

SECOND WORLD CONGRESS OF THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND
NEW COMMUNITIES

*The Beauty and Joy of Being a Christian in the Education of the
Youth in the Contemporary World¹*

Luis Fernando Figari
Founder of the Christian Life Movement

1. Introduction

I would like to begin cordially greeting all those present, especially the authorities of the Dicastery.

Adherence to Lord Jesus, living faith, allowing oneself to be touched by the splendor of Revelation and by its beauty as an existential appropriation of the Truth, is today an occasion of conflicts to a greater or smaller extent, with our surroundings and some times even within our own families. The culture of death almost seems offended since, in the world it is constructing, its choice of a profane culture has not achieved the complete dismissal of God and the freedom to follow his divine Plan.

But the challenges of the Christian life are not only external. There is an extended inconsistency in the faith of many that has as repercussions the debilitation of its credibility for the youth. Furthermore, the problems of Christian and ecclesial identity within the heart of the People of God also constitute an active and painful anti-testimony, whose effects are devastating due to the characteristics of resonance and globality of modern culture. To this a phenomenon should be added, which is not new but whose effects are new indeed: the children of this world are more astute than are the children of light². That is precisely why the Lord invites his followers to wake up from lethargy, to “be astute”³. Today we see the serious unconsciousness and negligence which is translated into ignoring one’s own history, the expressions of Christian life and thought, especially within the last three or four centuries, contributing to the diffusion of a myth of ‘progress’ proper of the enlightenment, that encapsulates a dynamic of weakening of the faith affecting many, especially the youngest.

These situations should be kept in mind so that while we speak of education in the faith of the youth we do not end up with abstractions and good intentions. Precisely, Pope Benedict XVI diagnoses that the youth “are easily attracted instead

by other things, by a way of life that is rather remote from our convictions.”⁴ Therefore, before the spectacle of a world that is deaf to the announcement of the faith, the Holy Father said not long ago: “You have the duty to once again propose, from your competence, the beauty, goodness, and truth of the face of Christ, in whom every man is called to recognize his most authentic and original features, the model that should be improvingly imitated each time. Therefore, your arduous work, your elevated mission, consists in demonstrating Christ to the man of today, presenting him as the true measure of the maturity and fullness of humanity”⁵. Here we have a valuable key that Pope Benedict offers for the education in the faith of the youth: to present Lord Jesus as someone who illuminates their personal reality, their most unsettling questions, their horizon, their unfoldment, as the definite key to understanding the meaning of life, the way to reach one’s own realization and its plenitude in the definitive encounter with God⁶.

2. Premises

It is well known that a conception of the human being is a premise for any educational process; and to an even greater extent in religious formation. “The subject of Christian education is the entire human person”⁷, said clearly Pope Pius XI. And with the realism which is characteristic of a Christian approximation he remembered that it concerned a fallen man, with a wounded “likeness” and the lack of balance in his inclinations, despite being rescued by Lord Jesus who offers him the path of Reconciliation.

In order to approach the image of the entire human person instead of mutilated perspectives, we must keep in mind that we have been created in the “image and likeness”⁸ of God, that we human beings carry his imprint in our depths, and that the Eternal Verb has precisely assumed human nature in the womb of Immaculate Mary to redeem us, to show us our identity and to give an answer to our most intimate longings, moving us towards the path of personal unfoldment towards the horizon of the full encounter in Love.

The goals of the formation process in faith have been remarkably declared in the II Vatican Councils declaration *Gravissimum educationis*⁹. There we are told that what is sought is the maturity that leads a person to his realization, as it is logical within a Christian perspective, however what is sought above anything else is that the Baptized become more conscious of the faith they have received. That in learning the knowledge contained in the contents of the mysteries of reconciliation, they learn to praise God, particularly in liturgy, and are formed “to live according to the new man in justice and sanctity of truth”¹⁰ oriented to reaching the stature of the perfect man, the supreme *hagionorm*. Equally, one’s own vocation must be

deepened, giving witness to hope¹¹, contributing to the growth of the Church, “and to help in the Christian configuration of the world”¹².

On approaching the subject from the perspective of the faith of the Church and the entire human person, we have it that it is necessary to know the mystery of salvation and its consequences in the personalization of the human (*faith in the mind*); it will be necessary to adore God, to adhere vitally and allow configuration with Lord Jesus (*faith in the heart*); to live the Christian life, give witness to hope and help the transformation of society and culture according to the divine Plan (*faith in action*).

3. Faith in the mind

Faith in the mind corresponds to the spirit of the cognizant subject. It concerns the intellectual aspect, but in a vital, not a dry sense: “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”¹³ and “I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.”¹⁴. These sentences of the Lord demonstrate a horizon of comprehension of the truth that goes far beyond a mere cerebralism, extending itself towards an existential dimension of the human being, which is especially attractive to the youth.

The categorical aspect of faith is not avoidable. Furthermore, “truth is the soul of beauty”¹⁵. The category of “encounter” or even the perspective of “beauty”, despite their elevated value, cannot supplant it. The Church has always supported the importance of intellectual formation, especially concerning the realm of faith. One of the serious evils of our time is the relegation of the doctrine of faith, and therefore an inadequate comprehension facilitates its dissolution when clashing with the aggressive secularism or so many other threats to faith that occur in today’s world. It seems that the *political correctness* of the North American world has reached many so that it “sounds” disagreeable to insist in the adherence to the truth. But the human person, and the young person in particular, are seekers of the truth¹⁶. However it may be, a poorly understood faith will be a faith poorly lived out, with a moral practice all the less coherent and an in-existent or epidermic worship, as we see widespread today, and certainly not specially nor exclusively among the youth.

However, despite its transcendence, there are some who do not consider the faith in the mind as important. Thus, we can verify how in many areas of catholic formation the religious formation has been abandoned or replaced by subjective approaches, in many cases with a stressed emotive and sentimental tone, as if faith

was a subject without importance on which each one can give an opinion according to what they think or the dictates of their caprice.

Underlying these mistakes of perspective we can find an activism or reductionism, or perhaps the absence of capacity or knowledge, or the effective loss of faith and its substitution by “impacting” succedanea or by sociological or anthropological notions in fashion.

From the splendor of God’s truth, the authentic dynamisms are found, as well as the values and decoding keys that orient and give meaning to human activity, and furthermore to the youth’s particular questionings.

The orientation which should be given in this field is to provide adequate knowledge in order to satisfy the urge of searching within the young person, which would be the first of the acts of prudence, *consiliari*. This means to consult or to find. This way the youth finds himself in condition to analyze in the light of reason, judging whether what is found is apt to its end, which is the second step of the prudential formula – *indicare*. And if his informed conscience accepts it, in communion of faith, to make it one’s own in order to become more capable to christianly interpret his relation with God, with himself, with others and with nature. In this process there must be collaboration with he who is being formed so that he can learn how to think critically and to develop an integral perspective on human knowledge. Along with this there must be a solid education in catechetical knowledge as well as Christian anthropology and psychology, in order to avoid a tension between mental development and maturity on the one hand, and the content and projection of faith on the other.

During the entire process of Christian formation an appealing pedagogy must be developed in order to captivate and sustain interest. It is not a matter of artifice, but of deepening on the truth, of allowing oneself to be illuminated by its splendor and highlighting, from the richness of the deposit of faith, those accents which respond to an organic process oriented towards the students, attending to their particular reality¹⁷.

4. Faith in the heart

Faith in the heart corresponds to the area of feelings and will. The cognitive understanding of Truth is not quite enough, its vital assimilation is necessary. It must reach the depths of the young person. Faith does not stall in its conceptual objective aspect; rather its dynamism seeks to radiate the entire person. Through the experience it goes beyond the expansion of the Truth, to the point that it can be

experienced as a gift that when expanded, stirs up emotional movements and even manifests itself as *pulchrum fidei*.

Though it is certain that Christian life is much more than mere feelings, the voluntary demonstration of the act of faith is not produced only by the intellectual motivation, but also by the affective one. Thus, the psychological and affective aspect is declared basic and indispensable.

It is highly important to conceive the approach to this dimension in the perspective of sharing from our own experience of faith and of encounter with the Lord Jesus, announcing Him¹⁸ in first person as someone who has encountered Him and manifests an affective adherence to Him. The ideal path to reach this goal is the one indicated by Christ from the top of the Cross: «Behold your mother¹⁹». It clears the way of the filial love to the Mother, woman of the faith, that leads us to the Immaculate Heart, which is full of beatings of the Most Sacred Heart, towards Whom she conduces in the most beautiful and exciting experience of loving faith and encounter with Jesus in the intimate of ourselves.

With such an approach we will not only live the testimonial dimension with the ardor of living the unfoldment of faith in all its beauty, joy and enthusiasm, but also the great amazement, that never ceases, that as we educate others in the faith we are also being educated.

Likewise it is necessary to consider that the education in this area also centers itself in the transformation of the habits or in the building of moral virtues, directing the person to the goodness that perfects as a human being. If the will frequently fails it is because it is hindered by the ruptures and erroneous ways of decoding what constitutes the true good, yielding to the succedanea, misunderstanding the ideal of beauty, as an expression of harmony and order in good and the truth, with one's own likes or dislikes governed by mere subjectivism or whims. The mastery or exercise in virtues helps to direct the will towards the objective good and to drive it away from any disorder.

The adherence to Jesus, and the ardent following of his steps along the way of faith, are fundamental dimensions of a vital encounter and of an opening, as effective as solidly affective, to Him who is the full answer to the hunger of infinity, kindness, beauty, truth of the human being. In all, it is indispensable to keep in mind that Christianity is the personalizing religion. It is based on the relation between the person and the subject of God, One and Triune. This "I-You"

relation has to be noticeable not only in the intellectual field, but also, and very especially, in the vital one.

5. Faith in action

Faith in action is the projection of the *faith in the mind* and *in the heart*, expressed in our everyday life and in our testimony. It is necessary to indicate that faith in action, in the educational aspect, does not consist only in fostering actions, but fundamentally in developing habits of acting righteously and subsequently employing these actions to respond to the Plan of God for the fulfillment of the human being in his very self and in relation to the others.

In this field it is essential to refer to the liturgy, since when it is well conducted and well understood, produces a highly positive impact in the emotional and cognitive areas, at the same time that it is a foundation and an expression of the Christian life, which is born out of it and leads to it²⁰.

Similarly, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the *functional diaconic* orientation which the Christian has. Life is service²¹. This diaconic orientation must be underlined and applied through the transmission of the Good News and the transformation of the World according to the divine Plan.

Considering this, all of the effort of the education in the faith seeks to cooperate with God's gift to the person which is benefited from the educational process, having the objective to accompany them in the way of faith. In this sense it must express a reverence for a greater process, where education is only one of the factors and certainly not the only one, for which the real and concrete respect of freedom must be one of its characteristics, as well as the non imposition of a way of being or doing, but to communicate the enthusiasm for the adherence to Lord Jesus and what this means in the integral fulfillment of the human person, which includes the communitarian dimension. The work of active participation in the mission of the Church, thus contributing to the Kingdom, is the unifying goal that gives meaning to good works, social and personal.

Conclusion

We have succinctly tried to express some ideas on the education of the youth in the faith as an answer to their deepest necessities, to their daily preoccupations, to their existential dilemmas and to their horizons, from the light of the truth, goodness and

beauty which Jesus awakens in those who learn to respond to their calling and open themselves to his dynamism of love and reconciliation.

Notice: This text has been translated by members of the Christian Life Movement and has not been revised by the author.

The digital version of this document has been prepared by the Christian Life Movement. All rights reserved (©).

The digital version of this text can only be reproduced with pastoral reasons, without any modifications and keeping the integrity of its meaning. The source of the document must be clearly quoted. It is understood that it can only be used in non-commercial publications and under the conditions previously explained.

Notes

¹ Title based on the theme received by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, promoter and organizer of the Second World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, held at Rocca di Papa (Italy), May 31st–June 2nd, 2006.

² See *Lk* 16:8; H.H. Blessed Pius IX, *Apostolicae nostrae caritatis*, 8/1/1854, 1; also see Saint Eugene de Mazenod, OMI, *Información*, n. 439, January 2005.

³ See *Mt* 10:16.

⁴ H.H. Benedict XVI, *Meeting with the clergy of the Italian Diocese of Aosta*, 7/25/2005.

⁵ H.H. Benedict XVI, *To the members of the Pontifical Academies*, 11/5/2005.

⁶ See H.H. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 10.

⁷ H.H. Pius XI, *Divini illius Magistri*, 34.

⁸ *Gen* 1:26.

⁹ See *Gravissimum educationis*, 2.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ See *1Pe* 3:15.

¹² *Gravissimum educationis*, loc. cit.

¹³ *Jn* 8:32.

¹⁴ *Jn* 17:19.

¹⁵ Romano Guardini, *El espíritu de la liturgia*, Centre de Pastoral Litúrgica, Barcelona 1999, p. 80.

¹⁶ See *Qo* 1:13; H.H. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 21.

¹⁷ See *Medellin*, V, 14a and VII, 13b.

¹⁸ See H.H. John Paul II, *Homily in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo during the mass for the clergy, religious and seminarians*, 1/26/1979, 2.

¹⁹ *Jn* 19:27

²⁰ See *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 10.

²¹ See *Gal* 5:13; *Mt* 20:28; *Mk* 10:45; *Lk* 1:38.