

MESSAGE FOR THE FIRST ONLINE MEETING OF REDEMPTORIST EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Dear Confreres, and all collaborators working in Redemptorist educational institutions, greetings in Christ the Redeemer and welcome to this meeting, which allows us to unite around specific objectives:

- ✓ To meet as a missionary body that carries out a particular apostolate in the field of education; to encourage you in this challenging work of today.
 - ✓ To clarify some elements of the Redemptorist charism that contribute to a humanizing education.
 - ✓ To take this opportunity as a preamble in preparation for the third international meeting of Redemptorist Schools and Colleges to be held in Passo Fundo - Brazil, May 20-25 of this year.
1. The theme chosen is *education and the Redemptorist charism today*. Here I would like to give a general overview of what the verb *to educate* means and implies, in its Latin root. It is formed by two particles: it is outward movement, and DUCARE, from DUCERE which means to draw out, to carry, to lead. Therefore, *to educate* is to draw out, to make something public, to bring forward, to show someone where to go, usually by taking them somewhere, along a path, leading them, guiding them. *To educate* can also refer to nurturing and physically supporting a child. *To educate* refers to raising someone, that is, caring for a child, adolescent, or young person until they become an adult, internalizing certain specific beliefs until they are able to take care of themselves. *To educate* also refers to the activity of the mind.
 2. In general terms, education consists in helping, by means of a suitable discipline, to develop the capacities of the soul, leading the person to free himself of bad inclinations and defects originating from uncultivated nature, instilling in him good habits for good conduct and right action. In other words, to educate is linked to transforming people to act well. Hence, this is an activity loaded with an ethical and moral dimension. To educate is also to nourish the soul for the transformation of the human being and of the world. It means making the learner docile, not in the sense of losing his autonomy, but in the sense of bringing out all his potential to understand himself and the world and to transform it.

3. I believe that the elements presented are echoed in two of our Constitutions, *number five, when it affirms that the mission entrusted to the Congregation to evangelize the poor includes the liberation and salvation of the whole person, therefore, through the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, solidarity with the poor, the promotion of the fundamental rights of justice and freedom, finding the means that are in conformity with the Gospel and effective.* And in number 19, referring to dialogue with the world, it tells us that *"those gathered know well that only in the light of the mystery of the Incarnate Word can the mystery of man and the authentic meaning of his integral vocation be truly clarified."* In this sense, education based on our charism must touch the human mystery. It is not a matter of receiving content and information, but it has a sapiential dimension, of offering meaning to human mystery and to life.
4. Education from the Redemptorist charism should dialogue with the world and not close itself to it. In other words, it is to understand it as an opportunity. Educators should help children, adolescents, and young people in formation to make a hermeneutic of the world, offering reading keys to interpret it. I insist that it is not just a matter of having information. It is about how to transform it into knowledge, into wisdom, into what gives flavor and discernment to life. We can have people with a great deal of information, but extremely lacking in wisdom. Our saints and blessed knew how to perceive reality and were not afraid of the hostile world; on the contrary, they turned it into an opportunity. St. John Neumann with the parochial schools and in his service to the migrants, St. Clement with his schools for young people in a context of social transformation and rejection for being part of the Church, Blessed Sarnelli who worked with prostitutes to make them aware of their dignity and Blessed Peter Donders who defended the slaves working on the plantations in Suriname, as well as his work with the indigenous people and lepers. These are some examples that help in this understanding, all these contexts were also very difficult. Therefore, we cannot be discouraged when it seems that the world is becoming more and more complex and difficult.
5. In my letter to the Redemptorist Schools and Colleges I have written: *"Our colleges and schools are homes of redemption, to provide spaces for formative dialogue and temples where we can evangelize in the plurality of ideas, starting from the fundamentals of the Gospel, without*

imposing them or proselytizing. This call allows us to see that education is an opportunity to meet with children, adolescents, and young people, with their joys and sorrows, a group in which the Church does not have much capacity or a language conducive to dialogue with them" (Prot. 0000 033/2024, No. 3).

6. We are a Christian, Catholic and Redemptorist institution. This means that we must teach values and not proselytize. Catholic for us designates not only as belonging to an institution which is the Church, but in a universal sense that welcomes diverse thoughts, cultures, religions and even those who have no religion. If because of plurality we cannot communicate the Gospel directly, we can communicate it from an ethic that derives from the Gospel and from the whole tradition of the Church, but always respecting the convictions of others. That is why our schools and colleges must be ecumenical, where redemption is made present and where people can learn to care for and respect others and to care for our common home by exercising citizenship and responsibility. Our schools and colleges must be places where the Gospel is translated into new languages that can touch human hearts and minds.
7. It is not an easy task to form human beings from the inside out, while social networks build them from the outside in. On the one hand, there is the pedagogical effort of those who teach and, on the other, the micro-narratives of social networks that are de-educating and are much more attractive. These new times challenge us as educational institutions to find new pedagogical languages, new teaching methods and also to incorporate technologies and social networks in favor of this process of creating a new social conscience, taking children, adolescents, and young people out of the ghettos of banality provided by many media. This is a powerful task that requires creativity, vocation as educators and faith in human beings.
8. Finally, I would like to recall three great figures of our history: the philosopher Socrates, who questioned his disciples, leading them to recognize their own ignorance in order to initiate with them a path of wisdom "know thyself and you will know the universe and the gods," Jesus of Nazareth who in the Gospel of John 8, 32 tells us, "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." And,

Paulo Freire who tells us that "teaching is not transferring knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its own production or construction."¹

9. Dear confreres and collaborators do not be discouraged in this mission of forming people to be builders of a society that provides us with hope. This requires of each one of us: anthropological and theological faith, faith in the world itself and in the future. And I think that in the Redemptorist tradition there are these elements.

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Superior General

Bangalore - India, February 29, 2024

¹ FREIRE, Paulo. Pedagogy of autonomy: Knowledge necessary for educational practice. Paz e Terra, 1996, p. 47.