

“Jesuit Alumni and their Social Responsibility: The Quest for a Better Future for Humanity. What Does it Mean to be a Believer Today?”

Introduction

I would like to give everyone here a warm greeting. First, to those coming from other countries to this friendly country of Colombia and the city of Medellin; my greeting also extends to the alumni who have gathered here at the *Colegio San Ignacio* from all corners of Colombia. And of course, in particular, to the Alumni of this school who have joyfully hosted this meeting.

My feelings of gratitude to the organizing committee of this 8th Congress. I know that for many months they have been working very hard to prepare for this event. A special tribute of admiration and gratitude for Fabio Londono Tobon and Tom Bausch. Sadly, both died almost simultaneously a month before the Congress. Fabio, alumnus of San Bartolomé La Merced in Bogotá, and ex-president of the World Union of Jesuit Alumni and President of the organizing committee, left us on July 17, after a heroic struggle with illness. Tom Bausch, President of the World Union, died quite unexpectedly the next day, on July 18. Many thanks to both, for their testimony to life and for their leadership that gave life to the World Union of Jesuit Alumni. Truly, we are grateful for their efforts.

My thanks also go to the *Colegio San Ignacio* de Medellín, to the Fr. Provincial and Fr. Rector, as well as the Directors and members of ASIA *Ignaciana* for their gracious hospitality, and all they have done to welcome us and make us feel at home.

1. From "responsibility" to "gratitude".

The theme of "social responsibility" chosen for the conference is very appropriate. It takes us out of ourselves and makes us think about what we are doing and what we can do for the good of others and the world. I hope that this reflection will bring many benefits in our personal, familial, professional and social development, as well as to the alumni associations represented here.

The purpose of this subject plays an important role in the experience of faith and, consequently, the educational purpose of the Society of Jesus. As I have been given the delicate task of starting this discussion, I intend with my words to achieve three objectives: first, to offer a Christian perspective in the approach to this subject, second, to frame it in our Ignatian approach to education, and third, project it towards a collective commitment on the global horizon.

"Responsibility" in the Spanish language has two meanings: in the first, "responsible" is one who is bound to himself or to others to do something in their favor and therefore accountable to others in a task or mission assigned, whether immediately or in the future. In the second meaning, "responsible" is one who cares for others and pays them attention. In the English language, "responsibility" has to do only with the first meaning and is within the scope of what

has been called “accountability”.

Ignatian tradition, meanwhile, has intended to put the human being not in the orbit of "responsibility" but in that of “gratefulness”. In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola proposes to the exerciser the possibility of “bringing to mind the benefits received,” (Spiritual Exercises, 234) to arouse in him feelings of gratitude and generosity in response. Indeed, a person who shares this value would respond to generosity with like expressions of the kindness from which he had benefited, and thus give reason to the wise dictum "Love is repaid with love," exactly what St. Ignatius meant by "love should be put more in deeds than in words." (Spiritual Exercises, 230)

Only those who have had an "**internal understanding of everything well-received**" and a full recognition of them, can feel the desire to direct their life so they can “love and serve above all” (Spiritual Exercises, 233). In this way, Ignatian spirituality offers a strong motivation to take action or more accurately to guide our lives toward service of others.

In this perspective I invite you to consider our responsibility to other human beings (those similar and different) and to creation. I propose that we place the subject of our social responsibility more in the **logic of love and gratitude** than the logic that comes from duty, obligation, or "accountability".

This is not to undermine the concept of "accountability" as less important. To be "responsible" it is essential to account for and assume the consequences of actions and decisions, in fact, in our educational institutions we are making great efforts so that all - the Rector, the Directors, the different partners and even students -- realize their responsibilities and feel capable of entering into a process of accountability... What I propose is that, in addition to having as a base this dynamic that asks us to respond to those to those who have been entrusted to us, and to maintain full transparency as we exercise our approach, is that we place ourselves in the dynamics of gratitude and, finally, the recognition of what we have received. Like St. Ignatius, I consider this perspective moves us powerfully toward service, given that it raises a dynamic of loving harmony.

To conclude this initial consideration, I might point out that the experience of gratitude, or thankfulness, is one of the characteristics of one who is animated by Faith. It is the experience of those who know that everything in life is a present or undeserved gift, who know nothing belongs to him and that everything has been given to him: his life, family, abilities, education, friendships, property, health, etc.

II. Recognize the gift received: "be men and women for others and with others"

The force that moved the work of Ignatius of Loyola after his conversion was gratitude for all he had received. From there was born his desire to serve. The very purpose of the Society of Jesus, structured with a group of similarly-motivated university classmates, was precisely that of "helping neighbors", in the same way that he and his companions had been helped to find the purpose and meaning of their lives. With the founding of the Society, Ignatius wanted to institutionally structure the ideal of service as a way of living, working and serving

God, not just as isolated individuals but with a group of companions.

And, if "love and serve" is the purpose of the Society of Jesus, what else could be expected from their institutions and in particular the schools? That was the reason that moved Ignatius to accept the founding of the schools. He wanted them to be privileged instruments for forming youth, so that they could desire "all in love and service" thanks to knowledge and exercising the virtues acquired there.

Thus, as Jesuits, recognizing what we have received, we yearn to be followers and companions of Jesus, to help others to adopt that same wisdom of life. This explains why, no matter what our ministry, we will always be educators who try to show, with our lives and words, the face of God that Jesus has shown us, manifesting as a source of life, love and goodness.

This wisdom of life was expressed clearly, in 1973, by Father Pedro Arrupe, addressing the Society's Alumni in his famous speech in Valencia¹, Spain, entitled "Educating for the Promotion of Justice." There, Father Arrupe noted that since its inception, the mission of the Society was to form "agents of change", in society and in the Church, to renew and transform the structures of society that were expressions of sin and embodied unjust relationships.

Arrupe stressed that the promotion of justice was a constitutive element of the Jesuit mission, because for Jesus the genuine love for God is always linked to love of neighbor and from this stems just relationships. Therefore it follows that our students would train as "**men and women for others**", i.e. not focused on their "own love, desire or interest" (Spiritual Exercises, 189) but open to others and ready to serve their brothers in need, as part of the promotion of justice.

Since Fr. Arrupe made that call, our schools and our Alumni, through their associations, have changed positively in this regard. Today, 40 years later, education for justice, and its implied social responsibility, has become a hallmark of Jesuit education. Although much has been done in this area, we still need to do more and continue the endeavor, although, indeed, we have come a long way from the resistance to social justice education that we had in the '70s.

At present, most of our schools in the world have serious programs, innovative and creative, to educate for social commitment. Educational institutions of other religious congregations, or even public institutions, benefit from these achievements and often ask for assistance in this area. To cite examples nearby, in Colombia, schools have successfully implemented the program "Training and Social Action" (FAS); Fe y Alegría, in Latin America, is implementing the program "Skills for Life"; FLACSI, the Jesuit school network in Latin America, is promoting "Ignatians for Haiti"; all programs that have enabled our students to come into contact with social reality and injustice in a way that was unthinkable before. In other parts of the world they have similar programs and the emphasis on groups and social service experiences have become an essential part of "our way of proceeding" in education. It is interesting to note that as a result, many of our former students have linked with social volunteer

¹ Arrupe, Pedro, *Education for the Promotion of Justice*. To the Jesuit Alumni of Europe. Valencia. 1973, in "La Iglesia de hoy y del futuro." Ediciones Mensajero y Sal Terrae. España, pp. 347-359.

programs or NGOs that serve the poor, migrants, displaced persons and refugees. In this regard, the response of many alumni has been extraordinarily generous.

Deepening the call of Fr. Arrupe, his successor Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach pointed out that our educational tradition urges the formation of men and women who are **competent**, **conscious**, and **committed** with compassion². That is what in the English Ignatian pedagogy, has been called the "3Cs". In Spanish it has been translated as "4Cs": **competent**, **conscious**, **compassionate**, and **committed**³. Personally I prefer the Spanish version that offers more emphasis on the latter two features.

These four adjectives express the "human excellence" that the Society of Jesus wants for the youth who society has entrusted to us: **competent**, professionally speaking, because they have an academic background that exposes them to advances in science and technology; **conscious**, because in addition to knowing themselves, thanks to developing their ability to internalize and cultivate a spiritual life, they have a consistent knowledge and experience of society and its imbalances; **compassionate**, because they are able to open their hearts to be in solidarity with and assume the suffering of others; and **committed**, because, being compassionate, they honestly strive toward faith, and through peaceful means, work for social and political transformation of their countries and social structures to achieve justice.

Two years before, Fr. Kolvenbach, explaining who the Jesuits were, correctly added to the assertion of P. Arrupe "for others," the words "**with others**", pointing more fully to the purposes of our spirituality and our education⁴. It is evident that our educational efforts intend not to form students in solitary leadership but in recognition of the other, in the spirit of healthy cohabitation, in teamwork, in collaboration and in our common labors.

No wonder, then, that in the current global culture in which dominant economic forces emphasize educational models that chiefly favor utilitarianism, the Jesuits continue faithfully their purpose of forming "**men and women for others and with others.**"

This approach to education enables young people to access another characteristic of faith. This is that hidden treasure that Jesus showed us: the deep and lasting joy of discovering that by putting life in service to others, or giving it to others, giving up personal or group benefits in order to seek the greater good is not to lose life, but to find it in its fullest sense.

III. The issues with "globalization": the responsibility for greater service

The most recent (35th) General Congregation, as the highest organ of Jesuit government and orientation, and aware of the social, cultural and technological changes we are experiencing

² English version at http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/PHK_pedagogy_en.pdf, Kolvenbach, PH., Letter presenting the document, "Ignatian Pedagogy: a Practical Approach" 1993.

³ Cf. Spanish version http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/pedagogy_sp.pdf, in particular, #19: "If truly successful, Jesuit education results ultimately in a radical transformation not only of the way in which people habitually think and act, but of the very way in which they live in the world, men and women of competence, conscience and compassion, seeking the greater good in terms of what can be done out of a faith commitment with justice to enhance the quality of peoples' lives, particularly among God's poor, oppressed and neglected.

⁴ Cf. Kolvenbach, P.H., *To friends and colleagues of the Society of Jesus*, 1991.

globally, emphasized certain aspects of our mission and called for more effective forms of service, consistent with current times. Because of our greater awareness of and deeper appreciation for the benefits and possibilities that exist in the today's world, the General Congregation encouraged us to enter into greater communion with humanity and all of God's creation; to keep offering him life in abundance and fullness.

In order to achieve greater effectiveness and impact in international terms, the CG challenged us to take better advantage of the **global potential that exists in our numerous apostolic institutions for building networks**. The expectation is that they can promote projects beyond provincial, national and continental boundaries. Clearly, besides convenient technologies, this endeavor requires a new thinking and the use of imagination and creativity. We hope that alumni can help us make this possible, as many of you have significant experience in the world of networks and global affairs.

Looking at the complexity of the challenges currently facing humanity, the Society feels called to exercise **greater advocacy in favor of the society's neediest** at key points in economic, political, cultural and religious life. This, in order to provide a contribution to the process of reconciliation between individuals and communities, as well as in the search for a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment.

Our service to reconciliation between human beings corresponds not only to Gospel mandate but to the existence, at the beginning of the third millennium, of a new vision of mankind, with clear awareness of the equal dignity of all human beings, clamoring for **overcoming existing prejudices and exclusions**. Surely the international community still has broad work to do in this area, to establish legal instruments to ensure just and peaceful coexistence among peoples. This vision, however, in our view, remains an unattainable ideal if not formed by minds and hearts capable of understanding the fundamental unity of human beings in their diversity, in close interdependence, and the need to welcome and affirm the other, respecting their diversity.

Today we also feel clearly that humanity is indebted to the **ecological balance of our planet**. We are more aware of the delicate interdependence between humans and nature. The environmental crisis that we perceive affects us all, but certainly affects the poor more severely. Our institutions are aware of the importance of this dimension in educational processes and see the need to act decisively to encourage respect and solidarity with creation. We hope for institutions that are truly "green" because they live in and are in harmony with the environment.

On the other hand, we realize that until now we have educated our students in a local vision of belonging to the school where they have been taught and, consequently, they have much affection for "their" school and their peers. Nevertheless, in a context like the present in which social networks are multiplying across geographical borders, if we long to offer a better service within the international community, it is necessary to create **global citizenship**. With it we want our students to feel capable of intervening in the international arena and to assume the new reality of a world that is built beyond narrow frontiers, where we are all citizens and stewards; a path that provides for the achievement of this proposal belongs in the educational and social networks of the Company or those of alumni working for many humanitarian causes. In

this paradigm shift, which our educational institutions are beginning to assume, the World Union of Jesuit Alumni can contribute greatly.

IV. The vocation and responsibility to guard and make life grow

In today's globalized society intelligent and critical information management plays a central role. In such a context, participating or having received a quality education is of incalculable benefit. This is our case. The education that we received has helped us to constructively harness the imagination and develop a mental structure for analysis and discernment to become lifelong learners. **Education has allowed us to develop valuable human capabilities, and, whether we want it or not, grants us a certain amount of power and social recognition.**

If this is our case, the experience of gratitude for gifts received thanks to the educational processes requires a look beyond ourselves. We cannot forget that our condition on this planet that is our common home is privileged, for in it there are more than one billion men, women and children who go to bed hungry every night and have no access to drinking water; that more still have not received primary and secondary or university education, and that, unfortunately, we are promoting unbalanced economic growth and competition among nations that stimulates the rapacious exploitation of the planet's resources with a severe deterioration of the environment, generation of violent conflict and inequitable enjoyment of the goods of creation, that benefit very few.

These immense challenges show that something must be done; those who are believers recognize from their faith that this reality does not reflect the will of God, but rather rejects it, and that there exist situations of personal and social sin. Their longing, consequently, will not peacefully transform such situations. They know that for this task men and women of compassion and generosity are required, men and women who use their intelligence, social influence and creativity to create a community that is international more than dissimilar, more economically stable and environmentally sustainable, that is, who assume with passion this vocation to guard and protect the gift of life in all its amazing diversity.

Before these challenges, on March 19, comes Pope Francis, beginning his ministry as successor of St. Peter. On this day, when the Church celebrated the feast of St. Joseph the Father of Jesus and husband of Mary, Pope Francis pointed out to the whole Church and the many world leaders who were present in Rome that the "vocation of caring" for life is a mission that concerns not only believers but "is a dimension that precedes" the option of faith because "it is simply human" because life "belongs to everyone", in particular to those who exercise the power of nations. Indeed, when talking about his new responsibility, Pope Francis said that Jesus granted Peter with a certain power, but said that the **true power is, above all, service**, and this culminated on the cross, that is, the gift of Himself.

According to these words, **the honest vocation and legitimate source of all power, whatever it may be, is to preserve, protect and serve life.** It is the call present in every conscience to always be "careful of and attentive to" human life, starting with those who are most threatened or fragile, but also other forms of life present in nature.

This task, according to Pope's thought, requires, above all self-care, i.e., feelings that inhabit one's heart where "good and bad intentions emerge; those that build and destroy"⁵, but above all it requires kindness, even tenderness, which is defined not as a virtue of the weak, but rather as a sign of fortitude, compassion, openness to the other and to love.

V. Quality education for all: path to justice and peace in the world

In line with the call of Pope Francis to everyone who possesses a bit of power and, therefore, has the opportunity to contribute to the growth of humanity, this past July 12, before the UN Assembly full of world leaders, Malala Yousafzai, a 16-year-old Pakistani woman, who in October 2012 was the victim of an attack by a Taliban group opposed to education, delivered a rousing speech. She concluded, solemnly, "*a child, a teacher, a book, a pencil, can change the world. Education is the only solution*"⁶ against the many discriminations, exclusions and wars that affect millions of human beings. In her view, "books and pencils are our most powerful weapons." By that she asks all leaders of great nations to invest in schools, books and teachers to ensure universal primary education, so that by 2015, she proposes, this Millennial Goal can be achieved.

It is probable, in working for this goal, that many countries will come forward with efforts to extend educational coverage. We, as a Society, have given support to this dynamic that invites governments to allocate more in their budgets for education, but it is equally true that we Jesuits feel called to work not only by extension but by offering a quality education for the poor.

Thus, Jesuit education has intensified its work with the poor and marginalized throughout the world to provide quality education. Networks such as Fe y Alegría in Latin America, schools for Adivasis (indigenous) and Dalits in India, the education offered by the Jesuit Refugee Service and the network of Cristo Rey and Nativity schools in the United States, along with many other efforts, are creative responses to the challenge of providing quality education to the poor, as offered in our traditional schools. We can say that today that the number of disadvantaged students who are educated in the Society exceeds that of those from our more traditional schools. Even many alumni of these schools have contributed significantly so that these new ventures are successful, or they themselves, through their associations, have sought to contribute to these processes of education for the poor.

This contribution, however, is but a "drop" in the ocean. There are hundreds of million children and young people in the world who require more years of schooling. This means extending the educational network, but above all it requires a quality education, from the most diverse inspirations and pedagogies, to make them competent, conscientious, committed and compassionate, so that they can be "men and women with others and for others" in various social, cultural and religions of our world. Indeed, the road to justice, solidarity, reconciliation and peace in the world, will be passable only to the extent that all can be offered this opportunity.

⁵ March 19, 2013: Holy Mass of the Inauguration of the Pontificate, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/index_en.htm.

⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRh_30C8l6Y

VI. Responding to the gift: an effort to quality education for all.

Knowing that this 8th World Congress of alumni will offer a clear understanding of the gift received through the educational process, I invite you to make it bear fruit, not just as an exclusive benefit for achieving personal interests, but as a gift that transforms into work and commitment to youth around the world, suffering the humiliation of exclusion.

St. Ignatius sent a letter to Philip II, king of Spain, in favor of education in which he said that "**all the well-being of Christianity and of the whole world depends on the proper education of youth.**"⁷ At that time only a small minority received education. Today, on the contrary, as we have seen, all of humanity requires education and one who is excluded from it is condemned to poverty and discrimination, and often pushed to crime.

So today we are all part of "the Ignatian family" because we are beneficiaries of that spirituality and pedagogy, we feel called to deepen and continue to offer quality education in our schools, colleges and universities. But, given that in a global context, our institutions will always be a numerically small minority, we are called to strengthen international awareness of the need for quality education for all, since it is a right of all human beings and, therefore, a requirement for public policy regarding education.

For this reason, the Society of Jesus is encouraging among its colleagues, benefactors and friends, the development of an international network for **the right of all people to a quality education**. In this vein, the network has developed a document which I invite you to get to know and reflect on to assist in its action, as it requires the combined efforts of all society⁸.

I am convinced that you, as Jesuit Alumni, not just as individuals but as associations in each of the countries where you are present, are likely to influence such policies for states, each for their own or allied with each other, to give priority to the implementation of this fundamental right, thereby achieving a fundamental step for the exercise and respect of others' rights.

Since quality education provides not only knowledge but values, it can achieve the ideas that Malala, the brave young Pakistani, has proposed to the UN leaders, but also go far beyond, advancing toward overcoming any exclusion and discrimination based on gender, nation, race, religion or socioeconomic status.

You are at the heart of the world, working in various social institutions, private or public, who daily exercise social responsibility in decisions and analysis, at home, in the professional world, or on the ground with public tasks or policies. I propose, therefore, that one of the

⁷ Cf. Kolvenbach, P.H. "Selected Writings, 1983-1990". Edited, Spanish Province of the Society of Jesus. Arts Press, 1992. Page 453. Regardless, John W. O'Malley in his book "The First Jesuits" (Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 209) reports this letter was written by Pedro de Ribadeneira, SJ, on behalf of St. Ignatius, which would make him the author of this famous phrase.

⁸ Promotio Iustitiae, n. 110, published by the Secretariat of Social Justice and Ecology, in the Curia General of the Society of Jesus. http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/pj/docs_pdf/PJ110ENG.pdf

conclusions of the 8th Congress is the conviction expressed by St. Ignatius that the good of the world and the meaning of the message and Christian experience "depends on the proper education of youth" and, as a result, that **along with the Society of Jesus, you also assume the purpose of generating a broad global awareness for quality education for all.**

VII. Conclusion: believers are responsible for themselves, for the human community and creation.

The deaths of Fabio Tobon and Tom Bausch remind us of the simple fact of our lives: our existence in this world is temporary. Their departures, which we too will experience, make us wonder about our origins, about our destiny and the path we take during this movement in space and time that makes up our lives. No doubt there are many questions and concerns that are placed on our intelligence. According to the recent encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, issued by Pope Francis, "The light of faith doesn't dispel all our darkness, but as a lamp, it guides our steps in the night, and that is good enough for walking." (n. 57)

Who owns this "lamp" knows he is on the road and moves towards a fullness that awaits him and that is his future. He also knows that all he has received is an undeserved gift: life, health or sickness, wealth or poverty, triumphs or failures. All of this comes from the loving grace of God, who is near, present, and active in the world. To know and experience God's call, in the deepest conscience of every human being, believer or not, moving him toward compassion and goodness; know that this drives all of us to be "responsible" for life, to become "neighbors" or "guardians" of our brothers and creation. To be full of gratitude for this kind and discreet presence of God in our lives and in the life of the world, a God who doesn't interfere with free will, but desires that we not be deaf to his call and that we answer with generosity.

On the other hand, far from the longing for a past that was better and looking upon this culture with pessimism and distrust for changes being made, we examine the changes to discern how the presence of God is in them. The desire is to encounter the signs of such life-giving presence and join with them. Therefore one cannot be indifferent to the reality that surrounds him. One feels the responsibility to discern what is inside himself, in society and the world, to grow human beings with inalienable human dignity and communion among themselves. Such was the vision, for example, of many Jesuit missionaries and educators, such as Matteo Ricci in China, who understood that God was already working in that ancient culture and that God had come here before Ricci and the Church.

It is reasonable then that faith is understood and lived as double experience of encounter. Above all, with Him who is the source and destination of life, who assumed human form in Jesus of Nazareth, the personal dialogue with this "inner teacher" that respectfully guides the sacred precincts of consciousness, provides the light that helps us understand "the way, truth and life". And this deep experience to become a disciple, far from leading to individualism or spiritual solipsism, leads to another experience of encounter, or communion with others living the same experience in the Church. In this ecclesial community, despite the limitations and institutional opacities that come from entire human condition, through the faith handed down from generation to generation, signs and symbols give the possibility of renewing and nourishing the evangelical experience.

Finally, whoever directs his way toward the light of faith is inhabited by the challenging longing and unattainable utopia of ensuring the full sovereignty of God and his goodness, above all, in himself, but also in other human beings and their communities, so that, day by day, he renews his personal willingness to take responsibility for others and, therefore, to serve and to work towards the dream that animated Jesus to reach a new earth and a new heaven where "there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor complaint, nor pain" (Revelation 21:4).

Thank you very much.

Adolfo Nicolas, SJ
Superior General of the Society of Jesus

Medellin, August 15, 2013
On the Feast of the Assumption of Mary,
Educator of Jesus and the Church

(Original: Spanish)