

**TO ALL THE FRIARS OF THE ORDER:  
THE AUGUSTINIAN SCHOOL AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

Dear Brother,

The General Chapter of 1989 outlined an extensive programme of government, which is being realized through various initiatives. The most recent of these was the Latin American meeting which took place at Conocoto in September last. There we proposed *"to reflect on the reality of the Order in Latin America, in the light of Santo Domingo, as the beginning of a process of revitalization of the Order, in the service of the New Evangelization"*

Through a thoughtful analysis of the state of the Order and of the Church, we went through an experience of dialogue and sharing. We were searching for the key ideas that would give us a new understanding of the changes that are going on in the world. And this in the geographical setting of Latin America and in the life of the Church which is writing its history there, and making present the message of God's salvation.

With the memory still alive of those days in Conocoto, and continuing with the fulfilment of the Chapter programme for the six-year term 1989-95, we now invite you to turn your attention to another topic of particular importance. This is our presence in the world of education.

Since the *"Gravissimum educationis momentum"* of Vatican 2, there have been several thought-provoking papal documents that underline the importance of education for the Church: *"The Catholic School"* (Rome,1977), *"The lay Catholic, witness to the Faith in the School"* (Rome,1982), *"The Religious dimension of the Catholic School"* (Rome,1988).

No-one doubts today that the Catholic school is a platform for evangelization and pastoral activity. Its contribution to the cultural dialogue is unique, and seems to be an alternative among the variety of educational options. It is in the school setting, in keeping with the social and cultural conditions of our time, and with the special character given to it by a community of persons, that one can find an example of how to live in the world as believers.

In the cultural and educational tradition of the Church, the Augustinian Order has played a distinguished role. For St. Augustine, the human being is a rational believer. Reason and faith, far from being in contention, complement one another. In the educational process, just as in the weaving of Augustine's thought, secular culture and the faith flow together. This is the reason for the affirmation that to serve culture is *"one of the duties proper to our Order"* (Const.n.178).

**Our purpose in the world of education**

*"The specific purpose of our schools is the Christian formation and education of the students. It follows that this apostolate should always be regarded as an essentially pastoral activity, so that we teach the truth with love, and the students acquire, along with a humanistic and scientific culture, a knowledge of the world, of life, and of humanity that is illumined by faith."* (Const.n.179).

In using the term education, we are speaking of a global reality that embraces the whole person and involves the entire educational community. As a global reality it contributes to the development of the multiple dimensions of the human personality. In other words, an education which transmits culture in an honest way, does not neglect the substance of the faith and, as well as that, awakens social responsibility.

In order to make clear the Augustinian purpose in the educational field, it is necessary to have a community that radiates our spirit with its whole heart. Thus education is imparted by the activity of a community which professes and proclaims certain specific values. This community has as its inspiration the bountiful wellspring of Augustine. This is the nourishing source and, at the same time, the ultimate horizon of our education.

In contrast to a directive pedagogy, which would foster passivity and dependence, St. Augustine imagined the human being as a seed capable of development. *"God would like to sow in every soul the seeds of intelligence, of wisdom"* (Serm.117,11). The function of the external master (parents, educators...) must be to channel the release of this hidden potential. That intimate place, which is made up of feelings, restlessness, and search, is precisely where St. Augustine locates the encounter with God (Ena.74,9).

As Augustinians, we must offer to society the characteristic features of the *Augustinian School*, its inspiration and its pedagogy. Teaching communities in different countries are involved in this task today. It would be an enrichment to have a fraternal exchange of those texts which are used as material for study, as well as of the experiences which are born of their application in the classrooms.

## **The main lines of Augustinian education**

The process of humanization operates through LOVE, the most profound power of human nature (In Epist.Jo.2,141). St. Augustine describes it in metaphorical language: *"God has built a stairway in your heart for you to climb. The more you love, the higher you climb"* (Ena.83,10). To train *in and for* LOVE brings us to other central ideas of Augustinian thought. One trains *in love* by bringing the human person to identify with his own self - INTERIORITY - so that from its depths *"one withdraws into oneself and remains apart in the embrace of one's own being"* (De ordine I,1,3). To train *for* LOVE leads to COMMUNITY and SOLIDARITY. A love which does not result in sharing freely is a vitiated love.

Whoever carries in the centre of his life the supports of love and of sharing, changes his personal history into a RESTLESS SEARCH (*"We walk behind that which we seek and our search goes in pursuit of our love"*: In Epist.ad Gal.54). Love, in the graphic phrase of St. Augustine, is *"a restless flame"* (Ena.31,2,5).

Another central idea in Augustinian thought is TRUTH. Far from St. Augustine, however, is any cold or static concept of truth. He understands it as a sharing (Ena.103,2,11), dwelling in the depths (*"springing up from the humble sources in the valley"* Serm.104,2,3) and includes INTERIORITY (*"One rejects truth when one lives in distraction or dispersal"*. De beata vita,2,9).

Fidelity to the TRUTH - which includes God, man himself, life, history in a process of change - the understanding of reality demands new analyses and new syntheses. Fundamentally, TRUTH appears as an existential solution: *"It is of little value to speak the truth with the lips and not with the heart"* (Ena.14,3).

In this time of pessimism, the best service that the Augustinian School can render to the new evangelisation is a crystal-clear statement of values. The immediate and reflex effect of this effort will be a renewed Augustinian School, a healthy ferment in the midst of the human family.

At the heart of the Augustinian School is located the COMMUNITY. No ministry eliminates the basic equality of all the baptised. "*All of you form only one family and we, in the end, are only the providers who belong to that same family*" (Serm.101,39). The only Lord and Master of the community is Jesus Christ. Perhaps there are still some of our Centres that need to take that first step: to turn themselves into genuine educational communities. A school of this kind can be brought about only if teachers, parents, and students, are united in one and the same plan of education.

We have a large number of qualified lay people in the teaching staffs of our schools, in parents' associations, and as catechists. But our acceptance of them may, at times, be only as deputies or substitutes. Without the clear and active participation of the laity, the Church of Jesus Christ and the Augustinian School will not present a complete picture. In this context, participation and shared responsibility are crucial.

An essential goal is the transformation of the *teaching community* into a *Christian community*. The witness of harmony between the life and the teaching of an educator is his most eloquent lecture (De doc. christ. 4,29,61). As well as this personal evangelisation, the Augustinian School must offer specific ways for the development of religious experience. There is a whole range of youth associations, as well as a variety of group activities, liturgical, charitable, and other out-of-school undertakings that can be channels for personal development as well as for the imparting of the Christian message. All of these instruments must be combined in a pastoral plan, where the students themselves become actively involved in their own growth.

### **The Augustinian School needs to be evangelised**

Like the Church, which is always in need of evangelisation, and "*needs to maintain its freshness, its vigour and its strength for proclaiming the Gospel*" (Evangelii Nuntiandi,15), so also the Augustinian School needs to look back, calmly, at its past, and to judge it objectively. Especially it needs to examine itself critically in the context of this present time - which is a time of grace - and to accept the need for the restless search, for CONVERSION.

We must implant the evangelising and pastoral dimension within our educating-teaching activity. This obligation to renew and examine critically the *raison d'etre* of our School has today the mark of urgency. Rather than theoretical statements about identity, we need practical translations, plans for action.

The evangelisation of our school calls for the abandoning of all defensiveness, weariness, and evasion. In times past, society itself provided many examples of religious values for children and young people. Today, on the contrary, it is possible that for a considerable number of our students the Catholic School is the only agent of evangelization. Accordingly, the Augustinian School is called on to fulfil an important missionary function.

Today's culture shows itself to be oblivious of questions of meaning and value. It is the school that has the entire task of integrating culture and faith, and as such it has a clear

evangelising character. That character will afterwards be modified by many other factors within the framework of education. Attention to the transcendent dimension of the human being is demanded by the very concept of integral formation. A school which disregards these attitudes, these ultimate values and questions, does not fulfil its function and is reduced to the mechanical transmission of knowledge. The good of the person and of society itself requires that the school incorporates into humanistic and scientific knowledge *the search for meaning*. The Augustinian School, being Catholic, is called upon to respond to this need and must include in its search the moral, spiritual, and religious dimension, evaluating the conquests of science and technology within the total perspective of the human person (cfr. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, 15.08.90, n.7).

### **Public recognition of teachers**

One of the sectors which is making a major effort in renewal is that of education. The ill-disguised hostility towards the Catholic School, which exists in some social and political contexts, has brought about a re-evaluation of its evangelising results, as was recently vindicated once more by the Conference of Latin American Bishops at Santo Domingo. The effect of this process in the Catholic school is the enthusiastic determination of many men and women, who display an undoubted professionalism in the classroom. They arouse interest among their students in the ways of justice and peace, without allowing their hopes to be dimmed by difficulties and, supported by their Christian faith, build up the miracle of fraternity.

Yours is a hidden work, little acknowledged, living water which does not always flow on the surface. But it is a necessary ministry for the Church and for society.

To all of you, my dear friars who are engaged in education, and to all the lay people who share in that same ministry, I offer these words of encouragement. Both the anthropology and the spirituality of St. Augustine call for a presence that is close and tangible. Accordingly, I would like my last word to be a warm invitation to you towards renewal, in a personal sense as well as in terms of your teaching and cultural roles. The nucleus of evangelisation is the inescapable call to CONVERSION. It was an event which filled the life of St. Augustine from the time when he opened himself unconditionally to the action of God. An ongoing renewal is a process of constant conversion.

I salute you cordially in St. Augustine,

Miguel Angel Orcasitas OSA

Prior General

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