



THE JESUIT CURIA IN ROME
The House of the Superior General



Fr. General Arturo Sosa, SJ

Gathering with educators

JESUIT EDUCATION TODAY

Allocution and Q&A

San Calixto School

La Paz, Bolivia

July 18, 2018

Dear educators and other friends present,

Before me sit not only all of you, but also the thousands of individuals who provide the educational services entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Bolivia, in coordination and collaboration with state institutions, religious congregations and so many other entities that also work hard to provide a quality education to the Bolivian people in the richness of their diversity. As mentioned by the Provincial, Fr. Osvaldo Chirveches, in his initial greeting, education is one of the dimensions of the apostolate of the Society throughout the world that bears a special significance.

Above all, before me are the children, adolescents and young people who fill our classrooms, training courses and educational programs, as well as their parents: the fathers and mothers who entrust us with the education of their sons and daughters. Together, we seek to provide them with well-rounded training as human beings.

I see the teachers who have generously taken on the educational task as a true apostolate, as their principal contribution to the construction of an accessible, more humane society, more in keeping with God's project. I see the governing bodies that take on the none-too-easy task of orienting, coordinating and encouraging the educational community in their everyday activities,



with the help of the technical and support staff in so many different areas. Without this teamwork, our institutions would not be able to fulfil their objectives.

These are a great many individuals, lively faces looking towards the future. They are full of hope, as is to be expected in our faith. Their educational task is, above all, a hopeful investment in the future. It is sown with plenty of generosity and gratitude, because in education we all give of ourselves. Like in the Gospel parable of the sower, the ripest, most flavorful fruit will be harvested in a future where we will not be present, a future that our students cannot even imagine at present. When we were students, we were also unable to imagine today's world. We remember the popular wisdom that Jesus adopted, saying "one sows and the other reaps." We are the sowers, we should never tire of sowing!

Educators, messengers of Hope

I would like to share with you a reflection on this hopeful future, how hope and social transformation are connected to the education we would like to offer. General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus, gathered in October and November 2016, confirmed our work by calling "the entire Society to a renewal of our apostolic life founded on hope. We need more than ever to bring a message of hope, born of consolation from our encounter with the Risen Lord. This renewal focused on hope includes all our diverse apostolates."

As a result, I think it is important to emphasize the fact that the educational apostolate is driven primarily by the energy of those with a vision of the future, who make the virtue of hope real within their lifetime. It should be said that an educator from an institution of the Society of Jesus is a messenger for hope. Those of us who live in and through hope are not naïve or ignorant of reality and of the challenges offered by the reality we live in. There are fundamental questions that push us to reflect. One example is the appearance of new technology, which in addition to being an increasingly important tool in our daily lives is also creating a new type of human being that connects with reality from a different angle. What we are experiencing is not only a technological revolution or a change in era, but also an anthropological change, a change in how we human beings live, in the habitat in which we live. Today, we live in a world that some would call our "digital ecosystem."

This new reality extends over everything, with increasing intensity. Within it, the newer generations –our so-called "digital natives"– are raised, and they are the ones that access our



educational institutions. They are asking us to reflect deeply, seriously and rigorously, but above all hopefully. This reflection can better prepare us to teach, taking fuller advantage of what we generally call “Ignatian pedagogy,” in dialogue with the new pedagogical trends that are also seeking to respond to changing times with new methods.

These answers are not easy to arrive at, first because these changes are relatively recent and are processed at great speed, which makes it difficult for them to be accompanied by profound reflection. This is one of the first tensions we run into, that the seeds we sow need time to fall into the ground and mature, and yet we live in such fast-moving times that it is hard for this process to take place fully.

Second, since it is often hard for us to leave our area of comfort, we each do things in our own way. It is hard for us to leave territory we are familiar with, in which we feel comfortable and safe. It is hard for us to risk taking on new, unknown things, which we may even see as a threat.

Third, because we know that our educational tradition provides us with a wealth that we do not want to lose. The many experiences and the rich knowledge of humanity accumulated in our tradition over so many centuries is a treasure. It is a treasure we want to maintain, of course, and that we want to help develop. But we do not want to do so as if we were preserving it in a museum: Ignatian pedagogy is not a museum piece, nor does it want to be. Still, there is a risk that it might yet become something somewhat interesting and worth remembering, but out of touch with our lives in the classrooms or our students. If this educational tradition is not living, it becomes traditionalism, conservatism, fossilization. We are encouraged to be loyal yet creative. True loyalty is shown in creativity, in placing this educational tradition at the service of modern times, making it useful to digital natives.

Without a doubt, we have a commitment to an identity, a vision that is born of and nurtured by the Ignatian educational tradition. That is where our task is rooted, this is the terrain that provides it with strength and stability and that feeds it. Our tradition also provides tools, not only for the healthy, fruitful self-criticism capable of keeping it alive, but also for a critical, reflective, intellectual interpretation of the reality that needs it. Ignatian education demands that we think in order to understand and create new paths. This is why the commitment of Ignatian education, of the educational institutions of the Society of Jesus, is a commitment to being in-depth. I would like to focus on one aspect of the mission that affects us and that is not always well-understood: what we call the Intellectual Apostolate.



Often, this type of apostolate is seen as the exclusive responsibility of universities or research centers. Nevertheless, I suggest that we broaden this understanding. It would be wonderful if all the educational work, if all the apostolates carried out by the Society of Jesus and the institutions under its responsibility were a truly intellectual apostolate. In this sense, to pursue the apostolate as intellectual means understanding it as an apostolate carried out by individuals who seriously reflect on what they are doing, who delve deep into their knowledge of their immediate reality, who seek to understand it, perhaps with the support of research in multiple areas. Finally, these individuals are capable of speaking about this reality in an in-depth, meaningful manner, and are capable of truly influencing the transformation of this reality.

Once again, I would like to refer to General Congregation 36 and its call for hope: “We do not want to propose a simplistic or superficial hope. Rather, our contribution, as Fr. Adolfo Nicolás always insisted, should be characterized by depth: a depth of interiority and ‘a depth of reflection that allows us to understand reality more deeply and thus to serve more effectively.’”

Without an intellectual attitude in the original sense of the word (the capacity to read reality from within, *intus legere*, to look inwardly, to get to the bottom of things), we are stuck on the surface of existence and are easily carried by one current or another, like driftwood in a storm. With this call for our apostolate to be intellectual, understood as a life lived in depth, we are referring to the sociopolitical dimension of the work done by educational institutions of the Society of Jesus. This task should always be understood as a service towards the humanization of society.

Something relatively new in our Latin American societies is the transformation of educational services into market products. We can now find many educational offers that have very little to do with education, but that place emphasis on earning money through a so-called “educational offer.” Nevertheless, education is, without doubt, a service to humanity. In the mercantilist offer, this service to humanity is not important; what is important is having a “product” that is offered to potential customers, where the educational relationship is replaced by a producer-customer relationship. Educational institutions let themselves be dominated by market logic, taking part in a competition in which the relationship between quality and cost is often damaging to quality. As we know, educational quality is expensive, both in economic terms and in terms of the hard work, benevolence and dedication the educator needs to provide.



We are well aware of the current difficulties of pursuing our objectives in a world dominated by the laws of the market. This affects us a great deal, and we cannot hide it. Nevertheless, as bearers of a message of hope, we would like to continue to maintain an educational project in which each human being –and not the market– are what really matters. This is an essential key to Ignatian education. Possibly, the greatest innovation in Ignatian education is what we refer to in Jesuit language as the “care for each individual,” the *cura personalis*. Each individual has his/her own particular characteristics, and education promotes the development of each person.

We would like to continue to offer educational processes that, through Ignatian pedagogy, allow for the formation of critical citizens with a global vision, who are also capable of living with the deepest of cultural roots. They need to be able to live out their original identity from within, while being open to receiving and contributing to intercultural dialogue, to enriching themselves and others through what their own cultural identity has to offer. Your hard work maintaining and further developing the wealth of Bolivia’s multiple cultures, languages and traditions deserves recognition. A few days ago, I was at the *Fe y Alegría* school in San Ignacio de Mojos (Beni). There were about a hundred people there in the classroom, and I asked “How many languages do you speak?” After consideration –I think we had a show of hands– they responded “36.” Wonderful! And we were all able to communicate in Spanish. This wealth is there, and it is in our hands, in our institutions. How can we maintain this wealth while also offering these students the opportunity to communicate with the rest of the world, to have a broader vision of the world, to know that they are part of a diverse universe, and to know that they have something specific to contribute?

Education to transform reality

Another important aspect of the educational task led by institutions under the responsibility of the Society of Jesus is the desire to positively influence social processes, those defining both public policies on education and social and economic policies. Education is not an island. Education is part of a social project. As a result, the first thing any political regime tries to control is education. This is where we need to leave our mark. The institutions under our responsibility are aware of their role in discussing subjects affecting Bolivian society, and we certainly do not want to be absent from these discussions. We want to make our contribution as citizens through respectful, open dialogue. Our understanding of reality and our proposals to



improve it must be part of this dialogue. In the words of the Gospel, we try to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world,” and to therefore respond while remaining faithful to our identity, whose roots are in the Gospel through the proposal to identify with Jesus Christ provided by Ignatian spirituality. Because Ignatian pedagogy goes along with this encounter with the Lord. That is where we are headed, and that is why we refer to it as our educational apostolate: because we offer a path bringing us closer to the liberator, to the Risen Lord.

The Ignatian pedagogical tradition has been capable of adapting experiences and wisdom over almost 500 years of existence. But besides enduring over the centuries, it has also spread throughout the world. The Ignatian pedagogical experience has been tried and confirmed in almost all the world’s latitudes and longitudes, in so many different places and cultures that they would be impossible to list. Of course, the Ignatian educational experience began in Europe, but today it can be found in any corner of the world where someone has been trained in it, whether or not they are Jesuits, and where they are aware of the value of the humanist proposal of Ignatian pedagogy. Without fear of error, we can therefore say that Ignatian pedagogy always provides a universal point of view.

Respect for diversity and the promotion of interculturality are born of this identification with the central mystery of the Christian faith, the incarnation of the word of God among humans. In the words of the Gospel, “The word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.” When we Christians refer to this mystery, we are both confirming that God is not alien to any human reality, and that God can only be known through human reality. No one has ever seen God; it is the face of the human Jesus that he shows us. The fact that the son of God assumes our flesh, our human condition, makes us recognize the value that this reality holds for him, to the point that he even becomes one of us, among us. This positive affirmation of everything human allows us to have a critical attitude towards reality, recognizing what within it is damaging to humans, what takes humanity away from humans and the social relationships between them. The revelation of humanity in Christ also allows us to see inhuman traits we have added to our reality.

Education through Ignatian pedagogy could have no other way of approaching reality. The *Spiritual Exercises* are fundamentally a long contemplation of the word of God made flesh. They lead those that follow them closer to Jesus Christ: his values, decisions, his way of interacting with the Father, with others, and with all of reality. The Jesus we are contemplating is Jesus the *Son of Man*, a human who assumes humanity and its fragility, but who is also capable of



standing up to anything that threatens or wounds it: what we in theology call “sin.” Sin is inhumanity, contempt for what is human. Jesus did not become incarnate abstractly. Jesus became incarnate in a tiny town in a nation dominated by an empire, in a poor family with no social distinction, and this is the path that Ignatian pedagogy proposes. If we want to see the world as Jesus did, this is our point of view: starting with the very smallest things, through the eyes of the poor. This is the experience of the underside of history (as has often been said in Latin American theology), from the humanity that suffers from inhumanity and injustice.

Our educational task has always understood Ignatian tradition as a true apostolate. If it wants to be faithful to its Christian identity, it needs to remain open to all who collaborate to provide more *life, and abundant life*, in the words of the Gospel, but it cannot cease to *give reasons for the hope*. We have found these reasons in the message of the Lord, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our way of proceeding

Returning now to the global perspective of the educational task of the Society of Jesus, I would like to recall what General Congregation 36 said regarding the appropriate way of proceeding in this day and age. Decree 2 summarizes our way ahead from three points of view: discernment in common, collaboration, and networking. I would like to briefly refer to each, because I think it is important not only for fulfilling our educational proposal, but also for how we want to make it a reality.

“Discernment”: I imagine this word is familiar to those of you used to Ignatian language. I imagine it may at least ring a bell, as it is very present in everything that has to do with Ignatian spirituality. It is an attitude we expect will be present in everyone who seeks to live this spirituality. Simply put, it is a constant search for the signs that the Spirit leaves in each of our lives and in history. The innovation provided by General Congregation 36 is the insistence that discernment not only be experienced on a personal level, but that it be a process shared with others. Therefore, we call it “discernment in common.”

Last year, I sent a letter to the entire Society of Jesus on this matter, and I hope that you all have had or have the opportunity to read and study it. However, I would like to add that for Pope Francis, discernment is not only a matter of Ignatian spirituality or Ignatian education, it is a



matter affecting the Church. In order for the Church to be faithful to its mission, it needs to be a Church that discerns, that finds the signs of the presence of God through discernment.

The second perspective proposed by the General Congregation is collaboration. Here in Bolivia, especially with the *Fe y Alegría* network, collaboration is not a desire, but rather a reality—practically since the beginnings of this immense project, this immense network. An incredible number of religious congregations, parishes and dioceses, indigenous communities and state institutions on multiple levels—municipal, provincial and national— participate to make the educational *Fe y Alegría* network possible. They work together. Collaboration is what really allows the Ignatian educational project to reach so many places and so many people. We are a great many individuals working together, shoulder to shoulder, encouraging one another and each individual—on their own level, through this reality and identity— so that the educational task can be continued, expand, improve in quality and produce even more abundant, flavorful and ripe fruits.

Without collaboration, we would only be a handful, fighting each on our own, with our own limitations. Through collaboration, our strength grows, multiplies; our horizons are expanded, our hope is strengthened. Nevertheless, we cannot simply gratefully acknowledge that collaboration is already a reality among us. Another word that will ring a bell in Ignatian ears is *magis*, which invites us to search for more, for something better. We are grateful for what we have already achieved, but we need not only to maintain and recognize it, but also to see where, how, and with whom we can take firmer, more creative steps—bolder steps, I would even say—to grow in collaboration and obtain even better results. Ignatian spirituality is based on nonconformity, as is the Gospel: we are never satisfied with what we have achieved. We are grateful for it, recognizing it as a gift from God, but we say “we have made it this far, but what more can we do? How can we improve further?”

Finally, as indicated by the same General Congregation, collaboration brings us naturally to network. Our educational work has already taken important steps in this direction. We have the gigantic *Fe y Alegría* network, the International Federation, which has already crossed the Atlantic. Not only has it expanded throughout Latin America; there are also some *Fe y Alegría* experiences in the United States, and other similar projects. *Fe y Alegría* has even planted roots in Africa and has gone further still, with a few seeds in Asia. On a grade-school level, we have the *Latin American Federation of the Society of Jesus* (FLACSI), and the same process is taking place in higher education. Just before coming to Bolivia, I participated in a meeting in Bilbao (Spain) in which the representatives of over 200 universities entrusted to the Society of Jesus



were gathered to create the *International Association of Jesuit Universities* (IAJU). We have grown and have done a great deal, but much more can still be done.

In October of last year (2018), I was present at the *International Congress for Jesuit Education Delegates* in Rio de Janeiro (Brasil). It was the first congress in which all the Provinces of the Society of Jesus and all the educational networks linked to the Society were brought together. It was an extremely fruitful gathering, a place to become aware of the contributions of the Society's educational apostolate throughout the world. Seeing the diversity of faces was a great joy. The most important part of this gathering was when a series of final agreements were reached for all the Society's Provinces and educational networks. These were thirteen actions presented to the Society's educational delegates from around the world, adopted as proposals for us all with the support of the entire Society.

We have, therefore, thirteen concrete proposals to fulfill in five years. Six months have already passed, so we need to get moving. I will only refer to the four main blocks into which the thirteen proposals are grouped. If we are lucky enough to complete these thirteen proposals in five years, we will have taken a giant step forward for the Society of Jesus' educational effort in today's world.

A first group of these proposals refers to the experience of God. In other words, how we plan to create the possibilities and the environment so that students, teachers and school employees can have a fundamental experience of God within five years.

The second is the block entitled "Tradition and Innovation," or where I began this conversation. How can we connect our tradition –which is very beautiful and important– with the creativity that allows us not only to respond to the present, but also to remain a step ahead, to look towards the future? I also said, a little while ago, that neither we (those of us with greying hair or very little hair left), the younger teachers, or even our preschool students can imagine what their lives will be like in 30 years. Still, we have to educate them so that they can live that life within 30, 40 or 50 years. This is our great challenge: how to provide an education for a life we do not know. This is not something that separates us from our tradition. Often, when I consider this, I remember the book of Genesis and the figure we see as the father of our faith: Abraham. If you can remember, Abraham was a man with quite a few grey hairs, already established, who knew how to maintain his family. Yahweh then said to him: "leave it all behind, get moving!" Abraham did so. He left everything he had achieved and set out. He then asked, "where should I



head?” and Yahweh told him, “set out, and I will tell you.” He then lived a life where the “I will tell you” gradually appeared, and this is the life of any educational process today. We set out for who-knows-where, but since we are motivated and inspired by hope, the Lord will tell us as he wishes and when he wishes. He will tell us if we listen, but we cannot stop walking. We may reach a stretch we enjoy, a point with a beautiful view of the mountains, and we may want to stay. If we do so, we are already wasting time. The challenge is to keep moving.

The third group of commitments refer to the care for our common home: “reconciliation with God, humanity and creation.” I believe that one of the remaining challenges of Jesuit education is the relationship with the environment. We, Jesuits and Jesuit institutions, have written an entire library of books and articles on ecology and commentaries on *Laudato Si’*. We have given classes on it for some time, but our institutions, our lives, follow the same old patterns of behavior that harm the environment—with significant exceptions. We still have not found an educational and life model in a healthy balance with the environment. Reconciliation with the environment is an extremely important task, a priority, but we do not know exactly how to carry it out. Every day that passes puts the life of the planet more at risk, and our future is at risk every day. This is a great and exciting challenge. Reconciliation among ourselves is also important. We live in wounded societies, societies full of violence, injustice, in which we try to work to achieve reconciliation among individuals and peoples. This is the path that also brings us towards reconciliation with God.

The final chapter –the fourth in this group of thirteen proposals– is entitled “Sent in a Global Network.” In other words, to become even more immersed in our network, to get everything we can out of being an institution connected with the entire world, with many experiences to share and offer. A few months ago, I visited an island in South Asia called Sri Lanka. As you know, it suffered an ethnic civil war for over 30 years, and millions of people died. There, I found two educational realities that impacted me a great deal. One was a network of 120 schools in the north of the island, the region that suffered the most. It was a network of primary schools, an initiative of the widows of war victims. These widows said “what can we give our children, if they do not have fathers? There is always education.” They got organized, and with the help of the Church and the Jesuits, they put together a network of 120 schools. There is also a network for long-distance university education. I participated in one of the first graduation ceremonies in which students received university degrees, some sponsored by American universities and others by European universities. Either way, they received their university degrees in Sri Lanka thanks to the network. These are two examples that may seem small but



are extremely significant. The smile of a child receiving his/her university degree thanks to a network makes everything we do worthwhile.

I would like to finish by giving you what my teachers would give me: homework. They never left us alone! When I would get home, my father or mother would ask: “what homework do you have today? Have you done it?” Here it is: study the thirteen proposals for the next five years. Get to know them and put together a program to make them a reality, so that each institution can do so. Some institutions are most likely alive to some of them, but they can improve and learn from others. This is your assignment, and I will close with a word that summarizes so many things: thanks! Thank you for all your generosity, love, faith and hope!

Arturo Sosa, S.I.



QUESTIONS & ANSWER

1.

How can we network with other Jesuit projects around the world?

How do Ignatian pedagogy's 13 challenges connect with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals?

What can we do to be inclusive with members of the newer generations that have certain deficiencies that do not require special education, but rather more attention?

I would like to start with the last question, which is very important. One of the challenges is how to keep the doors of our institutions open, because there is a risk we will do the opposite. In other words, schools that are created for the poor end up being schools for the middle class. Schools created so everyone can attend end up being just for those with certain abilities, who can overcome certain challenges. There is no clear answer to this challenge, but I think that each case is different. I think one challenge is how resources are administered because, obviously, it is expensive to keep our doors open. This means placing great stock in what I mentioned before as a characteristic of Ignatian pedagogy: attention to different cases, to each individual. It is about recognizing the possibilities and abilities of each person. This requires caring educators and spaces, and there are not always enough resources. So, once again, there are no clear solutions, but we cannot give up. It is a challenge on all levels, from preschool to university. How can we include individuals with so many differences? Thank you for bringing this up, because I find it very important.

The connection with the *Millennium Development Goals* is not always explicit, but it is there. In some case there is a clear connection but, either way, they do overlap. As I said before, we try to end poverty from the point of view of the poor, and that is what the millennium goals are ultimately about. The *Millennium Goals* want to achieve a life of dignity for everyone, which is also a great challenge. In other words, how can our educational institutions generate individuals committed to social transformation? At Jesuit universities, language indicating that universities are a social transformation project has become quite clear, because we want our graduates at any level to be notable not for their math skills, research skills or because they can read in four languages, but rather because of their humaneness, for their commitment as citizens and



because they are capable of taking what they know and who they are and using it to work towards a life of dignity for all human beings.

When the General Congregation says that collaboration must bring about growth in the networks, it is because this is how we can expand. If we investigate, we see that we can improve our existing networks even more. We have *Fe y Alegría*, but *Fe y Alegría* can still grow inwardly; it can grow quite a bit as a network. The question is how we can create even more of a network, how we can collaborate even more within our networks. The same can be said of FLACSI, of our universities, etc. They need to improve internally to interact with other networks. That offers immense possibilities. One requirement for doing so is incorporating it into our way of doing things in such a way that we truly dedicate time, individuals, energy and resources to the networks. Sometimes, we suffer from naïve thinking, believing that networks are a part-time dedication or a way to fill up leftover time, but this is not true. If we really want to be efficient, we need to dedicate skilled individuals and plenty of time. All our institutions need to ensure they are dedicating the required resources and individuals to networking, and for the network to provide needed fruits.

This path should lead us to improve relationships among institutions with some connection to the Society of Jesus, but our dream goes even further. There are so many people that agree with the goals of the Society of Jesus. Why not also collaborate with others? How can we benefit from what others do, and how do we enrich them? The possibilities of our networks open new horizons for this possible collaboration.



2.

What is the role of the Society of Jesus in scientific research? What about women's participation?

What possibilities are there for Latin America to adapt the educational strategies of other experiences, such as that of Barcelona?

What will you take with you from your time in Bolivia?

The issue of science interests me personally, and I have tried to preach on this to young Jesuits and those in charge of training Jesuits. We should not forget the scientific training of those with this calling and these possibilities. In the past, the context was different. Because of the responsibilities I had before becoming Father General, I was in permanent contact with the Society of Jesus' astronomical observatory at the Vatican, where a group of 15 young Jesuit scientists work. There are a couple of older brothers, but most are young people from different continents. There is an African from the Congo there, and one day I asked him why he had become an astronomer. He responded: "once when I was studying philosophy in my training with the Society, I spoke with the Provincial about my interest in physics, and he asked me 'have you considered studying astronomy? The Society has an observatory.' I thought 'why not?'" Now, he is one of our astronomers. I often tell the provincials about this, because these things depend a great deal on your sixth sense. A scientist cannot be trained in six months, it is a long process. In any case, we need to discover and promote these abilities. I often say that the calling of Jesuits is not to serve as chaplains in our universities or schools. The calling of Jesuits, according to our tradition, is to be in the classroom, the laboratory, creating knowledge, researching and creating alongside others. We need to maintain this calling in all areas. A scientific calling is important, and I think we need to promote it.

Regarding women, I am not sure whether I agree with your diagnosis entirely. If we look at the educational task of the Society of Jesus today, what we call our "apostolic body," it is largely made up of women. We could also make a long list of the many women in important positions in the Society's educational network. They are present on almost all levels. Plus, this will increase because of the –as you put it– truly charismatic and significant contribution they provide. I think that we still have a long way to go in this area, to truly provide positions in



society, the Church and the Society for women, so that their contribution can be even more significant. However, we have gotten the ball rolling, and I do not think it will stop.

Of course we can take advantage of the Barcelona experience and other experiences from around the world. This is what I mean when I refer to networking: taking advantage of all the things that are generated in other places, applying them. It is not about having others do what we need to do. As you said, we need to get inspired, adapt, seek, share. Our network is for sharing what we do, for sharing models, materials, experiences, and for expanding. This is how we avoid doing things twice, rediscovering the wheel. If it has already been discovered, we need to learn how to use it. We will then have many possibilities that can be imagined, but the work must be done by those on the ground.

What will I take with me from my trip to Bolivia? I take the great affection exemplified by everyone who received me with such openness. There is the experience of getting to know places and individuals, a great wealth I was not aware of. Reading about Bolivia's ethnic diversity is one thing; seeing and interacting with it is another thing entirely. This is the principal benefit of meeting people in their own terrain.

One of the most difficult tasks of a Superior General of the Society of Jesus is getting to know the Society. Although I entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus 52 years ago, I spent 48 years in Venezuela. Therefore, I know Venezuela quite well, although things have changed quite a bit in the four years since I left. For me, this task is both enjoyable and demanding, because the Society of Jesus is present in over 120 countries, 80 provinces. But what I will really take with me are people's faces, the experiences—just like when I visited Sri Lanka.

I get reports every year. This is part of the Society as an organization, a certain amount of information and communication. Still, reading a report is not the same as reading a letter, where you can know who is behind it and where it comes from. I believe that this human connection is not lost, and this is something extremely valuable that I am very grateful for.

3.

Regarding the quote "in the days of Jesus there were no recordings," what can you say about the tradition of the texts and having an attitude that is not strictly bound to them?

What do youth contribute to education, and what is your message for them?



I never thought the reference to recordings would be so popular. I think we should put this into context. A journalist cited a Cardinal who was the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who had said that no one could change the words of Jesus. I said “I agree entirely, no one can change the words of Jesus—but it is not so easy to know what Jesus said, because there were no recorders, then.” In other words, we did not receive Jesus’ exact words directly, we received them much later through oral tradition and New Testament texts.

The first thing I learned at the Gregorian University in my theology studies was this: no one has Jesus’ writings. Jesus did not write, and there were no newspapers at the time; in other words, it is truly tradition. The first texts that were written down were the letters by Saint Paul and, much later, the Gospels. Over 50 years went by between Jesus’ words and the first texts. Of course, we recognize that the Gospels are the word of Jesus. The issue –and this is where the exegesis gets mixed up with my training in history of political ideas– is the matter of texts and contexts. In other words, no text has meaning in itself; texts are always a dialogue. Jesus spoke for a certain audience. When someone writes, they write for a certain audience at a certain time, a context we need to understand. Therefore, exegesis is what allows us to know exactly what Jesus said, and in what context.

Understanding our true textual tradition demands a significant intellectual effort. This is in order to understand the text and its context, to see how it reached us. This is why we need to make an intellectual effort to understand what Jesus said. Therefore, we are not tied to the texts. What is sacred is not the text; what is sacred is the word of God, which we access through discernment. This involves both a spiritual and an intellectual attitude, in the case of biblical texts. If you literally interpret certain biblical texts, you can find some truly barbaric things; they need to be understood in context. That is why I think that Pope Francis places such an emphasis on knowledge of the word of God, but also discernment. The word is not possible without discernment, and discernment is not possible without spiritual experience. Plus, understanding the word is not possible without intellectual training. This is part of what we need to offer in our educational tradition.

Regarding our youth, their great contribution is innovation and creativity. Young people force us to constantly rethink things, and this is a great source of wealth. I think that one of the great satisfactions of individuals who dedicate their lives to education is always being in contact with the world of youth. This keeps them alive, alert. It allows them to live creatively.



I am going to offer this message to our young ones so that they can remember that no one is eternally young; youth is a stage in life, a very beautiful period of life. A period of life in which decisions are made that mark the future of each individual, and where each individual can contribute to society. Take advantage of it! Whatever we fail to do, we fail to do. We cannot go back in time. There is nothing uglier than an elderly person wanting to be young. So my message for the young is “be young!” Take advantage of this stage with everything it has to offer; we hope that they will help those of us who are not so young to be more creative.

Thank you very much!

Arturo Sosa, S.I.