « what the Superior General of the Marist Institute expects of its IHE », But I did not want my words to sound like imperatives, but rather as a simple manifestation of what my heart tells me on the subject of higher education, that is, some dreams and intuitions of one brother among his brothers, in harmony with the document *Marist Mission in Higher Education*, which proposes to « put forward an exercise of investigation and discernment that can help to highlight clearly the nature, functions and purpose of Marist higher education¹. »

So I do not bring the words of the Institute, nor of the General Council with which I am working, but the wish to share some dreams which lead us to a discernment about the future of our IHE at the service of the Marist charism and mission.

« We are the stuff of which dreams are made », says one of the characters of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. In fact: « We are what we dream of being. The question of identity takes on all its meaning. Now I am convinced that identity is given us by what we are, certainly, but above all, by what we want to be. Our identity is defined more by our projects than by our achievements, by our dreams than by our actual situation². »

So I want to share with you some of my dreams for the Marist IHE. To do this, I will not approach the matter from a global point of view, but I will highlight some elements that seem to me particularly significant at this time. And I invite dialogue and sharing.

A) FOREWORD: PURPOSE OF THE MARIST IHE

¹ *Marist Mission in Higher Education*. Introduction.

² ROMERO RODRÍGUEZ SJ, José J. (2007), "Misión de una Universidad jesuita: retos y líneas de futuro", en *Revista de Fomento Social*, nº 247 (juillet-septembre 2007), p. 393-418.

Before beginning to develop the five points for the future on which I shall dwell later, I want to make it clear that I am sure that all Marist IHE strive to be coherent with their mission statement, with what they say about themselves in their documents. In other words, that they work to be what they say they are.

We are present in higher Catholic and Marist education. In the course of the last decades, one perceives a significant movement of the Marist Institute to accept various fields of apostolic work within higher education, convinced of the importance of our presence in this area.

But we have the moral obligation of assuring a presence with its proper style, incarnating in the charism which identifies us. It is not worth doing what everyone else does. If we contribute something, it is because there is something that distinguishes us, that is to say, that the Marist presence contributes something other public or private institutions do not offer. What is it that makes the IHE different?

Although our recent document *Marist Mission in Higher Education* may be a good reference for responding to this question, I cannot resist offering you two reflections.

First of all, one difference comes from the fact that we are situated in the Catholic intellectual tradition. Monika Helwig³ offers a series of characteristics proper to this tradition, which seem to me to be meaningful:

- a) **The link between faith and reason.** The need to think of the coherence between faith and the challenges presented to us through secular events and the new learnings of today. This philosophical practice is not opposed to faith, nor does it deny it. It reinforces it.
- b) **The accumulative aspect of wisdom.** We are not limited to Sacred Scripture or the pre-Constantine inheritance. At each epoch in history, men and women have responded and understood their faith in new cultures.
- c) **We prefer an anti-elitist approach.** A good dose of humility is needed to accept that Catholic intellectuals are not the only ones searching for the truth. The refusal of elitism means that we are responsible before the whole community when we choose subjects of research, writers, resources. Refusal of elitism means openness to non specialists, to those less gifted. Refusal of elitism means that we make the University accessible to persons lacking financial means, to the non privileged, to the excluded. That means respect for all cultures.
- d) **We are a community.** This means that all related groups and institutional groups are open to mission in general, that they grow in their desire of being a community which searches and teaches what it discovers. That means that all the disciplines develop their studies in seeking to have a social impact, and that what we learn we put to work for the common good of society. That means that we

³ Cf. AA. VV.: "Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition", Sacred Heart University Press, 2000. L'apport de Monika K. Hellwig s'intitule : « The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University ». On peut le trouver sur http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/2525_cit_in_the_catholic_university.cfm

prepare ourselves for effective service in the communities that we will later live in.

- e) **These learnings and wisdom must be lived.** Human development and professional development go together with spiritual development. All these integrated learnings should not lead to a mature life of self-sufficiency and self-concern, but should lead to a life oriented towards the service of others, starting from a coherent philosophy of life which creates a system with its priorities, a hierarchy of values, and an attitude of humility.
- f) **The sacramental principle.** A view of history and the whole of creation as a sign pointing towards another reality. It is through the memory that we call to mind and it is through the imagination that we are able to make use of what we call to mind to give it a new meaning. Creation and history are full of thousands of signs. The community of memory and hope recognizes them, celebrates them by stories, in art, music, architecture and liturgy, and brings them to contemplation.

There are, it seems to me, some references which accompany our institutional discernment, as Catholic Institutions. But we have as well, in second place, characteristics which are proper to us as Marist Institutions. *Marist Mission in Higher Education* sums them up very well; so I am not going to repeat them.

It seems to me that in all this there is a strong call to be coherent, that is, to favour creativity to incorporate the values that differentiate us into our « curriculum » and apply them through methodologies, as well as our ways of operating and organizing ourselves.

There is one question we could ask ourselves: « By what characteristics do we want to be recognised? » And there is a second parallel question: « By what characteristics are we actually recognised today? ». The reply to these two questions will provide the level of coherence with what we state we want to be.

A few weeks ago, I wrote the phrase “Learn by serving” in the search engine of Google; the first of 768,000 results corresponded to the Marist University of Mérida. I clicked on the proposed site and was able to read that this programme is « a pillar of our educational model and a part of the core studies proper to each career or academic programme. » I do not know what is the state of this programme today, but some years ago, on a visit to Mérida, I was impressed by it, for this programme seems to me to be an extraordinary effort to apply the characteristics which are ours to the whole University. Don’t you find it marvelous, moreover, that a Marist University should make obvious on the world of the Internet the fact of wishing to *teach through service*?

« Mary’s attitude of setting out for the house of Elizabeth to serve her is an invitation to the institutions of Marist higher education to go out themselves to meet those who most need them. That is the meaning of *university extension* and *community action programmes* that also assume a Christian meaning. To venture beyond its walls, the institution of Marist higher education approaches those who are excluded and marginalised by society. Mary’s example challenges us as to whether we only contribute to building the *city of men*, or also the *city of God*⁴. »

⁴ *Marist Mission in Higher Education*, 32.

Isn't that the type of excellence for which our IHE should strive? Several years ago, Michel Freyssenet, director of research at CNR, said in an article that the idea of considering the university as a pole of excellence was ridiculous, scandalous, and a source of exclusion. And he went on: « It is not poles of excellence that are needed, but poles of questioning capable of setting intelligence, imagination and the work of researchers in motion⁵. »

Saint Alberto Hurtado, a Chilean Jesuit, was not very far from this appreciation: « The first mission of the University is to question the world, and the first mission of its students is to manifest this questioning, this non conformity in the face of a world in prison, their very sincere desire to take part in the great human struggle... Our entire life at the service of justice and freedom... Let us fight so that in the world force serves justice; so that justice and freedom are always alive on the earth⁶. »

I began by saying that I had no doubt that all Marist IHE strive to be coherent with their principles, and I believe this is so, although this aspect risks slipping into second place. Frequently, what is urgent finishes by overtaking what is really important.

Could the Marist IHE set up some sort of mechanism of « quality control » with regard to the principles which define their identity and do a follow-up of the way in which they are concretely applied, especially when they go counter to the dominant culture?

B) FIVE DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MARIST IHE

As I said at the beginning, I will dwell on five aspects which seem to me important now for the future of the Marist IHE in the light of the calls of the last General Chapter and of my knowledge of the Marist Institute. I make no claim to cover everything, but to suggest some lines of questioning.

1. Referents in Marist and educational themes

Recently the academic classification of the world's universities was published. This involves ARWU 2010 (Academic Ranking of World Universities), known as the « Shanghai ranking ». It takes into account six variables : students and personnel with Nobel prizes or other academic palms ; scholars frequently quoted in 21 fields of knowledge; articles published in *Nature & Science* ; articles indexed in the *Science Citation Index* ; and academic performance per capita for each institution⁷.

Classification of universities imports to compare, to give accounts, to evaluate university policies and enter into competition. Some see these classifications as a marketing operation; others value their role in the internationalisation of the university or put the accent on the fact of publishing the results and favouring the increase of academic excellence. External classifications are good stimulants but they do not measure the quality of the university

⁵ « La recherche, sport collectif : conditionner la recherche au résultat, c'est malmener le processus de la découverte ». Libération, Rubrique Rebonds, 20.10.2004.

⁶ Cité en AA. VV., « Crónicas de una Iglesia liberadora », LOM Ediciones, Santiago de Chile, 2000, p. 204.

⁷ <http://www.arwu.org/>

teaching or their contribution to the socio-economic development of the country. Besides, many classifications measure only one type of science, while a university can be very good in other fields.

In what concerns us as Marists, shouldn't we give priority to everything involved with education as something proper to us? Shouldn't we distinguish ourselves in the classification of Educational Sciences?

A person involved in one of our educational works told me: « Several times I have expressed my surprise at the fact that our institution is not a referent in subjects such as childhood, youth and family, since we work with them and for them. Often we do not know the recipients, we are ignorant of the circumstances of their existence; our educational proposal, therefore, cannot be brilliant or relevant in their regard. »

I believe that the Marist Institute would be beholden to their IHE if they occupied a distinguished place in the production of learning, teaching, research and service to the community in subjects relating to childhood, adolescence and the family.

I also believe that one would be grateful to the IHE if they encouraged research into and the diffusion of the pedagogical intuitions of Champagnat and his brothers to lay the foundations of the initial and continuing formation of teachers in Marist principles and values, in communion with the calls of the Spirit to the Institute, these recent years. « The Marist institutions of higher education play a fundamental role in the formation of teachers in specific *Marist pedagogy*. Such teachers will practice in a particular institution or in other schools of the Institute or under the educational system of the countries where there is a Marist presence⁸. »

In fact, the XIX General Chapter called us to become engaged in revitalising the Marist charism. The XX stated that « many laypersons are attracted by the charism and the project of Marcellin⁹. » The XXI summons us to instigate « the birth of a new epoch for the Marist charism »; this is why « we feel the need to develop processes that allow all Marists to be co-responsible for our life, spirituality, and mission¹⁰. »

This is the place to recall the words of Brother Sean Sammon, reminding us that the charism of Marcellin Champagnat is « much more than certain works thought to be faithful to his original vision [...]. The charism of our Institute is nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit. Allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through us can give rise to some surprising outcomes¹¹. »

To become referents in educational and Marist matters. There is my first dream.

Is it very ambitious? Even if the ARWU classification, I cited at the beginning of this section, remains far from our situations, we can draw lessons from their experience. According to ARWU, the Universities which reach the greatest heights are those which unite to work with

⁸ *Marist Mission in Higher Education*, 25.

⁹ *Choose Life*, 10.

¹⁰ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS. *With Mary, go in haste to a new land !* Doc. Of the XXI General Chapter, p. 21.

¹¹ SAMMON, Seán. *Making Jesus known and loved – Marist apostolic life today*, p. 27.

others, as in the case of the University of Manchester.¹² It is up to us to draw the appropriate conclusions.

2. Experts in the evangelisation of children and youth, and in education for solidarity

Brother Sean Sammon, in his Circular for convoking the XXI General Chapter, issued an important challenge to Marists: « To become the Church's experts in the evangelisation of poor children and young people, wherever they may be found¹³. »

Where are we as an Institute with regard to this challenge?

In the report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter on the way in which the Institute had responded to and lived the call of the previous Chapter on mission and solidarity, it is said that « the call in itself does not seem to us to offer much room for interpretation and it seems absolutely clear in its objective: to go forward ... drawing closer to the poorest and most marginalised of children and young people. » At the same time, the perception garnered by the authors of the report is that « deep differences of opinion still persist among us on this question. » It was a call to unite and not to divide; « to become one force rather than to waste our time in sterile or useless discussions: we are all called to go forward ...drawing closer to the poorest and most marginalised of children and young people, even if we are not all called to do this in the same way », for there is only one mission which is expressed through different faces and forms¹⁴. »

The authors of the report recognise that « there have been significant advances in the Institute. In the first place, through an increasing identification of Brothers and lay people with this call, independent of where their mission may take place. They have also progressed thanks to the creation of new ministries directed at the service of these children and young people, as well as through the work brought about in the heart of our present institutions: education for solidarity, both theoretical and practical; greater access of admission to our centres, giving preference to the most needy; careful attention to students with special educational needs, etc. »¹⁵.

The same report notes that « significant efforts have been made to mark our educational works as centres of evangelisation for children and youth: the dedication of personnel and the measures taken on the provincial level; the establishment of pastoral teams in these centres; the creation of appropriate materials for religious formation, prayer services, and retreats; the evaluation of these centres according to criteria for evangelization previously established; the promotion of youth ministry, etc. Regrettably, however, there are still some places where it is difficult to imagine that evangelization is the priority and the focus of our educational works¹⁶. »

Finally, the report concludes by stating that in recognising « the advances made in the evangelisation of youth and in education for solidarity, we consider that both aspects,

¹² La Vanguardia de Barcelone, 11 septembre 2010.

¹³ SAMMON, Seán. *Convocation of the XXI General Chapter of the Little Brothers of Mary*, p. 33.

¹⁴ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 56-59.

¹⁵ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 56-59

¹⁶ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 59.

essential in our mission, are permanent challenges which have to be lived as priorities in all our works¹⁷. »

One of the most complete descriptions of what the Church understands by evangelisation is, without doubt, the one Paul VI gave in his apostolic exhortation, after the conclusion of the Synod of Bishops on evangelization and which was taken up again in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (Apostolic Constitution of Pope John- Paul II on Catholic Universities). « For the Church, it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also *of affecting and as it were upsetting*, by the power of the Gospel, *mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life*, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation¹⁸. » The proposition is especially important for the university fields engaged in evangelisation.

Also, « pastoral in higher education is not merely a support service, but the activity through which the institution declares its identity in an explicit way¹⁹. » So ministry must take its proper place at the heart of our IHE, since it is the activity which offers the members of the community the opportunity for harmonising academic and para-academic activities with religious and moral principles in view of integrating life, culture and faith.

As the Conference of Aparecida reminded us, « A university ministry is needed which accompanies the life and journey of all members of the university community, and which promotes a personal encounter and engagement with Jesus Christ and multiple initiatives of solidarity and mission²⁰. »

I believe that there is there a very serious invitation to a deeper understanding of what it is to evangelise in the university context; and there too the collaboration of institutions with one another can help us to see more clearly.

There is another aspect in which I believe the IHE should help the Marist Institute. That concerns the Marist Youth Ministry (MYM). « In more than half of the Administrative Units of the Institute, Marist Youth Ministry is present in a systematic and organized way and, frequently, with much experience and development. This tells us that our Marist Youth Ministry has a privileged place in the evangelization of our young people, and that efforts to promote its growth are very important, so that we can accompany our youth on their journey to being active disciples of Jesus²¹. »

A reference document on MYM is going to be published shortly. In its presentation, I have written: « The recent General Chapter received from the International Marist Mission Assembly (Mendès, 2007), the statement that « evangelisation is the centre and priority of our apostolic activity in proclaiming Jesus Christ and his message ». I firmly believe that the MYM is a privileged means in this evangelization, even if it is surely not the only one. That is why I would hope that, at the end of our mandate, during the celebration of the 200 years since the foundation of the Institute, the Marists of Champagnat would be able to be

¹⁷ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 97.

¹⁸ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n° 19.

¹⁹ *Marist Mission in Higher Education*, 21.

²⁰ V CONFÉRENCE GÉNÉRALE DE L'ÉPISCOPAT LATINO-AMERICANO ET DU CARIBE, Aparecida, 13-31 mai 2007. *Document final*, n° 343.

²¹ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 59.

recognized as « experts » in MYM, as I said at the closure of the General Chapter. This may seem a very ambitious goal; but it will not be if there is an effort in all the Administrative Units to give birth to or to continue to develop the MYM²². »

Could the IHE collaborate in this effort, helping us, for example, to better understand the world of youth, or to deepen the bases and foundations of the MYM, or to find better methodologies adapted to the different situations...?

As for the second aspect of this evangelisation, what we might call « education for solidarity », let me remind you of a text of Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, rector of UCA, who, as everyone knows, signed his words with the seal of his own blood: « A Christian university must take into account the evangelical preference for the poor. Which does not mean that the poor are the only ones to study at the university or that the university has to stop cultivating the academic excellence that is needed to resolve the real problems that affect its social context. It means rather that the university should become intellectually incarnate among the poor so to be the science of those who have no voice, the intellectual support of those who in their own situation possess truth and have reason, even if this may sometimes be under the guise of privation, but who lack the academic reasoning which justifies and makes their truth and their reason legitimate²³. »

Our document « Marist Mission in Higher Education » makes use of similar terms: « The more radical sense of Marist higher education is reflected (...) in its capacity to respond to the challenge of contributing in a decisive way to the construction of a fairer and more fraternal world, where compassion and mercy are shown in favour of those excluded from the benefits of development²⁴. »

For myself, in the words I pronounced at the end of the XXI General Chapter, I invited the whole Institute to « do everything possible to keep on advancing along the road of putting the Institute, first and visibly, at the service of poor children and young people, whatever type of poverty they suffer from. In our current works, in the new ones... to do everything possible²⁵. »

Finally, we can speak of the evangelical option for the poor as the transversal line of our IHE, but also through the concrete options which make this priority visible. The two points which follow are in some way a development of this topic.

3. Experts in the defence of the rights of children and youth

The Superior General and his Council, in the report of their activities to the Chapter, recognised that « one of the most salient fruits of this time of reflection (drawing up of the Strategic Plan) was the accent placed on the defence of the rights of children in the name of the Institute, as a paramount work of the BIS. With this end in view, Br. César Henríquez was named in 2005 'Delegate for the promotion and defence of children's rights' to the relevant body of the United Nations in Geneva. This followed the recommendation of the XX

²² « Evangelizadores entre los jóvenes », Document de référence pour l'Institut Mariste, 2010.

²³ Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., « La tarea de una universidad católica », Discours à l'Université de Santa Clara, 12 juin 1982.

²⁴ *Marist Mission in Higher Education*, 27.

²⁵ Br. Emili Turú, Superior General. Closing Address of the XXI General Chapter, Rome, 10 October 2009.

General Chapter which encouraged ‘the representation of the Institute before international organizations concerned with education and solidarity’ (48.6). In September 2006, the new delegate went to live in Geneva, residing in a community of the Province of l’Hermitage²⁶. »

« The whole BIS team (Rome and Geneva) has worked with vision and enthusiasm so that FMSI could be created and recognized, and they are presently supporting with great creativity the first steps of this new Marist NGO, which represents the whole Institute²⁷. »

What started out as a decision of the General Council was corroborated by the Brothers and laity meeting at Mendès who, in their final document proposed to work « in the defence and promotion of the rights of children²⁸. »

This has very clearly been an option of the XXI General Chapter: « We feel impelled to act with urgency to find new creative ways to educate, evangelize, be advocates for, and be in solidarity with poor children and young people²⁹. » « We remember Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt to protect the child Jesus. This image urges us to become experts and advocates for the rights of children and young people; speaking bravely and prophetically in public forums. We feel ourselves impelled to challenge social, economic, political, cultural and religious practices that oppress children and young people. Now is the time for us all to join in the work of the Marist Foundation for International Solidarity (FMSI)³⁰. » Among its proposals for action, « to promote, at all levels of our Institute, the rights of children and young people; and to advocate for these rights in public institutions, both governmental and non-governmental³¹. »

At present, as you doubtless know, our Delegate in Geneva, now for more than a year, is Br. Jim Jolley, of the Province of Melbourne. The current General Council, wishing to underline its commitment to this new expression of the mission of the Institute, has appointed a new brother for this work, Vicente Falqueto (Brasil Centro-Norte), and has asked Br. Manuel Mendoza (L’Hermitage), who is already part of the Geneva community, to also work full time in this service. So we have at Geneva a community of 4 brothers with the explicit mission of promoting the defence of children’s rights, with 3 of them working full time at this.

Brother Sean Sammon recalled in one of his circulars that « institutions have the potential to be a powerful means for social change³². »

Don’t you think that the defence of the rights of children and young people is a concrete way of expressing our commitment in the line of the evangelical option for the poor?

I believe that a very vast field of action is opening here for our IHE, with many possibilities. Let me suggest some initiatives, knowing full well that your creativity is capable of going much further and much more deeply:

- As a first and most important action, assure that the Universities have guidelines based on the Rights of the Person, as much on the level of their philosophy as on the

²⁶ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 60.

²⁷ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p. 61.

²⁸ ASSEMBLÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA MISSION, Mendes, 2007. *Un Cœur une mission*. FMS Message 38, p. 85.

²⁹ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS, *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* Doc.of XXI General Chapter, p. 40.

³⁰ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS, *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* Doc.of XXI General Chapter, p. 23.

³¹ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS, *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* Doc.of XXI General Chapter, p. 41.

³² SAMMON, Seán, *Making Jesus known and loved – Marist apostolic life today*, p. 56.

level of organisation; and, in what concerne the Rights of Children, be guided by the 4 main principles of the Convention of the Rights of Children: non discrimination; attention to the higher interest of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the child's point of view.

- Offer some academic diploma on this subject, as is the case in several of our IHE, for example the "Diploma in the rights of girls, boys, and adolescents ».
- Promote public campaigns to help people become aware of the topic of the Rights of the Person, especially those of Children.
- If this is not already the case, offer in the Faculties of Political Science or Law Faculties (or others), units on the mechanisms of the United Nations in treaties on the Rights of the Person, etc.
- Set up a research group on children's rights in different countries.
- Establish an "Observation post on the Rights of the Person" through the network of the IHE to monitor what governments are doing in the area of the Rights of the Person, especially of children.
- Engage with the NGOs and the Marist solidarity organisations for following up the "Periodic Universal Revision" and revisions of International Treaties, especially those concerning the Rights of Children.
- Etc.

As you see, the possibilities are enormous. Whatever it may be, what matters is that we be capable of collaborating, in the measure possible to us, so that we may be able to become « experts in the defence of the rights of children and young people. Let us hope that in eight year's time, when we look back, we will be able to say that the Institute has taken very significant steps in that direction³³. »

4. Establish bridges of dialogue and reconciliation in our societies

Recently, I had in my hands some albums of photos retracing the history of our General Chapters. One can clearly see, in view of the configuration of the chapter hall, an important change in the Chapter dynamic before and after Vatican Council II. Whoever in the future looks at the photos of the last General Chapter will also speak of a new epoch of transformations. Round tables, everyone on the same level, use of modern technologies... in a word: dialogue and consensus, or, still better, fraternal dialogue. « Around the round table, the dynamics and the pedagogy of this Chapter helped us to listen to one another in the spirit of the Gospel, to enter into fraternal dialogue, to take decisions and put them into practice³⁴. »

All during this year (well, it is a year since the Chapter finished) I have asked myself more than once if this change of methodology holds a message for the Institute or if it is simply a question of technique. As I have made my visits to the Provinces of the Institute, I have

³³ Br. Emili Turú, Superior General. Closing address of the XXI General Chapter, Rome, 10 October 2009.

³⁴ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS, *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* Doc.of XXI General Chapter, p. 14.

become certain that this change is a powerful invitation for us all to enter into a dynamic of fraternal dialogue, with all the demands that brings with it.

The societies in which our IHE are inserted, especially in Latin America, are highly polarised and we observe great differences between the social classes. I often say that a good gauge of social differences in a country is the height of the security fences around houses and properties. The higher the fences, the greater the social differences. And, certainly, in this country where we are now, I think it is obvious for us to find great walls, not only high, but sometimes even electrified, and with armed guards.

The absence of personal encounters, fear of the poor or of what is different, absence of dialogue are obvious. In this context, doesn't the call of the Chapter to be persons of listening, of dialogue, of welcome and respect, appear to you prophetic?

The spontaneous tendency, however, seems to be for us to reproduce in our provinces and in our institutions, the social divisions existing in society. We have made a separation between those who work in the well-off classes and those who work among the very poor. We have often contributed to overcoming this social division in our works, but we have reproduced it among ourselves. Instead of being prophets of unity and laying claim to this prophetic role, we have confined ourselves to reproducing the existing social schema.

In his circular on Marist apostolic life, Brother Sean said: « As the proprietors of these educational institutions, we have also become, in country after country, part of the established order, gaining the respect of many because of the quality of the schooling we offer. With respect comes privilege, and over time many of us are reluctant to part with the latter. Consequently, we may succumb to the temptation to preserve the main structures of the societies in which we live, even when change is warranted³⁵. » And I believe we can apply this to all our works, whatever the social context they are found in.

Can we change this situation? Of course, we can change it, once we become aware of it and are ready to build bridges of dialogue and encounter, first of all among ourselves, and then on the social level.

As Marist Institutions, we have the privilege of being present in different social strata. Yes, I said privileged because I believe that is true. As can clearly be seen in all our works – and our communities- our preference is for children and young people on the margin of society, but, in fact, we are really present in the various social classes. Why not make use of this presence to facilitate dialogue and encounter, to break down the barriers within our societies?

I know that many of our IHE have worked at social dialogue, whether by preferment of persons with poor financial resources, or by bringing many young people of the middle or higher social classes into contact with neighbourhoods they are not at all familiar with. It is in these personal encounters that the social changes we desire are worked out.

Edgar Morin has often used metaphor to describe his own vision and commitment: « We must begin again. In fact, everything has begun without our realising it. We are in the beginnings, modest, invisible, marginal, indefinite. On all the continents there is a great creative effervescence, a great number of local initiatives for economic, social, political, cognitive, educational, ethnic renewal or for a reform of the way of living. These initiatives

³⁵ SAMMON Seán, *Making Jesus known and loved ; Marist apostolic life today*, p. 78.

are unknown to one another; no administration takes notice of them, no party seems to see them. But they are constructing the conditions of life in the future. It is a matter of knowing them, identifying them, comparing, classifying, and harmonising them to create the new way which will be able to lead us to the future metamorphosis as yet invisible and inconceivable³⁶. »

In this process of metamorphosis, affirms Edgar Morin, « the orientation, which varies, means that the objective is no longer fundamentally the development of material goods, efficiency, what can be rented or calculated, but the return of each one to interiorisation, the great return to the interior life and the primacy of understanding of the neighbor, love and friendship³⁷. »

Isn't that a marvelous proposition to which we can all commit ourselves?

5. To act as members of a global society

This is the fifth dream I would like to share with you today.

« We have been an international Institute for more than a century – affirms Brother Sean Sammon- but we have not always acted as such³⁸. » In developing this idea, the previous General Council said in its report to the Chapter: « It has been an orientation of the General Council to develop the sense of belonging to an international Institute so that we can take advantage of the potential which that reality offers us. The Commission on Mission has come to realise that the richness of being an international Institute is something of which we should take advantage, and has promoted networking efforts at the continental level... In the area of mission, there are other examples of networking which are overcoming the limits of geography in our Administrative Units. Among such examples are : the consolidation of an international Network of Marist Institutions which work in tertiary education, together with the production of a document on their identity and mission, and the proposition of a common postgraduate course on Marist Mission and Spirituality; the creation of an international team to guide and support the Marist Youth Ministry in America; the constitution of an international team to produce for the whole Institute a guideline document on Marist Youth Ministry³⁹.

As you see, the IHE are mentioned in the report of the previous General Council; it is a sign that the Council is constantly involved in the life of the Institute at the international level. For that reason, I will take advantage of this opportunity to thank it for its openness and its willingness to collaborate, as well as its readiness to contribute closely to the life of the Institute.

As a fruit of the travelling of all these recent years, during which our internationalism has been experienced in a very striking way, the members of the XXI General Chapter have recognized a call to be « Brothers without borders, open and available in welcoming the diversity of our Institute. Called to go beyond our borders, allowing ourselves to be

³⁶ EDGAR MORIN, *Éloge de la métamorphose*, El País (31-8-2010).

³⁷ EDGAR MORIN, *Éloge de la métamorphose*, El País (31-8-2010).

³⁸ SAMMON Seán, Lettre of convocation of the General Conference of 2005, p. 12.

³⁹ Report of the Superior General and his Council to the XXI General Chapter (2009), p.62.

evangelized by others⁴⁰. » And, « As Marist Brothers and Lay Marists living in today's globalised world we are called to have hearts and minds that are international in outlook⁴¹.

I told the brother delegates to the Chapter before they went home: «I believe that we lived, as never before, this factor of internationality in an open and profound manner. I believe that it is a prophetic sign that another form of globalization is possible. We are also taking home this « task » of internationality. The question is if you are ready to pay the price, so that our Institute may become each day more global, more internally given to solidarity, with greater interaction among all⁴². Are the IHE also prepared to pay this price?

It seems to me that, in this area, there are at least two aspects in which the Marist IHE should continue to work: firstly, their offer of services to the Institute (an offer I mentioned in referring to Marist Mission and Spirituality, or by some suggestions on the four previous points), and secondly, in it their very manner of organizing themselves, as a Network to collaborate and work together.

It is certain that this Network includes very diverse institutions. They do not all speak the same language nor do they have the same resources. I believe that the Network should refuse to be a simple association for meeting and fraternal sharing, so as to create, starting from what we already have, a structure that allows us to affirm, sustain and effectively transform the educational mission at this level of education, form our fidelity to the inheritance of Champagnat.

I believe that we should not let slip this chance and the possibility we have of creating a more coherent and effective Network. I am not inviting you to create a heavy superstructure which controls and paralyzes, which requires great resources, but between that and the fact of doing everything depending on the good will of some people, there is probably an intermediate way, which I am sure you know how to find.

Conclusion

In the chronological perspective, the approach of our second centenary of life as an Institute is already becoming clear. It may be a reference point for our initiatives and an important time of evaluation for our journey. And that is also true for the Marist IHE.

We well know that no one in our institutions can escape the temptation to elitism, to insolent increase, to being taken for what we are not, to being content with an excellence of a patronal type. This is why we are called to constantly revise our ways of being and acting, in the light of the mission that has brought us together. This implies, it seems to me, that we become more aware of this mission, at least as intensely as we attend to the quality of teaching and the financial resources for the work. Evangelical excellence is what ought to distinguish us, and to continue and work at this, I have taken the initiative of sharing with you some of my dreams.

I began by quoting Shakespeare: « We are the stuff of which dreams are made ». I would like to finish with the words of the great Albert Schweitzer, who could perhaps serve as a model

⁴⁰ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS, *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* Doc. of XXI General Chapter, p.19.

⁴¹ INSTITUTE OF THE MARIST BROTHERS, *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* Doc. of XXI General Chapter, p. 40.

⁴² Br Emili TURU, Superior General. Closing address of the XXI General Chapter; Rome, 10 October 2009.

for those working in the world of tertiary education, as much for the quality of his research and practice as for the integrity of his life :

« When I was young, I listened to adult conversations which filled me with sadness. They emphasized the idealism and enthusiasm of youth as a precious gift which they had the regret of abandoning. I was afraid that I too, one day, would look back at my past with the same nostalgia. And I took the firm resolution to submit myself to the tragic need of being reasonable. Since then, I have tried to give direction to my life, guided by this promise which arose in the enthusiasm of my youth.

« Adults try to show the young that what they love and wish for is only an illusion. But I have understood that there is another way of helping the young in their lack of experience. This is to encourage them to strengthen and develop these ideas which are dormant in their hearts. The truly mature person, the « adult » person affirms that the idealism of youth is a treasure that is to be neglected for nothing in the world. We all pass through times when it seems to us that life may snatch away the enthusiasm and trust we have for the good and for virtue. But nothing obliges us to sacrifice them. If the ideal comes to nothing in the face of harsh reality, that does not mean that the ideal was false, but that it lacked force ; that does not mean either that that it was not explicit enough, pure enough, nor rooted enough in our heart.

« The force of the ideal can be incalculable. Ideals are thoughts; if we keep them on the mental level, their internal force is not active, even if we are deluding ourselves. These ideals can be active only if they become incarnate, if they take root in a human being who has worked at the purification of his sentiments.

« The vital lesson adults need to be able to transmit to the young is not: 'reality will brush away your ideal', but 'let your ideal become strong internally and so deeply that nothing will ever be able to take it away!⁴³ »

That is my wish for each and every one of you.

Many thanks and God bless you!

Porto Alegre, 7 October 2010

*Br. Emili Turú,
Superior General*

⁴³ ALBERT SCHWEITZER : « Souvenirs de mon enfance », Librairie Istra, Paris, 1951.