

Reflections on ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS on the current and future reality of the Pious Schools

IV Advisory Council of the ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS Network

FINDING NEW PATHS

I-INTRODUCTION

I would like to share the reflection proposed to me by the Executive Committee of the ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS network for the opening session of the Fourth Advisory Council which we are holding these days, in online mode, because of the pandemic in which we are involved. Taking into account the proposed title, I have articulated my contribution from two large blocks.

I will start with some facts about the current reality that we live in the Pious Schools, and then I will elaborate some reflection on the contributions that ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS is making and what it can make in the coming years.

It is good to make this reflection because ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS is born from the will of the Order and the Fraternity to work together in the great challenge of continuing to build Calasanz' project, to continue to build Pious Schools, so that we can grow in capacity for Life and Mission. ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS, a network of Institutional Shared Mission, is a privileged instrument to promote the project of the Order and Fraternity. It is not a third institution, a third project partner, but a dynamic and an organization from which the two propellants of the project may have a better chance of carrying it forward.

But for this to be the case, the Order and the Fraternity must grow in a clear awareness of what they are creating, and those who are in the day-to-day life of the network have to grow in awareness of what the Order and Fraternity propose and seek, enriching it with their contributions and views. Only then will we walk appropriately.

That is why it is good that this Advisory Council considers the central issues that have been worked on in the Fraternity Assembly, held last week, and to hear some highlights of what is being lived in the Order. This will be the first point of my speech.

II-CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT AND FUTURE REALITY OF PIOUS SCHOOLS.

There are several points of view from which we can approach the reality of the Pious Schools and what is happening in their bosom that will undoubtedly guide the direction in which we will walk. I will use two different but complementary schemes, which I

believe are the ones that can help the members of this Advisory Council most to draw conclusions for the future of the ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS network.

The first point of view is based on the "Keys of Life" and the new accents that emerge from their development. The second concerns the fundamental challenges we are receiving and welcoming that also become a "roadmap" for us.

A-THE KEYS OF LIFE AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

I believe that the nine "keys of life" of the Pious Schools are already clearly assumed and consolidated. I am not referring to all the potentials of each of them, but to the concept they represent and the need to work with all nine to boost the Piarist project. I do not think we need to trade them for others, because they're still valid. Vocational Pastoral / Initial Training / Permanent Training / Community Life / Ministry / Economy / Participation / Restructuring, Consolidation, Expansion / Calasanz.

In each of them new challenges appear, and we are treasuring achievements, small or large, that help us move forward. I do not think this is the time to detail one or another, although it can help to set some concrete example that illustrates what I mean by "there are challenges and fruits." For example, it has been understood that each Province must fight to have its own initial formation structure complete; the number of communities operating with a community project has grown markedly; we have founded in Guatemala or Timor Leste in the middle of the pandemic; the Province of Asia Pacific has been created; we have published the Opera Omnia de Calasanz, etc. We can cite fruits and challenges of each "key to life", and that is good.

But this dynamic opens us to new scenarios, the result of the dynamism they enclose. We have always said that the "Keys of Life" model would work if they are not understood in isolation, but systemically, and we have always maintained that "Life" will be the fruit of the proper combination of all of them.

Well, there are already some dynamisms that are the result of the development of the "Keys of Life" and which will mark the path of the Order in the coming years. I will cite some of these dynamisms, which are not the result of a "Key of Life", but of the combination of these keys. They are ***cross-sectional elements***, which indicate direction and come from the combination of the "keys of life". I sense that we will move forward in a better understanding of Itaka-Escolapios from this vision of transversality. Let us go.

1-SYNODALITY. *Synodality* invites us to develop the dynamisms of participation and discernment, in order to seek together God's will. It is a strong and demanding support for our key to PARTICIPATION and helps us to place it more accurately: it is a dynamism of shared discernment. But it is also the result of keys of like these: community life; the structures from which we work; the model of Piarist presence; shared and well-designed

decision-making processes; attention to the Piarist sensibility that characterizes young religious, etc.

2-GOING FORTH. The dynamism of **PIOUS SCHOOLS GOING FORTH** also marks direction in the Order. We have begun to understand it from the point of view of the intercultural and the missionary, but more will appear. It is a dynamism that indicates direction, and that will have a long and transformative route in the Pious Schools.

3-INTERCULTURALITY. We believe that this issue, which is directly and inseparably combined with the challenge of inculturation, like the two sides of the same coin, will be configured as a clear direction from which to walk, as a horizon to tend to. Gradually we realize that interculturality and inculturation must permeate the life and mission of the Order. They must reach the lives of communities, the dynamisms of formation, spiritual approaches, the way of understanding and living the charism, etc. They must be thought out thoroughly and incorporated in an intelligent, shared and Calasanctian way into the life of the Pious Schools. We feel challenged: the critical discernment of what we do and live must also be very clear between us, to avoid accepting dynamisms, styles and customs that can and should be changed, and which are even different - and may be contrary - to what we want to live as Piarists.

4-INTEGRAL SUSTAINABILITY. The **integral sustainability of the Pious Schools** is another of the strong topics that we will talk about in our General Chapter, and it is one of the keys in which the Fraternity is most involved and, consequently, ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS. When we talk about sustainability we tend to think about the economy, but what we are talking about is something much deeper, not just the material means. We are talking about charismatic sustainability, teams, people, leadership, Pious Schools increasingly capable of carrying out their lives and mission where we are and where we feel called to be. That is why we put the adjective "*integral*" on it. It is obviously a cross-cutting dynamism.

5-The "CULTURE OF ORDER". This topic probably brings together everyone else because it has to do with those dynamisms that are gradually consolidated and that guide the ordinary functioning of the Pious Schools. And it also has to do with those dynamisms of change that we want to introduce, to achieve better Pious Schools. We are not just talking about what we often call the "mindset of Order" that essentially refers to the growth of belonging, but to how we organize ourselves, how we work, how we make decisions, how we move towards a clear and fruitful Piarist subject, etc.

I do not want to exhaust reflection here, but just start it. I believe that the concept of "Keys of Life" is essential, but insufficient, and the **concept of "fundamental dynamisms"** is gradually emerging, which are the fruit of these "keys of life" and the path we are going down. And those dynamisms are shaped from **transversality**. This is the time of the Pious Schools, to this day: a moment of discernment of dynamisms and



options from which to better respond to today's children and young people and from which to be able to more faithfully embody the charism of which we are bearers.

And I think *ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS will also be relocated from what we are living. It will leave being located in the area of "obtaining resources" to be placed clearer and more accurately in the key of "Participation" and will gradually become understood from these transverse dynamisms that mark direction.* For example, the dynamism of comprehensive sustainability.

B-SOME FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES WE ARE RECEIVING AND WELCOMING

The Pious Schools are born of the bold and accurate reading that Calasanz knew how to make of the challenges he received from the reality in which he was: from the society in which he had to live, from the children he saw, from the Church in which he was, etc. Understanding and welcoming **the challenges also builds the future**, because in doing so we reveal what we are: what challenges touch us in our center indicates what we are and value, and how we respond. That is why I believe that a reading of the current moment of the Pious Schools from this perspective can also help us in the reflections of this Advisory Council. As in the previous section, I do not intend to exhaust them, but simply show their importance.

1-THE GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL COMPACT

The GEC is a direct proposal from Pope Francis. That is a great proposition. It invites everyone: all people, institutions, communities, states... to all of us who believe in education, to rebuild an EDUCATIONAL COMPACT that will help us place education where it should be: the key to a better, different, more humane and fraternal world. Only education can change the world; let us work together. It is not necessary to remember all the keys of the Pope's proposal, because they are all well known, I simply want to highlight the aspects that challenge us the most.

It is good to remember that what the Pope proposes is a NEW PROCESS. It is not an event; it is a PROCESS. Little by little. It will be long. And secrecy will be in the implication, the co-responsibility, the participation of all in a process that makes education its right place: the key to a different world, which needs the collaboration and agreement of all.

I feel the challenges we feel, backed by centuries of work in Education.

1. There is a first challenge: RENEWING our commitment to a comprehensive education, inspired by the values of the Gospel, children, and youth. It is a permanent challenge, which involves fighting tiredness, routine, believing that we already do things right, etc. RENEWING.



2. It challenges us in the EDUCATIONAL PROJECT. We need to place the keys to the Education Pact at the heart of our educational project and do so with increasing clarity. They are keys that are going to help us make things better.
3. It challenges us in our ability to WORK IN COMMON, as a network. Between us, with other schools, with many social instances. Working together with everyone who shares dreams and commitments. Working together on the line marked in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. There is the key. The NET proposal is essential. ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS must also enter here.
4. It challenges us in our OPTIONS, challenges us in our vocation as educators, challenges us in the model of school that we promote. It challenges us to continue working for the right to education for all; an education that carries answers to young people's desire for meaning of life; a comprehensive education that accompanies the faith process of our youth; a commitment to quality especially where there are fewer means and more needs; educators who really have a vocation to educate, etc.

2- THE FIGHT AGAINST CLERICALISM. It is a subject that would give for a lot, but I just want to say something very simple. This work, this struggle, is a global challenge that we must take on with all the consequences, and that affects many of our realities. It will mark the next few years of the Pious Schools, and I am sure it will be for our good. It is important to understand that the sin of clericalism is two-way. It is not an exclusive problem of the "clergy"; so is the layman who does not assume his condition and who is accustomed to a profile of little co-responsibility. I think it is good to remember, for example, that the great advantage of Consecrated Life is that the key is in consecration, not in the position - temporary - that a person assumes, in the same way as the great advantage of the Church - and therefore of the Order and of the Fraternity - is that the essential thing is Baptism, not the service that some assume by vocation or choice. Likewise, I think that to be re-founded in all that the generation of co-responsibility - organised - will help us a lot. And here we can make a lot of progress from ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS.

3-THE KIND OF CHURCH THAT POPE FRANCIS IS PROPOSING. In the same order, it is important to reflect on the kind of Church that Pope Francis is proposing, and which is gradually permeating the life and mission of the Christian community. Taking this into account will help us understand and accept the challenges that are consistent with his proposals, and that affect the Pious Schools in many areas of our lives and mission. Among these challenges, and only with the aim of quoting some examples that can and should inspire our choices, I quote the following:

- a) A Church focused on welcoming the immigrant and fighting exclusion.
- b) A Church that chooses decisively to serve the poor.
- c) A Church in which the role of women is reviewed and valued.
- d) A Church that credibly proclaims the Gospel.



- e) A Church capable of opening up to co-responsible collaboration with different communities and institutions, but with which it can find many points of communion from which to weave networks of work and effort for a different world.
- f) A Church inspired by *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*.

III-REFLEXIONS IN LIGHT OF THE REALITY AND FUTURE OF ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS

It is not for me to describe what ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS is and what it does. What I think I can contribute are some reflections taken from the path traveled and what we can consider for the coming years, and that could guide the development of the network. I will try to be synthetic, sharing with you five realities that we are already living and five lines of advancement that could help the project in which we work, which essentially consist of the Order and fraternity delve into the challenge of building more and more life and mission in the Pious Schools. Let us go.

A-IMPORTANT ASPECTS THAT WE ARE ALREADY LIVING.

I must say two things at the out point: first of all, I stress that I have no desire for completeness, but to cite some aspects that we already live quite clearly, because they illuminate. Secondly, I would like to stress that these aspects clearly indicate direction and can and should be deepened.

1. **Comprehensive sustainability.** I believe that the challenge of comprehensive sustainability to which I have referred above is progressively developed from the work of ITAKA-Escolapios. It is probably the area you're contributing to the most. I say this because this has to do with human and economic resources, leadership styles, project and teamwork, Piarist identity, etc. I believe that the Itaka-Escolapios network is being decisive in the efforts of a comprehensively sustainable Pious Schools.
2. **Assisting in the location of the Fraternity - and the Province - in the presence.** We are aware that the various Fraternities of the Pious Schools walk differently, at different institutional times. But what we are also clear about is that their institutional participation in the network helps each of them to position themselves in a more real and objective way before the mission. But I also believe that it also helps the Province, because it forces it to work in a more sustainable and co-responsible way, and to develop more clearly the dynamism of Participation. I think we must overcome the claim that it just helps the Fraternity. It helps everyone. But for this to be true, those who carry out the life of the network must try to share more clearly and transparency, perhaps with a better organization, the daily lives of teams and projects.



3. **Summoning more people to the project.** This is an objective fact that is sometimes overlooked. The Itaka-Escolapios network is a very valid tool to "add", to incorporate more people into the global project of the Pious Schools. Gradually it incorporates partners, collaborators, volunteers, institutional relations, families, alumni, etc. The "ability to convene" must be a more decisive part of the dynamisms from which we Piarists carry out our mission.
4. **Helping manage effectively and organizationally.** There is no doubt that Itaka-Escolapios helps in improving our management. On the one hand, we have witnessed malfunctions that have caused us to lose possibilities, but that very thing, if it becomes a lesson learned, helps to improve. But we have also seen a clear improvement in project development, in the presentation of reports, in the day-to-day management of the mission. Effective management is not at odds with mystique; on the contrary, it enriches it and turns it into a dynamism of development, in sustainable progress. This is a very good contribution.
5. **Institutional clarity.** The fifth point that I want to highlight from the path traveled is that little by little, we have been gaining in "institutional clarity" of the network that we have created. Itaka-Escolapios is the result of the clear decision of the Provinces involved and the committed Fraternities to create an instrument at the service of the project of the construction of the Pious Schools. It is up to the Provinces and the Fraternities, not the network itself, to establish their scope, their limits, and their spheres of influence. It is up to those who create the network to mark the direction, always in permanent - and organized - listening to those who carry it forward. It is the responsibility of the "parents", not only of the network, to work for their best location in the Piarist set. It is up to the network to give ideas, propose initiatives and develop the commitments made, always at the service of the Pious Schools. We are not just looking for an "executing arm", but an "instrument of creation". But this is only possible if the Order and the Fraternity promote it, and if the network is placed accurately in this space, which is its space.

B-SOME POINTS WE CAN RETHRED OR ENHANCE

I would also like to point out five aspects in which I believe that we need to grow or perhaps rethred what we are doing. In the previous points I have already indicated some suggestions. Right now, I'm going to try to be more specific.

1. **Advance in the "network culture".** Network working is a culture, sometimes not well taken advantage of by us. In fact, the Order itself is a network, and we are still on our way to understanding all its virtualities. Itaka-Escolapios must continue to develop its network dynamism in areas where the Order and the Fraternity entrust



it to it. And it must ensure an adequate connection with the teams that lead the Order and the Fraternity. At the general level, it will be good to improve the organizational structure from which the General Congregation and the General Council are informed of the life and initiatives of Itaka-Escolapios, and in turn the mechanism from which these management authorities can offer their orientations to the network. This is one of several aspects that we can consider for improving the service of our own network.

2. **Advancing in the provincial dynamics of the network.** Right now, I think the demarcation level is the most important we must consider. The way in which the service and reality of Itaka-Escolapios is located in each Province and in every presence will help a lot throughout the project from which we are talking. Itaka-Escolapios' participation in local and provincial presence teams should be well studied and fostered.
3. **Establishing dynamisms of "formation in Piarist culture"** of all those who participate in the network and members of demarcations and fraternities. Training is a necessary investment in all the people who work on the Piarist project, and especially those who do so in the "motor teams", as are many of the workers and volunteers of Itaka-Escolapios. I think it would be very good if everything about training in "Piarist Culture" (identity, knowledge of options, communion of dynamics, etc.) was included in the sexenal project. The possibilities offered today by telematics platforms are formidable. We must set up a program.
4. **Placing the network in the key of participation and in the key dynamisms of sustainability and synodality.** I have referred to these issues before, and I now reaffirm in them. In the whole project of the Pious Schools, Itaka-Escolapios must be placed and understood within the life key of "Participation", and especially thought in the dynamisms of integral sustainability and synodality. I think from this mentality we can go further. But for this to be understood, systematic and thorough work of explanation and testimony is necessary. Explanation from those responsible for the presences (local or provincial) and testimony, humble, patient and serving, from which they drive the network. It is the way.
5. **Always take care of the vocation of service from Itaka-Escolapios.** The essential identity of the network is to be at the service of the Pious Schools. Its proper location and the fact that it is treated with respect and valuation by the Pious Schools will always help in this objective. And alongside these two important points, it is crucial that the network's initiatives be always discerned in the light of the global project.

For example, there may be some options of the Order that should not enter or be coordinated from Itaka-Escolapios, so that they can be developed in a balanced way in the globality of the Pious Schools, and others on the contrary, they must enter and be enhanced by them. That is why the discernment of those responsible for the Order and the Fraternity is decisive, because everything has its moment and its process, and we must know how to understand it.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude this contribution with a word which I consider fundamental, and I pronounce it on behalf of the Order: THANK YOU. I would like to thank all the people who make it possible to develop and serve ITAKA-ESCOLAPIOS, and I want to do so clearly: you are contributing generously and dedicatedly to Calasanz' dream. As in all of us in this struggle, there will also have been times of difficulty or feelings of disappointment in you. This is part of the process, and everything happens second when we see and accept the fruits. For example, when we will open the Kikonka Children's School, in D. R. Congo, or when we are informed that the Venezuelan Schools remain open, or that the associated Piarist volunteering in Itaka-Escolapios has grown, or that the Kamda school project in northern India is becoming better and better.

I want to end by quoting Calasanz, and with it I want to add a sixth dynamism that we must consider as one of the best spaces for the location and service of the network: the expansion of the **Pious Schools**. I do not develop it, because that would take a long time, but I don't want to stop underlining it. The dynamism of expansion is at the genes of the Pious Schools, and that is why it must also be among the priorities of the network. This is what Calasanz said: "*If our Work is carried out with due care, there is no doubt that insistent requests for foundation will continue in many states, cities and towns, as has been proven to this present.*"¹ He placed this phrase no more or less than in his Constitutions. That clearly indicates the importance Calasanz attached to "**doing things right.**" Our life and mission must be lived like this: with daily care. Class-to-class, meeting-to-meeting, project-to-project, student-to-student, day by day, every day. Only in this way do we live in fidelity the Piarist vocation. It is good to remember from time to time. For us there is no quality without generosity.

THANKS A LOT

Fr. Pedro Aguado, Fr. General

Rome, 8 March 2021.

¹ Saint Joseph Calasanz. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation, 175.