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# Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning

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Francis' s pedagogy and Service-Learning  
spirituality

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### 3. FRANCIS'S PEDAGOGY AND SERVICE-LEARNING SPIRITUALITY

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#### Abstract

There are multiple speeches addressed to the education world likely to define some of Pope Francis's pedagogy principles. In order to approach his thinking and identify some reading keys, we have explored his cultural and spiritual lines. The ideal horizon where Bergoglio belongs is that of the French Jesuit School, greatly influenced by the Argentine phenomenology and by the People's Theology theorists. Guardini's principle of polar opposites has a paramount role expressing thought, action and management logic that is not dialectical, where synthesis absorbs—and destroys—the identity of its distinct parts. It is not the addition of such parts; it is more of a triadic, generative, and creative view, which prompts a third potential area, the space of promise, fruit of tension between the parts. Mercy is the sign of his pontificate and the base on which the social dimension is founded: "a poor Church, for the poor". These principles lead to a pedagogy defined by the search for harmony between opposing and contrasting elements (peacebuilding pedagogy), by the social prominence of the poor and excluded (pedagogy of the people), by listening to the call of mercy that encourages the mission to live it, experience it, and teach it (pedagogy of tenderness). These principles have

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been part of the pedagogical proposal of service-learning from the beginning. This article deals particularly with some of the antinomies faced by this pedagogical approach and the implicit promise to surmount them; the place of the socially excluded and the spaces of encounter inside and out of the classroom; the role of the education agents in the care of the concrete and living being and its connection with academic learning.

## Introduction

Pope Francis is regarded as a major hodiern Master. His vision, full of wisdom and concrete action, is recognized by a public not strictly limited to the Catholic Church. Particularly, he exposes, as a unique feature—compared with other popes—a special attention towards pedagogical topics; continuously appealing to the great influence education has on the political, social, and environmental fields. Actually, there are multiple speeches addressed to the education world (around 150) likely to define some of his pedagogical proposal principles.

In order to approach his thinking and identify some reading keys, we have explored his cultural and spiritual line. The ideal horizon where Bergoglio belongs is that of the French Jesuit School, greatly influenced by Argentine phenomenology and by the People's Theology theorists. His charism is Jesuit, but he is profoundly Franciscan as well. He was formed in the light of the Vatican Council II and the Latin-American Conference of Medellin, also, an active protagonist of the Conference of Aparecida, which he presided over. He is a great admirer of Paul VI and appreciates the views of Gaston Ferrary, Michel De Certeau and Alberto Methol Ferré. Still, it is Romano Guardini and his notion of the symphony of opposites and the doctrine of the unity of the transcendentals, his major influence on the construction of his vision, shown at the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

There are three polar pairs in *Evangelii Gaudium*: fullness and limit; idea and reality; globalization and localization. These three pairs give rise to the principles of discernment: time is superior to space; unity is superior to conflict; reality is superior to ideas; the sum is superior to the part. The Apostolic Exhortation deals with other antinomies as well, such as: being contemplative in action; counterposition of theory and praxis; evangelization and human promotion. This is not about counter positions; it is more about a reciprocal call, which does not preclude differences between the parts.

For this article we have chosen, apart from Guardini's thought, Juan Carlos Scannone's view (Scannone 2017) -Jesuit priest, regarded as one of the Theory of the People's fathers, Bergoglio's teacher in Argentina- to start depicting the fundamental lines of Pope Francis's spirituality in terms of his social ethics. This view is intertwined with speeches, writings, reflections, and some meditations written by Bergoglio himself—even before becoming the Pope- interpreted in the light of education and of current times (Bergoglio 2014a; Bergoglio 2014b).

## 1. Pope Francis's social ethics

The social ethics of Pope Francis, as described by Scannone (Scannone, 2017), pursues mercy. One of the resulting consequences is the preferential option for the poor, notion arising in the Latin American Church between Medellín and Aparecida. Bergoglio declared from the very beginning his desire of “a poor Church for the poor”, regarding the latter as both recipients and protagonists of the Church's mission. Today, “Sister Mother Earth”

*The social ethics of Pope Francis pursues mercy. One of the resulting consequences is the preferential option for the poor. Today, “Sister Mother Earth” is among the most fragile of the fragile. This is why we are immersed in a unique social and environmental crisis especially considered by the Pope in an encyclical which challenges us to make decisions out of mercy, historically effective, aiming at the life of the poor and the earth. His social ethics involves not only these notions, but also a method; the practice of discernment.*

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His social ethics involves not only these notions, but also a method; the practice of discernment, the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to acknowledge the will of the Father in Christ.

Even though there are other key subjects to Bergoglio, such as the joy of Gospel, a non-self-referential ecclesial community, an outgoing Church, the pastoral conversion, going out to the peripheries; his approach to facing the family's great issues, culture, economy, politics, ecology and also education, always lead to these three concepts: mercy, the preferential option for the poor, and a spirit of discernment.

### **Mercy**

Francis's motto is “*miserando atque eligendo*”: “Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him”. By acknowledging himself a sinner, he accepts being chosen by pure and gratuitous mercy and, thus, called to live it, practice it and teach it: “A sinner, yet a minister of mercy”. According to Scannone,

*This is the charism, the existential mood, the doctrine and style of Pope Francis's government. (Scannone, 2017 p.17)*

This is, thus, the beginning of a prophetic time of Mercy for the Church and for humankind. Mercy comes as a message of Grace in times of violence, conflict and pandemic which define this moment, with an encouraging offer to open our hearts, our eyes, our ears towards brothers and sisters in need. In fact, the word Mercy literally means “to have a heart (*cor*) for the poor (*miseri*). In times of suffering, only Mercy can awaken hearts.

Mercy reveals itself as tenderness, translating the affection God provides us and which, therefore, we can offer to our neighbor and society as a whole, triggering the so-called “revolution of tenderness”, naturally inherent to our fragility. We step into this world weak, unarmed, deprived of all what is necessary and, consequently, objects to tenderness, compassion, care. It is preserving this condition that evidences the limits of being human, our own fragility, to the extent of feeling ashamed; what opens us to Mercy, on the grounds of reciprocity, through which Misery and Mercy encounter and embrace each other.

The path of Mercy and tenderness leads us to a subsequent polar pair, the one existing between Truth and Mercy. Mercy is not affirmed against the Truth, but as a representation of Truth. Tension lies between the universal value of what is true and the practice of Mercy, which is always particular. Both poles imply each other to such extent that there is no moral of the situation capable of relativizing what is true; just like no abstract doctrine can terminate the specific mode of Charity requested by the same Truth. In the words of the pontiff in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,

*(...) mercy does not exclude justice and truth, but first and foremost we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God's truth. (Pope Francis, 2016, AL, 311)*

According to Scannone (Scannone, 2017) Mercy has, to Bergoglio, a trinitarian approach, since the main source of Mercy is the Father, who reveals himself in the Son's Gospel, both through the social doctrine of the Church and through every faithful, in the light of the Spirit, which provides the strength to put it into practice.

*To Francis, mercy has a trinitarian root, on which the social dimension of Gospel grounds, this means, every woman's and every man's infinite dignity stems from the Father's infinite love, thanks to the redemptive blood of the Son, which does not only redeem the individual, but also the social relationships between men, and from the overwhelming action of the Holy Spirit, who reaches everyone, penetrates every human and social situation and undoes the knots, even the most insurmountable and impenetrable human affairs. (Scannone, 2017, p.19)*

The Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* also contains references to the conceptual unity that gathers Mercy, social ethics, and the mystery of the Trinity.

*This joyful and life-giving contemplation of the face of God, revealed in Jesus Christ as a Father rich in mercy (cf. Ef2,4), enables us to experience in a liberating and responsible way the “mystique of living together” as a Church, which provides the leaven of the universal fraternity “capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others just as their heavenly Father does”. It is also the source of the imperative to allow our hearts and minds to heed the cry of the poor and of the earth, and to give concrete expression to the “social dimension of evangelization”, as an integral part of the Church’s mission; for “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person but also the social relationships existing between men”. It is true that “we may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never neglect: the option for the last ones, those whom society throws away”. This option must pervade the presentation and study of Christian truth. This is why, in the course of forming*

*of a Christianly inspired culture, the focus is mainly on the discovery of the Trinitarian imprint of creation, since it turns the cosmos in which we live into a “relationship network”, and where “it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things”, in order to foster “a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (Pope Francis, 2017, VG 4a).*

*According to Francis, we have been called to foster a culture of mercy to the extent of giving birth to a real cultural revolution: the revolution of tenderness. Infinite mercy comes first; it can take the first step, break new ground without fear, go ahead towards the encounter, seek what is further away and reach the crossroad to embrace the excluded.*

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The poor and the earth invoke the heaven, and demand justice and compassion from us, not only for those who experience it, but also for the personal, social, and structural sin of those who cause such suffering. According to Francis, we have been called to foster a *culture of mercy* to the extent of giving birth to a real cultural revolution: *the revolution of tenderness*. Infinite mercy comes first; it can take the first step, break new ground without fear, go ahead towards the encounter, seek what is further away and reach the crossroad to embrace the excluded.

## **Preferential Option for the Poor**

According to Francis, the truth is more clearly seen and in a more complete way, if you do not look at it from the center, but from the peripheries, instead. It is there where he stands to observe, in the view of the smallest and the poorest, today's world, its crisis, and the answer the Church should give towards its missionary conversion and to the whole humankind, towards its social, environmental and community conversion.

From the peripheries and from his perspective, therefore, there is a re-discovery of reality: both the centrality of the poor in Jesus' message and the current inhumane situation of the human poor majority, which suffers the consequences of exclusion, arising from the multiple crisis the modern world is undergoing: economic, political, democratic, environmental, demographic, migratory and sanitary. We are facing a process defined as an epoch change, which grounds on the paradigm of indifference or "the globalization of indifference" (Pope Francis, 2013b), as Pope Francis defined it during his first trip to Lampedusa, given the dramatic situation of migrants dead in the Mediterranean.

Therefore, the Pope encourages us to "heed the cry of the poor" (Pope Francis, 2013a, EG, 187-188), which demands us not only to the simplest and most common gestures of solidarity, but also to find a solution to the structural causes of poverty and pursue an integral development. To such purpose, it is necessary to value solidarity, which Francis views as a cultural change from competitive individualism towards the creation of a new mindset focused on the community,

*The word "solidarity" is quite worn out and is sometimes misinterpreted. It is much more than a few rare acts of generosity. It means creating a new mindset focused on the community, on everybody's life prevailing over the acquisition of everything by a few. Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction of those who understand the social role of property and the universal destination of goods as a reality prior to private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good. That is why solidarity must be lived as the determination to restitute the poor what belongs to them (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 188-189).*

Says the Venezuelan theologian Pedro Trigo (Trigo, 2013, pp.247-262), there are at least three possible interpretations of the expression "Church of the poor": 1) that the Church, although not poor, regards them as the preferential recipients of its actions; 2) that they feel at home when at Church; 3) that they are privileged active subjects of their life and mission, as the heart of the Church and its praxis. The first option must be, in Pope Francis's view, discarded, since it places them as mere beneficiaries or passive addressees of a Church self-regarded as a benefactor and assistance provider. The second is already a

fact in many places; the third, instead, is yet to be seen. A genuine spiritual, pastoral, and structural conversion is required to place them in the center of the Church's pathway as privileged active subjects.

Another aspect pointed out by Scannone (Scannone, 2017) is how much the Holy Father appreciates the poor's way to live faith; that is to say, in uncultivated popular piety, central element of the People's Theology.

*Francis propounds a new practice and a new hermeneutics, in the light of listening to the People: The questions of our people, their suffering, their plights, their dreams, their struggles, their worries, they all carry a hermeneutic value we cannot ignore if we mean to seriously incorporate the notion of incarnation. What they wonder helps us wonder, their inquiries, inquire us.*

*te the notion of incarnation. What they wonder helps us wonder, their inquiries, inquire us. (Pope Francis, 2018, GE 44)*

Also, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, on the call to holiness in today's world, Francis propounds a new practice and a new hermeneutics, in the light of listening to the People:

*The questions of our people, their suffering, their plights, their dreams, their struggles, their worries, they all carry a hermeneutic value we cannot ignore if we mean to seriously incorpora-*

This openness to listening to the People also appears in Miguel Angel Fiorito's writings, a Jesuit and spiritual father of Bergoglio's,

*The fundamental questions a pastor should ask himself if he claims: "I believe in the Holy Spirit" should lead to discover the Holy Spirit's effect on his faithful people. To put it bluntly, he will ask himself: how does the Lord go through my people's lives? How do they receive His presence? How do my people confess to the Holy Spirit? (Fiorito, 2019, p. 339)*

These are some of the theological and spiritual elements that encourage and enlighten the pontiff's decisions, which become, as well, a clear discernment criterion in the view of the latter.

### ***In the Spirit of Discernment***

According to Pope Bergoglio, Love is stronger than sin (personal or structural) both in personal and historic-social situations. From tension and excess, novelty and abundance

of harmony and life arise, there, where discord and death would seem obvious. This is confirmed, for instance, by the journey of the social movements, whom he calls “social poets”: community salvation experiences which often lead to creative reactions.

*Evangelii Gaudium* describes the dynamics of conflict resolution finding inspiration in the harmony of opposites, which shows a dialectic of opposites (rather than of contradictions), as explained by Guardini<sup>7</sup> (Guardini, 1997). In both levels, without losing tensional dynamism, we reach the unity of opposites in a superior synthesis which does not prevent conflict but is not trapped in it, either; in both of them unity, peace and harmony are the follow-up criteria.

*The Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium develops four principles as discernment criteria.*

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* develops four principles as discernment criteria:

**1.** “*Time is greater than space*” (Pope Francis, 2013a, EG, 222-225): this first principle of discernment encourages us, in a revolutionary way, to initiate processes rather than possess spaces. This involves generating processes of people-building, rather than reaching immediate results which yield easy, quick and short-term gains, but which do not enhance human fullness. It means generating new dynamisms to build people and human fullness but where those who create them do not pursue positions of power.

**2.** “*Unity prevails over conflict*” (Pope Francis, 2013a, EG, 226-230): Consonance, both interior and public, comes with resolution in a superior level, which preserves the precious potentialities of the contrasting polarities. This is achieved when conflict is faced, that is to say, when conflict is embraced to be resolved and transformed into a link in a chain leading to a new process, in a new vital area where conflict, tension and the opposites can

<sup>7</sup> According to Guardini, there is a certain structure of concepts related in terms of “opposition” or polarity. The notions of “opposition” and “polarity” coincide. Guardini prefers to use the word “polarity” because, as he himself says, it is “less worn out”. Subsequently, the expression “polar opposites”, the title of his book, began to be used. What does the expression “polar opposites” mean to Guardini? It is a particular relationship where two things or moments exclude each other and, however, they are connected at the same time. This relationship, which appears in every quantitative, qualitative or form determination, is called “polar opposition”. That is to say, two extremes exclude and connect to each other at the same time. Contrarily, when using “contradictions”, Guardini means the relationship between two things that mutually deny and exclude and, therefore, cannot be together. An example of polar opposites in Pope Francis’s language would be the relationship between “formal” and “non- formal” education, where there is a distinction of form, but where both reclaim each other. An example of “contradiction” is the relationship between the “Throw-away Culture” and the “Culture of Encounter”, where one of them implies the denial of the other.

Guardini thinks that polar opposite realities, as elements of a single reality in tension (not in contradiction), move towards a “new unity”, a third superior element that arises creatively, thanks to the same tension that boosts them. This “new unity” is not created by mixing or negotiating, but by raising these realities towards a superior and transcendent level.

reach a diversified and life-giving unity. The result is a criterion of good discernment and also peace which, as explained, harmonizes all diversities. Beauty crowns, confirms and fills with harmony, since diversity is beautiful when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation. It becomes a reconciled diversity.

**3.** “Reality is more important than ideas” (Pope Francis, 2013a, EG, 231-233): Ideas, conceptual elaborations, are supposed to capture, understand and manage reality. Since they are a human elaboration, it is necessary to determine their bipolar opposition to reality. Ideas must be prevented from detaching reality, from deforming or hiding it, instead of showing it. Among the diverse ways of masking reality, he mentions the following: angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, declarationist nominalisms, formal rather than real projects, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom.

**4.** “*The whole is greater than the part (and of the mere sum of its parts)*” (Pope Francis, 2013a, EG, 234-237): A distorted conception of reality is biased, just as is the mere affirmation of one of the poles in conflictive tension. To Bergoglio, the priority of time is related to the final fullness in front of the limit. It always keeps a polar tension between the global and the local sphere. However, the criterion is broad, 360°, since it embraces all kinds of totality. It distinguishes uniform totality (and homogeneous) and multiform totality (differentiated), in order to discard the former and support the latter.

These four principles are represented, in terms of thought, as the “polar opposites”, and in terms of image, as a polyhedron.

*The model is not the sphere, which is not greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the center, and there are no differences between them. The model is the polyhedron, which represents the convergence of all its parts, which preserve their distinctiveness. Both pastoral and political activities seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of every one. (Pope Francis, 2013a, EG, 236)*

Another common trait is that the four principles reject any kind of partial absoluteness (of a part, of an idea, etc.) which denies the interrelation between the opposites in tension.

Underneath these polarities and their synthesis in a “new unity”, a Trinitarian vision can be perceived as its root and support.

## Pope Francis and education

The challenges posed by education have always been in the heart and in the careful eyes of this Pontiff. Bearing in mind the central ideas of his thinking, it is possible to identify certain principles which give rise to a pedagogy focused on seeking harmony between opposite and counter opposite elements (peacebuilding pedagogy), the social prominence of the poor and excluded (people's pedagogy), and listening to the call of mercy, which encourages the mission to live it, incarnate it and teach it (pedagogy of tenderness).

### *Peacebuilding Pedagogy*

Interestingly, in his multiple speeches to the education world, Bergoglio establishes a relationship between education, dialogue, art, beauty, creativity, and harmony. This pursuit of harmony appears in both of his “cornerstones”, which he frequently mentions: personal harmony, which links together “head, hands and heart” and the “restoration of the educational pact, which has been breached” (Pope Francis 2015). These topics are not to be developed here since literature in connection with them abounds.

Nonetheless, it may be useful to acknowledge this principle or modality proposed by Bergoglio in “his manner”, causing disorder, “making a mess”, and in this way, creating harmonies which arise from a constant tension that is productive and creative. Opposites compose a fertile history. In Spadaro's words,

*Spirit and institution never deny each other, says Francis. The Church is institutionalized by the Holy Spirit (...). This means there is a fluent process of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization: what is useful remains, what is not, does not. The future of the Church is not stiff or rigid. (Spadaro, 2020, p.352)*

The dynamicity he applies to institutional matters is also a criterion to pursue knowledge and “encounter” the truth. To Francis, the truth is not owned; it is found; the wish for the truth comes from “one encounter to the other”, and our relationship with it is not static, since the truth is infinite and it is always possible to immerse in the mystery. It is more of a journey, or an adventure.

The truth on which our existence is based must be open to dialogue, to the challenges posed by the others or by circumstances. The truth is always “sensible”, even if I am not, and the challenge involves remaining open to the other's point of view, trying not to regard our beliefs as something still. It means a dialogue without relativism, but with logos, one that can be shared, reasoning presented in Love, in order to build together a more and more liberating reality.

*There are truths that challenge the individual as a whole, not just his intellect. Therefore, the quest for truth involves a relational harmony of contents, habits, assessments, perceptions, which go beyond a mere collection of information. Walking the way of beauty, from education.*

Perhaps, the hermeneutic key of the quest for truth and hence, the pedagogical method to reach profound knowledge, to Bergoglio, lies in the unity of the transcendentals: the truth is never alone; it is such if good and beautiful.

*There are truths that challenge the individual as a whole, not just his intellect. The encyclopedic illusion, however, can trick us when we mistake the quest for truth with the effort to know things. Simple information overlooks the surface of reality and of the soul: it does neither shake nor move the depths of thought. (Bergoglio, 2014a, p. 24)<sup>8</sup>*

Therefore, the quest for truth involves a relational harmony of contents, habits, assessments, perceptions, which go beyond a mere collection of information. Beauty, regarded not just as what is pleasant or attractive but as that which, when perceivable, fills us with the wonderful profoundness of its mystery and allows us to open to a still more profound truth. Actually, it is said that artists are closer to God because they are more sensitive to the spirit, to the transcendent dimension. What amazes us seizes and abducts us; the truth found this way makes us free.

*How many conflicts could be prevented if we started to think reality as beautiful and only then as good and true! The three things go together. Dividing them has caused lack of unity between contents, attitudes and behaviors, and methods; that is why we often go astray (Bergoglio, 2014a, p. 23)<sup>9</sup>.*

This is the reason of Pope Francis's invitation to seek

*inside of ourselves, in our peoples, beauty, the beauty that is our foundation, with our art, our music, our painting, our sculpture, our literature, what is beautiful. Educate in beauty ... (Pope Francis, 2015a)*

Walking the way of beauty, from education, leads us to build harmonies; both at a personal level, offering an education that constitutes the person, and at a community and social level: harmony in the education system.

8 Translation from Italian into Spanish: Carina Rossa

9 Translation from Italian into Spanish: Carina Rossa

## People's Pedagogy

*A pedagogy of the people, then, requires educators to “encounter the people”, to address to the peripheries and give, from there, an answer to the entire world. The greatest failure of an educator may be to teach within the walls.*

As we said earlier, the preferential option for the poor gives them a role of active subjects, in the center of the action and as the protagonists of change. In “Dear Amazonia” what is discussed is the education offered to develop

their capacities and empowerment; but so that it becomes such, it must be an education suitable to cultivate without uprooting, to foster growth without weakening identity, to support without trespassing (Pope Francis, 2020, QA).

A pedagogy of the people, then, requires educators to “encounter the people”, to address to the peripheries and give, from there, an answer to the entire world.

At the Catholic Education Conference, 2015, an important part of his speech was addressed to religious congregations, whose charisms were born in reply to emergency situations, but which today have transformed their mission. He encouraged them to “go back to their origin”, go to the existential peripheries with an open attitude to learn from them and from their condition:

*This is the first challenge for you: leave those places with plenty of educators and go to the peripheries. (...) Find the needy there, the poor; and they have one thing the youth in the wealthier areas do not, it is not their fault, but a sociological reality: they have experienced survival, even cruelty, even hunger, even injustice. They have a wounded humanity; and I think that our salvation comes from the wounds of a wounded man in the cross. They gain, from such wounds, wisdom, if there is a good educator to guide them. It is not about charity, or teaching to read, or feeding them... No! This is necessary, but temporary. This is the first step. The challenge—and I am encouraging you—is to go there and help them grow in humanity, in intelligence, in values, in habits, so that they can move ahead and take them to other experiences they do not know”. (Pope Francis, 2015)<sup>10</sup>*

Another very forceful statement he pronounced during this conference, when discussing educational and social inclusion, was an invitation to “educate outside the walls”:

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<sup>10</sup> Translation from Italian into Spanish: Carina Rossa

*The greatest failure of an educator may be to teach within the walls: educating within the walls of a privileged culture, the walls of a culture of safety, the walls of a well-off social group which does not move forward. (Pope Francis, 2015)<sup>11</sup>*

Building a “classroom without walls” has multiple meanings to Francis. It is a classroom for everyone, inclusive, one where there are no obstacles or barriers to learning and participating, in accordance with the proposal “Education for everyone without exception” (UNESCO, 2020). Particularly, the wall means a symbol of the inclusion of refugees and immigrants, as well as the broad discourse on a suitable intercultural education.

On the other hand, wishing a “classroom without walls” refers to the global dimension of education, to building networks between schools all around the world, always beginning at the peripheries—let us remind ourselves that Francis's *forma mentis* is global, but it always goes from the peripheries towards the center—and the consequent positive use of technology, which makes the “Global Classroom” possible.

Finally, the expression “classroom without walls” leads to pedagogical proposals which encourage students to leave the classroom, to learn in and from the real contact with the territory needs.

### ***Pedagogy of Tenderness***

Mercy —as discussed earlier—boosts Francis's mission and that is why heeding the clamor of people in pain, of distressing social situations and of the suffering sister and mother earth is at the heart of his educational proposal. This listening is also a call which becomes vocation that renovates the passion for education.

When Pope Francis speaks about “head, hands and heart” (Pope Francis, 2015) he is referring to such compassionate attitude towards the one who suffers and the intention to do something concrete to transform their reality.

The head does not only mean the intellectual rational aspect. It also involves the opening channels: the eyes and the ears, without which the educational action is impossible. No opening means no learning; therefore, the core of the pedagogical task is teaching the ability to hear and see, merging these components with the heart.

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<sup>11</sup> Translation from Italian into Spanish: Carina Rossa

*This is how a whole new scenario is displayed with attitudes and behaviors likely to be developed within the “pedagogy of tenderness”. They range from educating one’s listening, look, compassion, closeness and “fellowness”, to the broad and complex skill of “care” (for oneself, the other, the surrounding world, the Common House); all attitudes and behaviors which conjugate with the value of gratitude and gratuitousness.*

Emotions, which symbolically reside in the heart, enable the opening of these channels, and among them, astonishment and amazement have a privileged place, *There is a fundamental emotion in the learning process: amazement, the capacity to allow ourselves to be wondered, shaken and moved in order to open to a new reality: “Learn from amazement, cultivate amazement”.* (Pope Francis, 2021)

Hardships can also “shake and move” inside. Pain gets us closer to mystery, giving rise to questions of meaning which—very often—open the eyes towards the transcendent dimension. At the same time, these experiences require knowledge and skills suitable to change this so-called negative reality.

Both amazement and a painful experience (personal or not) lead, then, to a conversion which involves several postures, arranged to trigger the capacity of care, closeness, and tenderness.

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### **Service-learning and Francis’s pedagogy**

The principles mentioned hitherto have been part of the service-learning pedagogical proposal from the very beginning. These are some of the clues that may enlighten such educational practice and help us open up to new horizons, to new “promises”. They include, but are not limited to, the following, namely:

## **Service-learning, between Antinomies and Harmonies**

We are discussing service-learning when the performance of a project includes both a pedagogical and a service intention. Generally speaking, these two intentions oppose in our educational institutions, since aspects like theory v. practice, reflection v. experience or study v. life are polarized. However, in the words of Puig Rovira and Palos Rodriguez, what is new about this proposal is precisely the harmony between these two aspects:

*This is an innovative proposal, although based on well-known and long-standing tradition elements, such as service, voluntary work, active citizenship, on the one hand and—on the other—learning, knowledge, skills, and values. Innovation, or novelty, does not reside in the constituent parts but in the close relationship between service and learning in a single articulated, coordinated, and coherent activity. (Puig Rovira & Palos Rodriguez, 2006, p.61)*

Merging learning and service gives rise to a third element, a new pedagogical proposal: service-learning, which transforms both components, adds value and meaning to each one of them and creates new educational qualities. It becomes a profound bond between these two poles, which makes them better and produces new and different results that they would never obtain in isolation.

I could be stated here that the force of this pedagogy lies precisely in the tension existing between these two opposites, visualized in the dash (service-learning) that joins both realities. All the peacebuilding pedagogy potential could be applied and read from the dash that links and transcends the parts.

According to Nieves Tapia,

*One of the greatest strengths of S-L lies precisely in overcoming old antinomies between scientific and ethical education, learning content and developing skills, academic excellence and educational inclusion. (Tapia, 2014, p.55)*

Overcoming these antinomies has resulted in a relationship of mutual benefit, or “virtuous circle” between learning and service, by means of which systematically learned contents nourish the quality of social activity and service impacts on formation and encourages further production of knowledge. Numerous investigations evidence such effects:

*On a worldwide scale, during the last few decades, a growing number of research works have shown how S-L does not only enable the use of learned knowledge in real contexts, but also fosters the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for life, work and citizen participation (Furco, 2005; Billig, 2006; PNES, 2007; Ierullo, 2012) (...) Research and case studies throughout the five continents are definitely showing that good S-L practices produce “a kind of learning that changes perspectives” (Eyler y Giles, 1999) (Tapia, 2014, p.54).*

The newly built knowledge and skills development in excess of the teacher's expectations may become one of the new elements arising from this polar tension.

### **Service-Learning, between Truth, Goodness, and Beauty**

*In the view of many educators and educational institutions, the fact that students learn more than expected is already a positive result of the teaching and learning processes. From the standpoint of Francis's Pedagogy and from a spiritual look of the service-learning approach, we should still pose a few more questions: What kind of knowledge has been acquired? Could such knowledge be considered sapiential? Does such knowledge allow students to reach a dimension of understanding, value, and transcendent sense?*

In the view of many educators and educational institutions, the fact that students learn more than expected is already a positive result of the teaching and learning processes. From the standpoint of Francis's Pedagogy and from a spiritual look of the service-learning approach, we should still pose a few more questions: What kind of knowledge has been acquired? Could such knowledge be considered sapiential? Does such knowledge allow students to reach a di-

mension of understanding, value, and transcendent sense?

A first possible answer is brought about by the unquestionable horizon of meaning offered by service-learning to students. They discover through service how useful it is to study and that everything they learn can be a gift for the others. In general, a person understands the purpose of studying after a good experience of S-L; that it goes beyond the quest of truth (knowledge, information, beliefs reassurance), but of goodness as well (the quest of common good, self-transcendence in the quest of the neighbor's welfare) along with a great deal of gratuitousness.

These two purposes, Truth and Goodness, need each other and open towards a new tridimensional dimension that also includes Beauty.

The trinomial of transcendental values Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, which, from ancient times, philosophers, theologians, and artists have tried to depict, defines Bergoglio's proposal, as previously explained. To the Pope, what is true cannot be detached from what

is good or beautiful. Other contemporary authors, like Howard Gardner (Gardner, 2011), propound it as necessary knowledge for the education of the future; in times of technological progress that neglects transcendent values of the human nature.

From the point of view of prosocial<sup>12</sup> behaviors, it is considered that the transcendent value that leads to performing actions that benefit others—without foreseeing a reward—is Goodness, which within service-learning leads also to Truth since it connects it to certain knowledge. The question arising naturally, following Francis's pedagogy, is: What is the role of Beauty as a value? Is Beauty always present as a typical principle?

This is undoubtedly an interesting field to explore, bearing in mind that an “education to look” would lead us to see elements arising out of Beauty that, so far, have not been evidenced immediately in a service-learning project.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, in our opinion, this is a *sine qua non* characteristic, since it observes Beauty's opposite value: Ugliness, meaning all those realities that cause disdain, indignity, shame, distortion, limit; that is to say, all those characteristics of “the thrown-away” and which constitute the social reality selected to be faced by this project.

What is beautiful is immediately attractive. In turn, what is ugly is rejected. We keep trying to remove all that is connected with suffering, poverty, illness, everything inefficient, disharmonic, everything Pope Francis calls “throw-away culture”, represented in the new forms of poverty: the homeless, the addicts, the migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly, victims of human trafficking, women who suffer exclusion, mistreatment, and violence, etc. Migrants are the greatest victims of these times besieged by terrorism, urban violence, futurelessness and starvation.

Ugliness vindicates the excluded's wounds. In a service-learning experience, students are encouraged to touch with their hands, with a merciful heart, and with the reason competencies such wounds, in order to inquire on the structural causes that provoked them and, if possible, try to change them by means of what they learned in class.

12 The investigation center LIPA (for its acronym in Spanish: Laboratorio de Investigación Prosocial Aplicada), in Spain, considers as prosocial behaviors: “Those behaviors that, without foreseeing extrinsic or material rewards, are beneficial to other people or groups in the other's view, or social goals objectively positive, which increase the chances of positive reciprocity of quality and solidarity in interpersonal or social consequent relationships, preserving the identity, creativity and initiative of the individuals or groups involved” (Roche Olivar, 2010). This definition leaves the target of the assistance action as the last criterion; this means a difference with other approaches centered in the doer of the action, instead of in the recipient. A prosocial action benefits the other, like the other wants to benefit; therefore, it involves knowing the needs, identity and culture of the other, through empathy. The incorporation of the other's reality prevents the risk of tolerating prosocial actions which, rather than benefit, damage the other, by producing dependent relationships or causing others to feel undervalued. (Escotorin et al., 2014, p.13-14).

13 Except in experiences in the world of Art, but in this case it would be a partial aspect involving only a few projects.

*Ugliness vindicates the excluded's wounds. In a service-learning experience, students are encouraged to touch with their hands, with a merciful heart, and with the reason competencies such wounds, in order to inquire on the structural causes that provoked them and, if possible, try to change them by means of what they learned in class. Perhaps, the most important thing we can teach our students is learning how to develop a "fellowness" attitude and its value.*

*This is the compassion we need today in order to defeat the globalization of indifference. This is the look we need when we come across a poor person, an outcast, a sinner. It is a compassion that nourishes from the consciousness that we are sinners as well. (Francis, 2016, P.102)*

Beauty becomes, thus, the "promise" of service-learning, and the way to reach it is Mercy.

### **Service-Learning, between Looks and Love for the World**

Lastly, it is important to highlight the faculty task, encouraged by service-learning, who—due to the particulars of this pedagogy—is "displaced", moves out from the center to leave the students and the pursuit of community welfare instead. This "displacement" does not undermine them, though. On the contrary, it entails great responsibility: allowing students to gain wisdom by getting in contact with the wounds of the humankind; relating this wisdom with formal knowledge; educating the look, "learning to see" the surrounding reality, with a creative look leading to new Harmonies.

As stated by Donha Schlobitten, learning is shaped from the look, and educators must accompany such development,

*Within the space of the look the tasks and questions of the world arise. We must regard the world as a task, superseding ourselves in what is finite and acknowledging what we must develop, based on that which only our vulnerability reveals. (Donha Schlobitten, 2020, p. 236)*

This way to see reality requires care and look training, love for the world and magnanimity.

## Conclusion

Mercy encourages Francis's mission, it is its conducting thread and it is even translated into a pedagogical proposal that keeps the transcendental values— Beauty, Goodness and Truth—alive, always and constantly creating new Harmonies.

Service-Learning joins theory and practice, propounding a kind of incarnated education that teaches student to open their eyes to the misery of the world and their ears to heed their cry.

*In education, how could I put merciful acts into practice?*

Pope Francis, in his closing speech at the Catholic Education Conference 2015, suggested everybody should

think about this: In education, how could I put merciful acts into practice? (Pope Francis, 2015)<sup>14</sup>

We would like to present, at the end of the chapter, for homework—as he himself says—one of his reflections on the final exam:

*Let us open our eyes to see the misery of the world, the wounds of so many brothers and sisters deprived of their dignity and let us feel compelled to heed their cry for help. May our hands reach theirs and hold them close to us so that they can feel the warmth of our presence, of our friendship, and of fraternity. May their cry become our own and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that often reign supreme and conceal hypocrisy and selfishness. (...) We cannot escape the Lord's words, and they will serve to judge us: if we fed the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty; if we welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked; if we devoted time to visit the sick or imprisoned. (cfr. Mt25, 31-45) Likewise, we shall be asked if we helped to clear the doubt, which leads to fear and sometimes to loneliness; if we could fight ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to be rescued from poverty; if we could be close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate leading to violence; if we were patient, following God's example, who is so patient with us; finally, if we commended our brothers and sisters to Lord in prayer. In every one of these "little ones", Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, the exiled...*

14 Translation from Italian into Spanish: Carina Rossa

*to be acknowledged, touched, and carefully assisted by us. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: "in the twilight of life, we will be judged on the basis of love". (Pope Francis, 2015b, MV 15)*

In the twilight of life, we will be judged on the basis of love, this is what the most important exam we must pass is about. As repeatedly stated by Nieves Tapia, service-learning is the proposal that prepares us not only to acquire the necessary competencies to perform well in society, but also in the most important exam of all our existence: the final exam.

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***“We will not change the world, if we do not change education”***

*Pope Francis*

### **3** Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning

A research topic that is increasingly attracting the attention of the academic world is the link between teaching and spirituality, understood in its broadest sense. This will be the focus of the volume that we present to our readers today. The aim is to provide, both for Catholic Institutions of Higher Education and universities at large, a space for reflection in their itinerary of discernment about their identity and specific mission.

This book, the third of the Uniservitate collection, explores these topics, bringing together research and experiences of international scope, from the Catholic university world as well as of other creeds and non-religious convictions, which delve into service-learning from the ethics of care and fraternity.

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