

Fr. General's Speech to the Congress

Cochabamba, November 7th 2012.

A general greeting is suggested and then...

I was just named General when I was invited to the 34th Congress of Faith and Joy that took place in Lima. I couldn't attend. Today I'm pleased to accept your invitation.

In the 35th General Congregation, in the decree about "Working together at the core of mission", we, Jesuits, acknowledged Faith and Joy as a work of the Society that had managed to have the characteristics of an international network, thanks to the collaboration with other religious congregations and thousands of other people.

In that line, it's a pleasure for me to show my appreciation for Faith and Joy, work of the Society and of the Church where 44,000 lay people, 900 religious (from whom only 100 are Jesuits) share the same mission.

This mission was born in Venezuela in 1955 by the action of the university pastoral work of Fr. José María Vélaz and the generosity of the worker Abraham Reyes and his wife Patricia, who gave their house they were building for their family of 8 children with their savings of 7 years. That house became the first school of the popular district of Catia, in Caracas.

I've been able to visit and to appreciate some of your schools, colleges and centers of promotion in the different countries that I have visited in the Caribbean, Central America and South America. I know you are in Chad (Africa) with a lot of dynamism and with very specific and generous missions in Spain and Italy. When I was in charge of Oriental Timor, I had the pleasant visit of Fathers Manuel Aristorena and Agustín Alonso who came to explore lines of collaboration with Faith and Joy in Timor. Even in my General House in Rome there are Jesuits who give time and a lot of heart to this Movement!

I've been given some questions, asked initially by your Council of National Directors and put in order by your Directive Committee. All of them seem to me extremely important. I would prefer to listen rather than to speak because this is the first time I've come to your house and I would wish to learn lots of things from you. But, as you are there to listen, I will take up some of your questions in the poor thoughts I'm going to offer you.

1. Congress

I feel that our being together in this venue is full of meaning. Surely, the subjects of your previous Congresses were to the point and they met pressing problems, but the one you have chosen for this one - “Inclusive Education and its Challenges” - is the entrance, the attitude and the fundamental orientation to be able to give the human training that is necessary today. Presently we live a plurality and diversity which is more explicit and dramatic than ever before in history. We need to be attentive to the differences, individual and collective, to the diversity of cultures and religions so that everybody feels welcome with dignity. You give me a lesson of the Gospel spirit and you comfort me when I see you, together with other works, on the borders, almost always conflictive, of the marginal cultures and of the excluding poverty.

It's been only four months since we met in Nairobi (Kenya) some 110 Jesuits, chosen in their great majority as representatives of their Provinces to reflect upon the present moment in the Society of Jesus. Reading the written reports of these representatives and the accounts of the meetings of the Provincial Congregations, I was impressed by the image that comes out of apostolic vitality and of the generous dedication both of the Jesuits and of the people who collaborate in the mission. It was also possible to notice the traits of dynamic and strong institutions and ministries that continue to have a significant influence in the lives of the people we serve. And of course, there is a very important thing: it's not surprising that *education*, at every level, is always a strong and vibrant apostolic sector. It was especially helpful to see that in many places of the Society, the *education of the poor* is a priority task. It happens so, among other places, in South Asia, Latin America and the United States.

2. Platforms and Networks

You ask me about the importance today of apostolic platforms and institutional and inter-institutional networks. In the International Federation of Faith and Joy you have an assertive answer to your own question since Faith and Joy has been a pioneer institution in network action. Thanks to that, it has a huge operative potential and offers a great variety of federative programs of high quality that help to improve and diversify the educative offer to all the unities of Faith and Joy at its diverse levels.

It's evident that for the last years we have been witnesses to an important development of *apostolic networks* in the Church, in the Provinces, in the Conferences, and even among diverse Jesuit Conferences. It's interesting to see how networks spring out not only within one type of apostolate, but also others that unite different types of apostolate, either building apostolic platforms or designing common projects or sharing support structures, as, for example,

it's happening in ecology and migration. In both cases they establish relationships among social centers, schools, parishes and spirituality centers.

I know that Faith and Joy is not alien to the strengthening of the tissue of networks not only inside the Society but also with other religious Congregations, lay groups and civil local and international institutions. We can also mention the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN), the Cristo Rey schools, businesses in solidarity, institutions of national states, NGOs, Latin-American communication channels of private and non-governmental management, without bringing up networks within Faith and Joy and the concert of the 20 National Faith and Joy. Acting in networks in the Society of Jesus or, better - given its amplitude - in the Church and in society, is possible thanks to the availability of people and the firm will to articulate activities. And it must even reach the generous level of sharing human and economic resources.

We must be aware of how the present world is structuring itself, of how people, from their individual space, take part in more powerful social networks, of how institutions interconnect themselves in more and more complex textures and networks. Few months ago, the two strongest universities of Boston, Harvard and MIT, reached a revolutionary agreement. It consisted in putting all their courses in Internet, in order to offer thus free education to all who can access Internet. Each university brought 30 million US dollars to this venture. This is a revolution for the access to education and opens up really interesting possibilities, whereas it also leaves problems to be solved, such as the academic accreditation, etc.

For us the apostolic interest lies in shaping the future in agreement with the Gospel criteria, and for this I think the issue of *networks* conveys a bold proposal. It suggests that today we have an extraordinary opportunity to help model the future, not only of our institutions but of the world, and that the way to do this is through *networks*. The good you do, the more universal it is, the better. Networks give the power to reach and to permeate different milieus and so, that aphorism comes true.

3. The Society of Jesus. Preferential option.

You ask me if the preferential option for the poor is still an option of the Society of Jesus. The question surprises me but, as it is asked from Faith and Joy, it's reasonable, since its foundational charisma is the pain for and with the people who suffer from severe lacks in the satisfaction of their basic needs. Popular education is aimed at the poor and the activities of social promotion intend to empower them for their self-liberation.

Saint Ignatius, as the Society of Jesus was growing, became aware of the importance of Colleges and Universities for the accomplishment of its

mission and began to give norms, ever more and more specific, for their foundation and development. One necessary condition was that the educative centers of the Society, at all their levels, had to be accessible to all kinds of people, especially the economically weak, for whom education had to be free. Because of this, he accepted the creation of a new educative center of the Society only if it was economically 'founded', that is, if the town, the corporation, the bishop or a particular 'founder' warranted an annual fixed amount of money to cover its functioning.

I'm glad to notice that Faith and Joy has recovered Ignatius' original insight and has adjusted it to the present situation with great creativity. The accords of Faith and Joy with the Ministries of Education fulfill the role that the 'founders' had in St Ignatius' time. They allow the access to your educative centers of people who lack economic resources.

Looking at the present situation of the Society - beyond Faith and Joy - it hurts me to notice that in the last years we have lost some spaces in our service to people who suffer from poverty and extreme scarcity: in our social centers we haven't got the same capacity to give attention to those in need and the image the society gets of our education doesn't show with clarity our dedication to the education, promotion and assistance to the weaker and socially depressed groups.

But, in spite of the shadows, and to acknowledge the reality of the preferential option for the poor, I must tell you that for me it's something hopeful to notice that the Society as such and its collaborators worry for the service to the poor and the most vulnerable. The service to the poor is not something entrusted to an apostolic sector. It's something constantly present in all our ministries (social, educative, of social communication, pastoral or spiritual). In fact, it would be difficult to find some kind of apostolate where this perspective has not been introduced in its planning and orientation.

This said, I wish that Faith and Joy should see itself and should be seen by others as an expert in the option of education to the poor and their social promotion. With the passage and weight of the years, it may happen that we find ourselves settled and entrenched in positions that go against the encounter with the neediest. We will only have the strength to remain in a sustainable way within the realm of poverty if we remain faithful to Ignatian discernment, to prayer, and to the friendship with those same poor who teach us the Gospel.

Surely, we, Jesuits, are not the ones who know how to do it best, but I can assert that, at the level of the Order, these last years I've witnessed *new educative initiatives*, especially to the service of the poor.

4. Cooperation with others. Lay people and Religious Congregations

The collaboration among Religious Congregations and with lay people has been a key to the growth of Faith and Joy. Many Jesuits have become passionate for the Movement while working in it. And the same can be said of the religious and the lay who collaborate with them.

It cannot be denied that many works of the Society of Jesus, just like Faith and Joy, have grown in tight collaboration among jesuits-religious-lay. Those works are sources of Grace for the Jesuits as well as for our collaborators. Their importance is notable because of the quantity of people, because of the geographical and cultural dispersion and because of the mutual support in the implementation of the common mission. Each person has received the gift to make God's Kingdom grow in his environment according to his specific charisma. But I must acknowledge that the growth of *the collaboration with others* is an unequal reality in the Society.

In the last 40 years we have spoken a lot about this, but the reality is much older; from St Ignatius' time all the work of the Jesuits has been in collaboration; sometimes it was acknowledged, sometimes not; the problem and the injustice is that, when History is written, they put the name of the Jesuit and not the name of those who collaborated with him. The works of the Jesuits have been supported by great benefactors, by collaborators, or by people who have worked and given everything that was needed for the success of that work. The Jesuit, in consequence, was riding over many people who were working very well.

Today this fact has not only become more visible. It has become necessary in a much clearer fashion. In this domain, our reduction in numbers may be providential for us to become aware that, with bigger or smaller numbers, the challenges overcome our capacities. I'm convinced that we, Jesuits on our own, we wouldn't be able to manage. With lay people we can keep dreaming, creating, implementing, just like during the best times of the Society of Jesus. This means that I hope that the collaboration with lay people should become deeper and deeper and we should realize that the problems that come out are secondary. At the same time I must say that, at present, most Jesuits, when they speak of training for their collaborators, they are bound to add "training of lay people and of the Jesuits who work with them". As you know, it's not so easy to work with Jesuits. We all have to reeducate ourselves. Sometimes we forget that our work is for the Kingdom of God. We don't work for the Society of Jesus. In other words, the prestige of the Society of Jesus is, without any doubt, a distraction. God's Kingdom is no distraction. For it we all exist and for it we want to work. In it, the communion with lay people may be total and in it, there are no problems of identity, no problems of obedience since we are all working for the same objective and we organize ourselves in the best way we can.

In this topic of collaboration with others it's important our capacity building in dialogue and in inter- and intra-group work of identity and spirituality. You devoted yourselves to this subject in your last two International Congresses in Quito and Bogotá. It's clear that Jesuits have an identity specifically Christian and Catholic. However, through the history of the Society, the Jesuits have also seen themselves as collaborators and companions of non-Christians or of non-Catholics or with all men and women of good will, men and women of good heart. I'm thinking of the mission of China, where the Jesuits had the Imperial Observatory or they worked as artists in the Emperor's court. Let's remember the collaboration of Mateo Ricci and Xu Guanxi in the translation of the *Elements* of Euclides into Chinese.

Even if Jesuits bring their own catholic-christian identity to any activity, they are aware they work for the Kingdom of God from which the Church is only a seed and a beginning in this world. The Society of Jesus has no special mission that it would generously share with others. The mission of the Society is to be to the service of the mission of Jesus Christ, the mission of God, which goes beyond all religious and confessional particularities. To the service of this mission, the Jesuits often work with persons who share the fundamental values of the Kingdom of God as it was proclaimed by Jesus, even if those persons do not share the faith of the Church.

5. Borders

Those who ask about a better knowledge and definition of 'border' are often motivated by a deep spiritual move to get out of the routine and to progress towards spaces of greater necessity and transcendence. It may happen – and it frequently is – that the border coincides with a physical and spiritual place where others don't go or they find it hard to go. In 2008, in the 35th General Congregation, the Society of Jesus accepted the Holy Father's request to the Society to go to "the borders". At the same time he insisted that we should have a better apostolic planning. For this, three years ago, I invited all the Conferences to identify those 'borders' of mission that challenge them as a whole and that, once identified, they should begin to plan how to face them. Every Conference has already identified their mission borders and some of them have started their planning and implementation in relation with them.

For almost all of you, the reference to "border space" is defined in the "Common Apostolic Project 2011 – 2020" of CPAL, with the inspiring sub-title of "Co-responsible in the Mission". In its introduction you can read the answer as to how the strategic plans of the networks and the interprovincial apostolic works integrate themselves, as it is the case in Faith and Joy. I fully make mine the following statement: "only from a global vision, the weakest and most vulnerable places that require, because of that, greater attention can be detected". I've been informed and it's general knowledge that Faith and Joy,

through its Federative Programs, its Peers Networks and its Commissions is working with spirit of 'border' in the domains of education and social promotion.

As for new borders, specifically, Inclusive Education, the focus of this Congress is clearly one: quality education for all, inter-culturality, especially in the indigenous world, human mobility and its grave social incidents suffered by migrants, the displaced and the refugees, special education and the young who are in situations of grave social risk.

Concerning geographical zones, Faith and Joy is in search of new places of work which really have the meaning of 'border' as they have in them spaces of extreme need. Let's hope that soon you'll be able to start in Mexico, this brother country, and to collaborate with some other country of Africa that will add to the pioneer efforts of Foi et Joie Tchad in that continent.

A border that is always in front of us as a challenge and as an invitation to go there is the border of Depth. I personally like translating the Ignatian 'magis' by 'depth'. I believe it's a better translation. The problem of translating 'magis' by 'more' is that, easily, it can be interpreted as more in the consumist and competitive culture. If we have 'more' prizes, a 'more' elevated place in a ranking, 'more' computers, 'more' sport fields, 'more' professors with high academic diplomas, etc. it's very easy to deceive ourselves and to believe that we have reached the Ignatian 'magis'. And I'm not saying that those things are unimportant. I only say that they are not sufficient to render our colleges institutions that are deeply Christian and Jesuit.

Ignatius was always worried by depth. I'm sure you've often heard that Ignatius liked the old saying "non multa sed multum". Literally it means "not many things but greatly". First, it appears in one of the annotations of the Spiritual Exercises. It's often applied to the Ignatian pedagogy. I'd like to rephrase it as "not quantity but depth". Saint Ignatius says "what satisfies the soul". In other words, what is really important is the task of becoming a person or a Christian. It's not knowing a lot of things of superficial knowledge, but a deep understanding of what is really important for living as such.

Conclusion

I admit that Faith and Joy has always interested me as one of the best initiatives I know in terms of service to the poor and of educative service without creating dependency. It seems to me extraordinary that in this Movement with a great number of people and initiatives, it's a small group of Jesuits, religious and lay very committed and responsible the ones who are animating and empowering others so that they can realize a project of wide proportions.

What can Faith and Joy achieve in the future? Of course, Faith and Joy is facing the same or similar challenges of education that other educative works

face, but always with starting points in more depressed situations. One thing that gives me hope is that Faith and Joy has always been open to the international dimension, and today intercontinental dimension. Faith and Joy is an excellent answer for the peoples that hope to come out of poverty or of ignorance caused sometimes by the lack of resources or by other unjustifiable motives.

I also know that Faith and Joy has been in Chad since 2007 and that it's beginning to expand. Other African countries are thinking of integrating the model of Faith and Joy, which is an extremely creative model and does not demand the superstructures of other models of education. I believe Faith and Joy can make a very great contribution to the world, not only to Latin America.

In the Society, there is an emerging field that presents every symptom of becoming a global apostolic preference. I'm speaking about the *pastoral accompaniment of young people*. It's something that we hope it will grow, and in a more and more creative way. In this field, I'm sure Faith and Joy has a huge task to realize.

Please, with faith and joy, hold on to your vocation of popular educators and social promoters, implementing your mission with quality, ethics, spirituality and advocacy. Let's give a rotund no to a *poor education* and a rotund yes to the education of excellence to the poor.

Creativity was an indispensable element in the conception and planning of Fr. José María Vélaz. On my side, in all my encounters with Jesuits, I invite them to re-create the Society of Jesus. I dare to do the same for you, with all familiarity. I believe that each generation must re-create its faith, its way and must prepare itself to re-create its institutions. This is not only wishful thinking. If we've lost the ability to re-create, we've lost the spirit. This is why I do encourage you to re-create Faith and Joy!