



**CONVERSATION between Fr. General Arturo Sosa, SJ
and the Education Delegates
JESDU-Rio2017**

October 20, 2017



Introductory note

*As part of the International Congress of Education Delegates of the Society of Jesus, JESDU-Rio2017, on the last day Fr. General Arturo Sosa SJ gave his speech, “**Jesuit Education: Forming Human Beings in Harmony with their Fellows, with Creation and with God,**” to the education delegates. After the speech, the session was open to comments and questions. The contents of that session are included in this text. The original conversation was held in Spanish and English. The version we are now making public was originally edited and approved by Fr. General in Spanish. The contents of this conversation must be understood within the context of the speech by Fr. General.*

Question 1.

Fr. General, thank you very much for your speech, particularly the fourth chapter (*Interculturality: Global Communication among Many Cultures*), with its attractive, challenging contents. There is a feeling of “inertia” or of “gravity” in terms of what is local, and the concerns that stem from it. How can we speak to those who are most fearful about taking on borders because of local concerns?

Fr. General:

I do not think that there is a single formula for that kind of dialogue. Nevertheless, it is an important step we need to take. Things cannot suddenly change unless we first promote dialogue among the individuals involved. As you all know, what really changes people is personal contact, and this requires that we promote new ways of being together, or of

meeting with different individuals, in a context where the most personal sort of exchange can take place. The first step is to create the sort of relationship on a human scale that makes it possible for us to “find” one another, to open ourselves up to reflection. It is not just about exchanging information; it is about contacting one another, sharing our personal visions.

Question 2.

In documents of the Society of Jesus, the call to take on the shared mission through networks is very clear. Your speech seems to focus on the global school network. In my opinion, the apostolic sectors create obstacles when it comes time for us to “move.” Doesn’t this idea of working in sector-based networks generate problems when we are called to form a more global network? Should we just consider our sector-based networks a basis for global work?

Fr. General:

I would not want you to understand my proposal as a call to “sectorialize” our networks. The expression “apostolic sectors” has not been used in 20 years, because I believe that in the history of the Society, the initial identification of sectors helped us to connect, but it has since become a way of “preserving” a group. Now, the idea is to create a complex system for mutual collaboration. Sometimes we are not aware of the complexity of our collaboration “amongst ourselves.” Often, we associate the word “collaboration” with “others,” but we have an enormous collaborative challenge within the Society, not only among institutions, but also among our different forms of apostolic work. That is our horizon.

Our global educational network can help us to take that step, because we refer to a “network of networks.” As a result, local and regional networks need to exist in order for the global network to exist. What we are working on now is the creation of an effective global network, an educational network of schools. How can we create a more global vision of our schools without losing our perspective of unity with other educational and apostolic realities? We cannot focus just on educational work at schools. We can find a great wealth in our work if we do not establish barriers between what is educational, social or pastoral, but when we work together.

Question 3.

In the context of the changes to the leadership/organization of our provinces or to other Jesuit working structures, what are the implications of your mention of a fifth “C”, “Consistency”? (*Editor’s note: see the homily by Fr. General at the closing of the Congress*)

Fr. General:

A brief answer might be as follows. There should be no difference between what we say and what we do. We have great documents and apostolic plans, well written, well founded and using beautiful language, but we cannot have a gap between that and what we do, between

how we make decisions each day and the processes we use to reach different types of agreements.

We need to overcome the gap between what we do and what we say on all levels, on the provincial and on the institutional level. On other occasions, I have spoken of “institutional conversion.” We tend to use the word “conversion” to refer to “personal conversion.” In Ignatian language, we have the concept of “community conversion,” but now we have to commit ourselves to “institutional conversion.” Institutions are extremely useful to our apostolic work, we need them, and, furthermore, it is not easy to build good institutions. However, if these institutions are not capable of changing, they become “anchors” that hold back our processes of change. That is what I am referring to with the fifth “C”, Consistency, so that there is no distance between our words and our actions. This should be brought about not only by individuals and communities, but also by our institutions.

Question 4.

Fr. General, with regards to the challenge you propose encouraging us to make education part of our intellectual apostolate: that requires that we professionalize the service and the work of our teachers as much as possible. We need to specialize, just as many fellow Jesuit currently do, for example, with doctorates in education. It is not easy for schools to offer ongoing training for their teachers. We should invest in this—through Jesuit or other universities, for example. Could you expand on this issue?

Fr. General:

I agree with your concerns, and we need to look for ways to address them. The growth of platforms and networks helps in this area, but to go a little further, I think that our challenge has more to do with “pedagogical creativity.” In general, we feel proud of the impact Jesuit education had at its beginnings, and of how it is changing our way of understanding institutions, because it focuses on the person.

Nevertheless, right now, with the world changing so rapidly, we need to ask ourselves if we, as an educational apostolic body tied to the Society of Jesus, are really making new proposals. Or are we just reacting? I mean, with our idea of going a step ahead or several steps ahead. Are we currently capable of moving ahead? Are we dedicating our people, our time, our economic resources and our energy to imagine, to create new forms of education? How are the experiences and processes we are currently going through really aimed at taking a step ahead? We need to keep ahead of changes, and not just react to them. Of course, right now it is hard, harder than ever, to educate while thinking about tomorrow because of all the uncertainties we need to face. However, that, precisely, is the challenge we need to take on. How can the Society improve its investment in education in order to go beyond what we currently have and what we currently do?

Question 5.

This question is on better understanding our students. How would you define a global citizen? How can you identify them?

Fr. General:

To me, a global citizen is someone who, first, is aware of their local roots, their culture, and their history. In other words, someone who has local roots. But on a second level, they are someone who has a critical view of their own culture and who, as a result, doesn't idealize it. They know it is one of many, and they know that their own culture has strengths and weaknesses. On a third level, they are also someone open to other cultures, who gets in touch with them, knowing that they are part of a greater body we call humanity. Finally, on a fourth level, they know how to enrich themselves by interacting with others, and they can enrich others with their culture.

As Christians, through the Gospel we see the advantages tied to this critical vision of our own cultures as a way of generating social transformation, without being ignorant of the richness of our roots. Therefore, global citizens are those who, while recognizing their roots and considering themselves part of humanity, are open to the contributions of other cultures, with the hope of working with others to build a better humanity.

Question 6.

It seems to me that you are encouraging us to use discernment in the decision-making processes at our schools and in our educational networks. How do you want Jesuit educational institutions to participate in the process of identifying apostolic preferences?

Fr. General:

I have written a letter to the Society on this. Discernment is a complicated process. We need to be prepared and to have a certain amount of training in discernment in order for a working team or a community to use discernment in a way that is truly collaborative and of a high quality. It is not just a system or a technique for making decisions. It is an attempt to identify the will of God regarding some non-evident issue. As a result, it ceases to be a decision made by the team, becoming a joint search for what God desires.

I am very optimistic about the process the Society of Jesus is using to define its universal or global preferences. Education is a very important apostolate for the Society, and as a result its contributions and its participation are extremely relevant in this process.

Through the secretariat for secondary and pre-secondary education, the provinces and the provincials, we want to listen to the voices of the whole of the educational apostolate. We do not want to define a single way of carrying out this process, because the contexts we run into are extremely diverse. A province with 40 schools is not the same as one with four, and

education by Fe y Alegría is not the same as education by FLACSI. We are awaiting contributions until December 2018 through the channels put forth in my letter on the subject, so that we can then prepare our response.

Question 7.

In the third chapter of your speech (“Education that paves the way for understanding the world we live in”), you mentioned the contribution of “Jesuit Humanism” with regards to the historical context within which the Society created and grew its educational apostolate. In your opinion, to what degree are we loyal to this tradition, to this first calling, or to what was the first intuition of the role of the Society’s schools and universities?

Fr. General:

That is not an easy question. I think that we have moved from a “renaissance humanism” towards an “evangelical humanism.” Now, we are more aware of the fact that our humanism comes from the Gospel. Currently, we have more critical studies and knowledge of the Gospel texts and their content; we have an enriched understanding of our own humanity and of our relationship to God.

I cannot make a concrete list, but I am under the impression that over the past 50 years, the Society and its institutions have made a good effort to formulate precisely the identity of each institution and to share it with our management teams, teachers and the educational communities in general. Currently, we are more explicit in stating where our inspiration in this humanism comes from.

Question 8.

In the sixth challenge mentioned in the fifth chapter of your speech (“Challenges today to education that looks towards the future”), you talk about being a creative actor in the process of creating Global Citizens. Could you expand on this invitation?

Fr. General:

Expanding on what I mentioned in the previous question, I would like to note that the encyclical *Laudato Si* has often been cited in reference to the Pope’s insistence that we are not facing “different crises,” like those concerning the environment, social issues, politics, economics or religion. We are facing a crisis in the global system. Many analysts have referred to it; some to give support to this vision, and others to reject it, to claim that it is a lie.

This is a complex argument. Nevertheless, it is clear that regarding this awareness, which comes from the language of the Social Doctrine of the Church, we cannot just assume that this idea of the “global common good” is established or accepted in the world. We need to continue to focus on how we can acquire, expand and consolidate this awareness.

Today, with nationalism once again on the rise and with certain religious identities becoming fundamentalist, this awareness of being a global citizen is even more important. How can we establish priorities between particular interests and global interests? We need to help individuals to hold the universal common good as a priority, ahead of the interests of their nation, race, culture or ideological vision.

The invitation is to do so creatively, because human beings are extremely diverse, as are our many starting points. It is not the same for a persecuted Christian from Lebanon to achieve this awareness as it is for a citizen of Germany to do so; nor is it the same for an indigenous person fighting for the survival of his people to do so. The challenge is how to promote the need to create the awareness of being global citizens using our network.

Question 9.

Concerning the fifth C, Consistency, I would like to ask for a clarification. Is it true that we have many good ideas in our educational apostolate but that perhaps we are lacking action? Is that where there is a lack of consistency?

Fr. General:

Yes, it is true. That is why I mentioned that consistency can allow us to overcome this gap between our ideas, our plans, our declarations and what we do. Perhaps, using theological language it would be a “conversion.”

Question 10.

There is a semantic issue in the concepts you are sharing with us. We are not just “renewing” or “updating” education, we are “reinventing” it, and that scares people. The concept of audacity comes from GC36, which even proposes “the audacity of the impossible.” What example do we have of the audacity of the impossible? Where can we see an example of this audacity, to have a point of reference?

Fr. General:

I agree that it scares people. That is why I mentioned that our tradition needs to become “memory” and not a “burden.” We need to take the step towards “discomfort” instead of “convenience.” It is not just me making this invitation; it is also the General Congregation. We do not want any more words or “pretty” documents, we want more focused projects. GC36 has fewer documents, but not fewer challenges. There is a strong invitation to reconciliation, and this term does not come out of nowhere; 90 provincial congregations mentioned this horizon from completely different contexts. The experience of the Society of Jesus is that we live in a “broken” world, and as a result, we are invited to be collaborators in reconciliation.

Another enormous challenge is the issue of discernment. What we do in terms of innovation needs to be the result of discernment or of joint work to discover the will of God. In fact, GC36

does not call us to personal discernment, but to group discernment. This group discernment is challenging to Jesuits, because we are better at personal discernment.

GC36 also recovered a formula concerning collaboration that we had forgotten and that had been mentioned at GC34 in Decree 13; it referred to the conviction that the Church of the future would be a lay Church, as was imagined at the Second Vatican Council. If this is the horizon, the Society of Jesus, in the service of the Church, needs to help to create a lay Church. This is a tremendous innovation, because it is a change of subject in church life. Pope Francis has noted this on multiple occasions with his criticism of clericalism.

In referring to collaboration, GC36 paused and noted that we Jesuits are also collaborators. This is a change, a notable innovation. And that is not all, it then refers to planning. As a result, it notes that there is tension between discernment and planning.

As for the example of audacity, there is the Jesuit Refugee Service. In it, we have seen the bravery and the flexibility to remake the mission, starting with the initial intuition of Fr. Arrupe. He imagined a provisional service, thinking that the flow of refugees would soon stop. Nevertheless, today, we are facing a different reality and the discernment of the JRS has brought us to think that education is a type of service and aid that the Society can offer refugees.

In Nairobi (Kenya), I remember a young refugee from South Sudan who said to me “Fr. General, I would like to ask that the Society of Jesus not abandon its educational work in the refugee camps, because I won’t be a refugee my entire life and I don’t want to see my youth fly by and never get an education.” That impacted me a great deal, along with the fact that the average stay of individuals in refugee camps is 17 years. If a person does not receive the opportunity to get an education during this time, their conditions afterwards will be much worse. The Society has human and spiritual resources to collaborate in this personal transformation.

Question 11

Regarding your plan of action, on a provincial, regional and global level, if we want to move forwards, do we need to make changes to the structure of presidents of conferences of provincials and to other structures?

Fr. General:

One of the messages of GC36 was that the structure needed to follow the mission. We do not join a “province” of the Society, we join the Society. Just like any other structure, provinces can be adapted to get better results. The Society has a peculiar structure, because it has a head and a body, but decisions are made on a provincial level, in a decentralized manner. How does this structure operate successfully? How do we remain united in a single body? It

is because we have good communication, and because one of our characteristics is that we share resources between provinces.

Question 12.

How can we work using a system of solidarity among provinces so that those that have more can help those that have less?

Fr. General:

One of the issues we are currently working on is solidarity among provinces in economic matters and in other areas. Of course, we need a system that allows us greater internal solidarity to make better and more rational use of the resources we have for the mission.

Question 13

Discernment depends on those who are sitting at the table. Sometimes it is between Jesuits and laypeople; but how can we maintain equitable representation to include everyone? Sometimes, discernment is carried out just by Jesuits, just by men. What can we do about this?

Fr. General:

I agree that there are different levels of participation in a discernment. It depends on the issues, the different groups and the people involved. For example, issues that just affect the Society of Jesus, the religious community, will be different from those we carry out in our apostolic work with our companions in the mission. In any case, we need to learn how to combine these different levels of discernment and how to integrate the different individuals involved in the issues to be decided on.

Final words of the moderator (José Mesa, SJ)

Thank you very much to Fr. General for being here today. I would like to finish with an anecdote: two weeks after Father General Arturo Sosa SJ was elected, I had the opportunity to speak with him to invite him to come to this Congress. His answer was immediate: "I see how important this Congress is, and this is the first meeting I accept as General." I was surprised by his rapid response, and I insinuated that we could wait a few weeks, so he could have time to go over his agenda and get back to us. Nevertheless, he was sure: "there is no need to confirm afterwards, I promise I will participate in the Congress." Therefore, once again, Fr. General, thank you very much for your time and your participation in this Congress.

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