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# Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

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Global Citizenship Education (GCED):  
from ideal fraternity to real solidarity

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## 9. GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: FROM IDEAL FRATERNITY TO LIVED PRO-SOCIALITY

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### Abstract

The aim of this work is to present a reflection on the essential value of Service-learning in the Scholas educational program, which harmoniously integrates the cognitive, affective and behavioural areas. The change of time and the crisis in current education require promoting a new educational paradigm, committed to global citizenship and the transformation of reality. Faced with a liquid and confused society, with fragile links, the Scholas Occurrentes project arises, whose mission is to make a change in education based on the culture of encounter. Welcoming plurality and diversity is essential for universal brotherhood. Social, cultural and religious difference is valued as a source of wealth for integral education. This educational intuition of Pope Francis rejects utilitarian and elitist criteria that rule out the most vulnerable or the different. Unconditional acceptance, inclusive education and dialogue are signs of identity. But also didactics, understood as the place of encounter between educators and students. For Scholas, university and school make sense if they are no longer self-referential and go out to the peripheries. Service-learning methodology is the ideal model to build that bridge between what is thought and what has been lived, between theory and practice, and between university and society. Young people, from an outgoing experience, learn by serving and acting on the reality they want to transform. But, at the same time, that reality transforms students to be the engine of social change. Breaking down prejudices and standards, adjusting expectations, growing emotionally and reinforcing prosocial values are Service-learning strong points as a hallmark for a global citizen education typical of the Scholas Occurrentes project.

### 1. Introduction

We are living a time of global crisis characterized by the loss of basic certainties, uprooting, depersonalization and discontinuity. The roots of memory and tradition have been forgotten. Technological advances affect social, cultural and communication changes; current economy affects the labour market, consumption and social differences; the development model affects the environment; and the change in the social structure

affects the human being and its relationships. There prevails feeling, image, immediacy, uncertainty, indifference and the law of the strongest.

Modern society, rooted in secularization and moral relativism, places the human being before a restless humanity. The way of building liquid links and understanding reality has a bearing on the processes of construction of personal and collective identity. The Pope echoes this scenario stating that:

*In today's world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference... (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 30).*

This situation also affects the educational system and our young people. Digitization is growing dramatically in recent decades and giving rise to new ways of communication. Everything seems to indicate that in a world in which technological development predominates, aspects such as communication, encounters and inclusion would be strengthened. However, the differences are becoming more pressing and the throwaway society is gaining ground even in educational institutions.

Specifically, the role of technology in times of pandemic has been relevant, since lifestyles have been significantly modified by teleworking, teleconsumption, distance leisure and even online teaching. All these contributions become a double-edged sword that affects our young people. On the one hand, there is no doubt about the benefits of technology to facilitate communication, but on the other hand, the digital divide is increasing along with the danger of addictions and dependencies. In this sense, the Pope affirms that:

*Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups. The digital world is a public square, a meeting-place where we can either encourage or demean one another, engage in a meaningful discussion or unfair attacks.<sup>42</sup>*

There are multiple challenges that technology poses at the socio-educational level. Many of them especially affect the ways of establishing interpersonal and communicative relationships in today's society.

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42 Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the 50th World Communications Day (2016).

## 2. Communication in a globalized and virtual world

Digitization allows young people to communicate more fluently, improving their level of socialization, especially those who have less social skills to establish interpersonal relationships physically. In the networks they feel accepted, recognized and can express themselves in a simple way. Thus, *“The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.”*<sup>43</sup>

This new way of communicating breaks down physical walls. Introducing digital skills in a globalized world implies a relevant change in the concepts of citizenship and social justice. The use of technologies is not neutral and global digitization cannot be identified with global justice. But the problem is not whether technology is good or bad. Making a reflection or a judgement about it is still a simplistic statement. Rather, the question or reflection is more about how we are going to create spaces that humanize the digital world of our young people and that are potential for encounter and inclusion. As Domingo affirms:

*Globalization has transformed the way to exercise their responsibilities as citizens, and thus, civic identity is considered in a more complex way, paying attention to factors that have to do not only with the political community to which one belongs, but with the ethical, cultural or religious community of which one feels part.* (Domingo, 2017, p.122).

We must bear in mind the risks or limitations of a virtual world. The excess of information and overstimulation, as a result of technological and digital development, influences the analytical ability to think. The communicational process paradoxically loses strength because, although it is immediate, there is a physical distancing that directly affects non-verbal communication. It is complex to distinguish emotions and feelings through the screen. On the one hand, the digital environment allows all young people to be connected twenty-four hours a day; but on the other hand, digital access is causing inequalities that mainly affect anthropological categories supported by the culture of encounter and care. The Pope reminds us that: *“The subject of this culture is the people, not simply one part of society that would pacify the rest with the help of professional and media resources”* (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 216). In this way, the “you”, the neighbour and the sense of belonging to the community are displaced. As Han says: *“The days of the other are over. The other as a mystery, the other as seduction, the other as Eros, the other as desire, the other as hell, the other as pain are disappearing”* (Han, 2019, p.21)<sup>44</sup>. Hyperconnection and excess of communication affect the piling up of “friends,” but not based on the relationships caused by the encounter.

43 Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day (2014) Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter.

44 Own translation.

Technology reveals the intimacy and privacy of the person, but at the same time it is an incorporeal communication. Direct contact with the other is lost. We do not see the body, and we partially see the face because facial expressions are not properly captured. It is true that in hyperconnection there is no distance, but it lacks the mystery that the encounter produces. Poor perception, look (Han, 2014) and voice abilities affect the way in which people interact and communicate. *“Narrative becomes considerably less important. Today everything is numerable in order to be transformed into the language of performance and efficiency. Therefore, everything that cannot be counted numerically does not exist.”* (Han, 2014, p. 42)<sup>45</sup>. Even the anonymity originated in this area has a negative impact on personalization.

In addition, communicational processes on the Internet affect the capacity to accept unconditionally because there is no active listening that involves a corporal aspect. In digitization, you do not listen with your whole body, reducing it to a mere exchange of information. This lack of active listening affects the establishment of bonds and trust produced by a real encounter. And as the Pope says, identity processes are affected:

*Social network communities... often they remain simply groups of individuals who recognize one another through common interests or concerns characterized by weak bonds. Moreover, in the social web identity is too often based on opposition to the other, the person outside the group: we define ourselves starting with what divides us rather than with what unites us, giving rise to suspicion and to the venting of every kind of prejudice (ethnic, sexual, religious and other)*<sup>46</sup>.

Digital spaces are real, but they do not contribute to develop the human fullness because they ignore elements that belong to the person itself. In this context, it can be said that young people are particularly vulnerable. Internet influences your mood, shapes your thinking, and can even create conflict in your interpersonal and family relationships.

We are, as Bauman says, before an atomization caused by a liquid society where even the links are fragile. *“The modern liquid society is that one where conditions of action of its members change before the behaviours can be consolidated in certain habits and in a routine.”* (Bauman, 2017, p.9)<sup>47</sup>. The problem of meaning and encounter as anthropological categories is questioned. Considering this change of era, where the crisis in current education and the fragmentation of knowledge predominate, it is urgent to promote a new educational paradigm that humanizes virtual communication styles and is committed to global citizenship and the transformation of reality.

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45 Own translation.

46 Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the 53rd World Communications Day. 2019.

47 Own translation.



### 3. Some challenges of the transformation of education in the 21st century

*The way to build solid bridges between school/university and society is to embrace educational methodologies that address the needs of a global citizenship, capable of serving diversity as a source of wealth for integral education and promoting universal brotherhood.*

The analysis of the educational change in the 21st century involves developing a deep reflection about the elements of traditional education. This process affects the university and the methods applied in the classroom. Plurality

and social, cultural and religious diversity are also present in our universities. The way to build solid bridges between school/university and society is to embrace educational methodologies that address the needs of a global citizenship, capable of serving diversity as a source of wealth for integral education and promoting universal brotherhood.

The polyhedron that Pope Francis uses in his last encyclical to clarify the meaning of living in a universal and heterogeneous world is a significant image:

*The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 215).*

Higher Education Institutions are called to foster dialogue with the world of culture, thinking in terms of community and social friendship. Highlighting the importance of universality entails a broad perspective that do not favour homogeneous aspects, typical of the dominant culture, but that have an impact on small and specific issues; that keep in mind the local context, but from a global perspective. Catholic Universities, which are not alien to social, cultural and political problems, must make a deep discernment encouraging the construction of a culture of communion, developing a sense of service to the community and understanding the place of man in the world. The current world shortens the distance between us, we can all communicate immediately, although we are separated by a long distance. In this sense, it is true that *“as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers.”* (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 12). Taking care of the surrounding world is taking care of ourselves.

*“As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers.”*

It is important to respond to the call to build a civilization of love and a culture of life, generating actions empowering young people to transform society. For this reason, it is necessary to build bridges with the culture of current society; generate spaces of fraternal responsibility, spaces for listening, for holding a real dialogue with the different cultural forms that help promote a “cultural pact” (Pope Francis, 2020), welcoming and respecting the

*Promote a “cultural pact”, welcoming and respecting the different worldviews that coexist in our society; strengthen their public presence, developing classrooms experiences of educational innovation “which goes forth.”*

different worldviews that co-exist in our society; strengthen their public presence, developing classrooms experiences of educational innovation “which goes forth.” (Pope Francis, 2013, EG); and promoting a culture of encounter that regain the concept of individual person, its dignity and relational character through intergenerational cultural initiatives and favouring transdisciplinarity (Pope Francis, 2017) and the integration of knowledge. As the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* indicates:

*“(…) university scholars will be engaged in a constant effort to determine the relative place and meaning of each of the various disciplines within the context of a vision of the human person and the world that is enlightened by the Gospel (…)”* (John Paul II, 1990, ECE, 16).

Hence the urgency of developing networks that integrate different knowledge and disciplines. Networks are a place of encounter and dialogue that unite students and educators in a life project in order to promote the civic and Christian dimension. Fares invites us to value the true meaning of otherness:

*When you recover otherness in the encounter, you begin to establish a dialogue, and dialogue involves not only hearing, but also listening. Recover that ability to listen. The other, although ideologically, politically or socially different, he/she will always have something good to give you and me something good to give in turn. (Fares, 2014, 51)<sup>48</sup>.*

For a Catholic University, the category of “service” is essential and is part of its mission to both the Church and society. We cannot regard a university unable to respond to the current needs of society. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* says:

48 Own translation.

“The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students” (John Paul II, 1990, ECE, 34).

*We cannot regard a university unable to respond to the current needs of society.*

For that reason, integrating teaching-learning projects supported by service means

drawing up a fully coherent educational itinerary with comprehensive implications for students. We must bet on a consistent, solid and open education, forging a path that is not directed only to the final scores of a course, to mere productivity, or to the competitiveness typical of commercialized societies.

In this society with a strong cultural confrontation, a diversity of worldviews and anthropological conceptions, and a strong controversy regarding the purposes of education, educators need supporting instruments, channels that promote exchange and reflection, and strengthening the experience of the community support to their mission. Their task transcends their own curriculum demands, since they must not only elaborate a good program, deliver quality instruction or testing fairly.

The vocational dimension that defines the teaching staff of a Catholic University implies a direct interpellation to the meaning of the teaching activity itself, that is, to know why we educate and from which perspective: that of the individual, the world and the reality. The educational task must be shaped both at the identity and community level.

Today our centres run the risk of acritically responding to the demands for educational quality established by today's society and based mainly on the quality systems of a cognitive capitalism that causes division. The perverse system mechanisms promoted by the current knowledge society can produce individualistic and throwaway dynamics among educators, together with a lack of team awareness and weak identity bonding.

Educating in excellence implies that educators accept their mission, considering it as a ministry of hope and service that involves accompanying students in the art of living. A meaningless life, a life without transcendence and without love, is incomprehensible. We are called to discover and enhance the best in our students. They need a quality teaching that cannot be understood without promoting excellence in virtue and personal vocation.

One of the great challenges of the 21st century education is to personally guide and accompany students. Educating involves being bold and creative, but also being

magnanimous to discern and thus being able to take a balanced step between the cornice of safety and the zone of risk, as Pope Francis explained in his address to the students of the Jesuit schools of Italy and Albania in 2013.

In the classroom, the strong and the fast ones are rewarded, and the weak and the slow ones are despised. Educators must encourage an education based on testimony, coherence and the humanization of processes. Being a witness involves challenge, motivation, accompaniment and growth. It also means paying special attention to the classroom and the institution environment, the attitudes it assumes and promotes, and the style of relationships conceived from gratuity, care and generosity.

*It is possible to propose students with pedagogical paths of thought and action that contribute to their growth in solidarity, commitment, dialogue, respect, responsibility and care, and have common good, dignity and universal fraternity at their core.*

For this reason, it is of great interest to foster constant teacher-training so that, while maintaining their professionalism, they develop fundamental capacities that allow them to provide personalized guidance to students such as acceptance, listening, empathy, trust, understanding, etc.

In this way, it is possible to propose students with pedagogical paths of thought and action that contribute to their growth in solidarity, commitment, dialogue, respect, responsibility and care, and have common good, dignity and universal fraternity at their core.

#### 4. An educational change for a global citizenship

There is a relationship between anthropology and citizenship. Our conception or idea about human beings affects where we are and what we do in society. The question is to ask ourselves whether the anthropological vision is harmoniously integrated into current citizenship. The interaction between both categories significantly affects the educational system because the educational institution cannot remain outside society.

The information and technology society involves fast adaptation to changes. But more information does not mean more knowledge or more wisdom. The local citizenship model promoted a traditional school and university. This was characterized by a unidirectional model where educators were the ones who handled the flow of information and knowledge for students because the most important thing was knowledge acquisition. In this way,

students adopted a passive role and the differences between them became worse. Those who did not have the capacity to attain such knowledge were excluded by the system itself. Thus, the concept of education and person was reduced to mere utilitarian and chrematistic criteria. Only those who had the capacity and intelligence for this teaching-learning model would attain professional and social achievement. The educational system, therefore, was in charge of strengthening certain student capacities, thus ignoring their integral growth. In this way, didactic and educational innovation processes were also negatively affected. We thus have a local citizenship and a traditional school/university.

But over time, classrooms are becoming more and more heterogeneous. Not only do students have different abilities, but they also come from different cultures and religions. School is the reflection of a global society. This new vision affects educational institutions. Living in a global citizenship implies being aware of your own and specific problems. Dealing with new interpersonal relationships that are subject to change due to technological and information development.

A global citizenship needs a global education. The traditional education paradigm is no longer useful, but students need to be educated to develop a way of thinking and an overall reflective capacity, that is, one that considers sociocultural and religious plurality. It is not just acquiring concepts, but educating sensitivity, knowledge and behaviour. There is an urgent need for an education that encompasses the person in all their intrapersonal, interpersonal, existential and transcendent dimensions. Thus, an educational centre that responds to current times focuses on the comprehensive care of students. Solidarity, wisdom and knowledge are essential. Educating for global citizenship is educating for hope and discernment (Domingo, 2002).

*Educating for global citizenship is educating for hope and discernment.*

It is essential to encourage all of us to acquire full citizenship despite our differences, and this requires

respect and responsibility. Educating in respect implies teaching students to coexist in multicultural societies. This means sharing from dialogue, accepting the identities of each culture that coexist in the present world. But it also means educating in unconditional acceptance. It is not possible to welcome others without eliminating prejudices and dogmatic attitudes that avoid perceiving the other at a superior level. Perceiving the other with the same dignity is the first step towards respect. It is opening our eyes to new cultural spaces beyond borders. Respect implies an attitude of responsibility and commitment to an open and universal society.

Responsibility is meaningless without the presence of the others. *“Stating a responsibility is to justify human relationships in terms of training and empowerment, that is, in terms of skills, maturity, creativity, authenticity, sincerity, and, ultimately, personalization. To atomize is to individualize, to personalize is to train”* (Domingo, 2002, p. 38)<sup>49</sup>. Educating in responsibility is educating to strengthen the community. A sense of responsibility cannot be developed without the presence of the other, without encounter. And this attitude necessarily involves recognizing the other not as a “partner”, but as a “neighbour.” Paradoxically, the relational nature of the other strengthens my identity. Communion, bond, fraternity and communication emerge from the proximity with the other. *“The human person, with his or her inalienable rights, is by nature open to relationship. Implanted deep within us is the call to transcend ourselves through an encounter with others.”* (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 111). The virtues, values and attitudes are developed from the openness and union with other people. It is about educating for a responsibility that is retrospective, respective or relational and prospective (Domingo, 2017), and encompasses past, present and future. It is key to understanding the human being comprehensively and with full dignity. It is then when the boundaries in the relationship between *the I* and the *you* are set; whose path is social friendship as a condition of universal openness.

## 5. The Scholas Occurrentes educational project

The Scholas Occurrentes project was born in 2001 as a result of an educational intuition of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires (today Pope Francis). It arises in a complex social, cultural and political crisis with the desire to provide greater social participation and public training to young people. This action started with two projects: “Schools of neighbours” and “Sibling Schools.” These consisted of bringing young people together from different schools, religions, cultures and socioeconomic positions in order to develop their civic citizenship. Through the “Design Thinking” methodology based on the Stanford school model, young people detected the problems they were most concerned with in order to carry out research-reflection-action work. They discovered conflictive social situations as opportunities to address. After consensually selecting the topic they were most interested in, they carried out their research. The objective was to propose real and concrete solutions that could be passed on to the competent bodies and even follow up on the achievements. This process enabled them to make progress towards the concept of social friendship, by integrating diversity from the culture of encounter. It was thus conceived as a great educational potential for building a fraternal and peaceful world. The school also had an impact on society, and young people learned in a different way, as leaders of their own teaching-learning process and actively taking part in society.

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49 Own translation.

These proposals were strengthened with various similar educational experiences. The bridge between educational institution and society was a reality. When Bergoglio was elected Pope, he embraced the project and gave it an international character in 2013, constituting it as a Pontifical Foundation, so that it could reach all corners of the world. A new understanding of education, learning, the role of educators and young people in society acquired some relevance. It was the beginning of realizing the importance of changing education to change the world.

In this way, the challenge now is to humanize education, placing the person at the centre of the educational process and accepting the implications of this process at a personal and community level. Scholas mission is to generate a change in the current educational paradigm, where the most fragile or vulnerable are excluded and discarded due to a predominant instructional model based above all on the acquisition of knowledge related to specific subjects. But this change must be for all educational communities and integrate even those with fewer resources. The key is to create meeting-places based on unconditional acceptance, inclusive

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education and dialogue as signs of identity. There is no room for utilitarian and elitist criteria that promote selfreferentiality. Scholas implies an educational model that supposes decentration and commitment to social justice. This change is structural and organizational, including the social, political, cultural and educational dimensions. However, it is also a personal

change for all educational stakeholders and for all the elements that affect the education of our children and young people.

Highlighting the importance of art, sports, games and technology means reinforcing a pedagogy typical of a classroom without walls. There are various Scholas educational proposals to address global citizenship. One of them is the recently created University of Meaning. The objective is to develop civic and transcendent attitudes to take part in society, having common good and human dignity at its core. This University relies on educating in soft skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence and active listening as axes to promote behaviours related to social engagement, social justice, responsibility, solidarity and respect. It is an educational and training reality for a global citizenship



that integrates the intergenerational, interreligious and intercultural dimensions respectively.

*There are various Scholas educational proposals to address global citizenship. One of them is the recently created University of Meaning.*

Scholas programmes seek prosocial educational experiences that unite head, heart and hands as a path of “integrality,” as a *laudato*

horizon that ensures the integral care of creation. One challenge is to build a civilization of love based on universal fraternity and highlighting the leading role of young people. They are part of the current society. The pedagogical keys point towards didactics that connect with reality, experience, encounter and beauty.

Currently, Scholas is a network of networks that is present in five continents and includes over 500,000 educational institutions. The most relevant contributions are:

- ▶ Educating in the culture of encounter. Pope Francis proposes in his address *Meeting with the Academic and Cultural World* (Pope Francis, 2013b) the need to understand that University and school should promote the culture of closeness, eliminating self-interests that build walls with respect to others. Therefore, the culture of closeness, dialogue and encounter must be cultivated in educational training contexts because every person is an end in itself and cannot be exploited as a consequence of an efficient culture (Pope Francis, 2015b).<sup>50</sup>
- ▶ Networking. An educational institution cannot be an island, but rather it needs to be a community that unifies educational experiences committed to local communities, but with a global vision to build a civilization of love and peace.
- ▶ Educating from a pedagogy of reality. Relying on experiential methodologies entails a way of making visible the four pillars of the Delors report (1996): learning to know, to do, to live together and to be.
- ▶ Developing the inter and transdisciplinarity. We educators do not have to take on and concern ourselves exclusively with our field of knowledge, but rather we have to look further away towards an education that is not structured in separate compartments and that conceptually integrates different

50 “We need to build up this culture of encounter. We do not love concepts or ideas; no one loves a concept or an idea. We love people. Commitment, true commitment, is born of the love of men and women, of children and the elderly, of peoples and communities... of names and faces which fill our hearts” (Address of the Holy Father at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements Expo Feria Exhibition Centre, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 9th July, 2015).



disciplines. But, at the same time, it is important that educators know the limits of their own discipline and develop new perspectives from the links established with other disciplines. In this way, the growth in knowledge will not generate inequality or exclusion because there will be a global and non-sectoralized perspective of the person.

- ▶ Offering pedagogical methods that develop inner attitudes or dispositions of authenticity, empathy and unconditional acceptance (Bermejo, 2011). The authenticity or coherence that requires behaving consistently with one's own values, thoughts and feelings, being aware of limitations. The empathy that allows to know the feelings, desires, expectations and values of the other to understand them implies a cognitive, affective and behavioural effort. The empathic attitude includes active listening, predisposing our ears and our bodies to focus our attention on the other, and unconditional acceptance, which implies the absence of moralizing judgment. This attitude allows you to accept the other without prejudice for what he/she is and what he/she feels, creating a space for sincere communication and dialogue. The three attitudes are essential to recognize the dignity of every person.
- ▶ Developing a globalization of solidarity for a global world. Approaching a global world supposes a change in mentality that leads to *“transcending our own parcel and realizing that each human being is part of the entire universe, that any part of it —however remote it may be- affect him, and that ends up even affecting the other extreme”* (Torralba, 2019 p. 212)<sup>51</sup>. And to realise this solidarity, you need service as caring for the most fragile. This is inclusive because nobody is left out, as Pope Francis expresses to young people in Cuba (Pope Francis, 2015c). And it is not ideological because *“we do not serve ideas, we serve people”* (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 115).

## 6. The service-learning proposal as the main tool for the Scholas mission

John Dewey proposed that student's learning process should be based on experience, but he also warns that it can be underestimated if this experience is based on complacency or is meaningless because it is not good for society (Deeley, 2016). And from this perspective, service-learning was born in 1967 in the USA, as a methodology supported by an experiential education. And it is in 1969 when the first service-learning conference is organized in Atlanta. There are basically five disciplines that are involved in this methodology: pedagogy because it is grounded on learning based on experience and connected thanks to action, reflection

51 Own translation

and participation processes; philosophy because it helps to develop critical thinking, but from ethical and moral criteria supported by the culture of care; anthropology because it offers a vision of the human being in which social bonds are of vital importance to create just and supportive societies; psychology because it allows us to understand the meaning of prosociality while welcoming the diversity of human behaviour; and theology because it proposes the attitude of service as an educational potential for the integral change of the person.

*Service-learning is an essential pedagogical tool for the Scholas mission. It dynamically integrates living together and citizenship in a planned and systematized methodological innovation project whose objective is to promote student lifestyles that allow them to participate to transform society.*

Service-learning is an essential pedagogical tool for the Scholas mission. It dynamically integrates living together and citizenship in a planned and systematized methodological innovation project whose objective is to promote student lifestyles that allow them to participate to transform society. In terms of

education, it implies a deep reflection on the evaluation and didactic criteria, since the process understood as an educational pathway is the fundamental point. During the process, young people modulate their affections and cognitions. This methodology, is not only innovative, but also strengthens the mission, vision and values of Scholas.

*The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness.*

Francis in his message to educators at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, on 7th July, 2015, gave us clues regarding the elements that we should keep in mind in innovation. Every innovative process develops critical thinking, capable of caring for today's

world. Globalization itself urges educational institutions to assume the responsibility of guiding students to find answers to the new challenges of society. Therefore, it is not appropriate to innovate and plan activities aimlessly. But:

*The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes*

*more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness* (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 82).

Service-learning is a flexible and appropriate methodology suitable for all young people because in the process itself, not only does the learning dimension prevail, but the service component.

## 7. Contributions of service-learning to a global citizenship

Service-learning contributes to global citizenship in the following aspects:

**a)** Developing a holistic learning that harmonically includes cognitive, affective, instrumental, attitudinal, motivational, existential and spiritual dimensions. Knowledge is acquired, but also the management of soft skills that affect the integrity of students. They enter into a reality that has an impact on them, but at the same time enables them to carry out their social intervention and service. Thus, it allows “*to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral*” (Pope Francis 2015, LS, 112).

**b)** Teaching how to network, enhancing initiative and creativity, while connecting with different stakeholders and generating educational alliances that improve the community.

**c)** Educating based on attitudes, due to the flexibility of the methodology itself. The global pandemic situation has not annulled the possibility of applying this in the classroom, since the modalities of direct, indirect, research and advocacy service (Chiva-Bartol & Gil-Gómez, 2018) have made it possible to be adapted to different realities.

**d)** Improving the teaching quality of educators by bringing them closer to reality. There are numerous contributions and benefits of Service-learning to the teaching activity. One of them is that it helps educators to participate in a methodology that, in a metaphorical sense, breaks down the physical walls of the classroom, that denotes a selective culture, a culture of safety and accommodation for a small group of young people. Staying in the “classroom walls” generates work inertia and also a comfort zone for educators.

**e)** Updating the vocation of educators and strengthening their mission. Helping students to leave the classroom contributes to updating one’s teaching vocation, since it implies rediscovering new ways of educating. This new “way of doing” radically changes the role of educators, since they no longer confine their teaching practice merely to an

instructional model. They now become a guide that comprehensively accompanies the students' educational process, providing them with the tools that allow them to get into the course subject, but in a personal and concrete way<sup>52</sup> (Pope Francis, 2015a). This updating of the educator's vocation also helps educators themselves develop "together with" their students a critical and reflective spirit about what happens in the nearby local environment, opening new training spaces that allow them to carry out interventions with a global and plural vision. Therefore, educators contribute to the culture of care and educate towards a new way of thinking that responds to the challenges of society and that breaks prejudices in both real and unknown situations.

**f)** Promotes the intrinsic motivation of educators. Accompanying projects of these characteristics developed by students also affects the intrinsic motivation of educators and, therefore, job satisfaction. The urgent need to overwhelm students with theoretical concepts is no longer important, what matters, however, is that they "learn the art of living," that they actively care about reality, about what is going on every day, offering others the tools and gifts received.

**g)** Strengthening the pedagogy of the encounter, urging the teacher to rethink the teaching-learning processes to achieve an integral and harmonious education of the person. It implies acknowledging "*man as a natural, cultural and historical being. An anthropology that accepts scientific assumptions, but that delves into the ontological roots of life and the person*" (Magdalena, 2007, p. 121)<sup>53</sup>. The didactics for this methodology is a space of encounter with the other. This type of pedagogy puts the emphasis on service, in such a way that commitment is understood as the logic of gratuity and gift. At the same time, the encounter is the key to hope because, based on service-learning, students are capable of transforming and improving reality, no matter how insignificant their interventions may be. Thanks to the encounter, the other is seen as important in our life, since it helps to put ourselves in the place of the other and, therefore, to empathize. The other helps us grow. With Service-Learning, the educator generates opportunities to open to the other, to a "thou."<sup>54</sup>

**h)** Raising awareness of the pedagogy of reality, making sense of the experience of the Church "*which goes forth*" that supposes a transformation of reality where both the educator and the student "come out of themselves," out of the classroom walls, and build

52 "Educational communities play a fundamental role, an essential role in the enrichment of civic and cultural life. Be careful! It is not enough to analyze and describe reality: there is a need to shape environments of creative thinking, discussions which develop alternatives to current problems, especially today. We need to move to the concrete" (Address of the Holy Father at the Meeting with Educators, Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, 7th July 2015).

53 Own translation.

54 "Our openness to others, each of whom is a 'thou' capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human persons. A correct relationship with the created world demands that we not weaken this social dimension of openness to others, much less the transcendent dimension of our openness to the 'Thou' of God" (Pope Francis, 2015, LS, 119).

bridges: the educator with the student and the student with the vulnerable and suffering environment. This results in a didactics of reality. It is no longer taught from the practical assumptions, but from concrete and real contexts.

**i)** Highlighting the pedagogy of harmony. This helps educators to ask themselves how, what for and for whom they enter the classroom. The answers guide us towards a pedagogy capable of harmonizing the comprehensive dimensions of the human person: emotional, corporal, moral, psychological, spiritual, etc.

**j)** Humanizing educational processes. Activating this type of methodology contributes to personal and teaching improvement. It is not only necessary to learn to solve problems or teach a topic, but to become an expert on inclusion and humanity. Therefore, one of the great contributions of institutionalizing service-learning in our universities is that it significantly improves the quality and educational process established between professors and students. And this, in short, affects the essence of our mission because it places the university as an ideal space for humanization.

**k)** Strengthening the social engagement of students. Service-learning experiences develop profound attitudes and help shape lifestyles that respond to direct involvement in society's need.

**l)** Promoting students' proactivity. This methodology has obvious benefits for the student, since in order to provide solutions to problems or needs, it promotes the development of a proactive attitude. In addition, intellectual and personal skills are acquired that are reflected in educational results that are not easy to achieve by other means such as the transmission of values and education in virtues. Service-Learning "*protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else*" (Pope Francis, 2015, LS, 237). Therefore, an academic, social and emotional improvement is produced at the same time that integral education is promoted. Furthermore, it offers a way of proceeding to be part of society and favour spaces for public coexistence and active citizenship.

**m)** Involving the student as an active agent of social change. The access to reality stems from the experience and the interpersonal relationship of the encounter as a powerful factor in learning. This is how students learn to read reality and broadens perspectives on the way the world is understood. They feel part of the society, collaborating in an immediate area of need and being responsible and an active part of the community. They are educated towards a new way of looking at things, and the contents of the course are witnessed because they are experienced in first person.

n) Developing a sense of community in students. Service-learning helps students be “next to,” leaving a self-referentiality that only leads to selfish and narcissistic actions. When students participate in these projects, they are recognized and perceived with relational and encounter capacity, and are part of a community to build a better world. This methodology highlights the relevance of otherness and interpersonal processes. And based on that, it is possible to build a community.

In this way, the acquired academic training enables students to achieve important objectives related to knowledge and technical skills. Students advance in the design and implementation of actions so that they are transformational actions, especially in the local environment.

In addition, all this has an impact on the positive perception of students regarding the educational institution.

## 8. Service-learning and Scholas, an education for change

Scholas educational projects and, specifically, the support for active methodologies, such as service-learning, create inclusive spaces that promote cultural and social development. This change of era in which we are challenges us to know reality and to know how to interpret it. Knowledge is applied to face problems or extreme situations of reality. At the same time, however, it favours research taking into account the definition of the problem and the related knowledge that suggests a possible solution applied to reality. In addition, the results and educational and pedagogical relationships based on the agapic dimension are valued. This is understood as a fraternal and unconditional welcome from educators to students, seeking their good in an integral way.

This type of methodology is essential to promote a change in education and in the world, to build a bridge between what has been thought and what has been lived, between theory and practice, and between university and society. Breaking prejudices and schemes, adjusting expectations, maturing emotionally and developing both prosocial values and different sensitivities are strengths of service-learning as a hallmark for a global citizen education typical of the Scholas Occurrentes project.

This educational change has service at its core. It is a motivating force for the social and civic responsibility of students, since it considers that the concern of everyone for everyone is a guarantee to care for the common home. This active and experiential methodology, as is typical of Scholas projects, entails a change in Higher Education Institutions, and

especially in Catholic Universities. The Church is an “*expert in humanity*” (Paul VI, 1965) and, therefore, an expert in generating an educational environment in which the student can develop a sense of responsibility and freedom under criteria such as seeing, judging and acting. The Pope’s call to be a Church “which goes forth” (Pope Francis, 2013, EG) becomes a reality, building the foundations for an authentic dialogue in the face of socio-cultural challenges and in the face of the current educational emergency.

*Every innovation should wonder whether it strengthens the mission and the identity signs of the Educational Centre Project.*

Every innovation should wonder whether it strengthens the mission and the identity signs of the Educational Centre Project (PEC). Scholas projects,

and specifically Service-Learning, strengthen the sense of people and community because they eliminate discriminatory behaviours from reflection and critical thinking. This implies learning to distinguish the spaces that lead to solidarity and recognition of the person in their dignity.

Santos invites us to rethink the attitude of teachers: “*In these times of uncertainty, it would be very stimulating for teachers to assume with a flexible spirit... new disciplinary orientations and, above all, an approach focused on student learning, both of specific content and of procedures and civic social values*” (Santos et al., 2015, pp.72-73)<sup>55</sup>. Thus, values, procedures and attitudes take on a special interest.

## 9. Fraternity thought and fraternity lived

Service-learning makes real what can be present only on the mental or thought plane. The experience in concrete actions of fraternity strengthens the personal identity, but forged from the other. “*The personal relationship between the I and the you, becomes effective in the social and dialogical we*” (Cicchese, 2018, p. 137)<sup>56</sup>. The relational character, where narration prevails, favours perceiving the sense of beauty (Han, 2020) in the other. It is a lived fraternity, made flesh, that unites head, heart and hands, educating, as Cencini says, in a:

*...relational sensitivity that indicates to what extent the other is important to me, and to what extent my life is effectively and affectively open to the other, and how much I am willing to interrupt my journey to stop to help those in need* (Cencini, 2019, p. 32).<sup>57</sup>

55 Own translation.

56 Own translation.

57 Own translation.



When the person projects the concreteness in the action of the sense of fraternity, it makes possible the reality of the four fundamental tenets that, for Francis, contribute to creating a new mentality that thinks of solidarity, but not as occasional actions aimed at reflecting “do-goodism”, but thinking in terms of community that prioritize the lives of others (Bergoglio, 2013). These translate into: time is superior to space, avoiding considering limits and boundaries that divide, and favouring attitudes that crystallize in behaviours that keep society in mind; unity prevails over conflict, understood as a way of consolidating social friendship and initiating the process towards a culture of peace; the reality is more important than the idea, giving rise to a constructive solidarity, where the idea is inherently related to reality and spontaneously passes from the mental to the behavioural plane; and the whole is greater than the part (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 145). With service-learning, students act locally, but without losing the global perspective because what matters is not the particular good, but the common good. (Palau, 2020).

## 10. Conclusions

Service-learning space help educate humanely, but with open horizons. Not only is it integrated into the contents of a specific subject, but it also ensures the assessment of personal, moral and social skills of all the educational agents involved. That is why it contributes to humanize education. And this means not only that educators teach and students learn, but that everyone is driven to live and take part in realities based on the common good tenet. Thus, educational projects of legitimate encounter are planned, in which a universal fraternity becomes a reality, educating in the logic of gift and gratuity, while putting talents received at the service of others.

This methodology contributes to strengthening the Catholic identity of Catholic Universities. Students learn by serving and the service component gain relevance. At the same time, it educates for global citizenship by connecting with reality.

All education is not neutral, but rather conveys a meaning: “a pedagogy of meaning that aims to explore the communication of meaning between educators and students and vice versa” (Torralba, 2016, 8).<sup>58</sup>

Applying service-learning in universities implies training minds and citizens so that they feel an active part of society and develop a broad vision capable of placing distant realities together. We have the responsibility to be at the service of a new humanism, favouring spaces for dialogue and work for the common good. This methodology is an opportunity

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58 Own translation



to establish educational and pedagogical relationships that teach the meaning of the common good, dialogue, solidarity, hope, encounter and, ultimately, the authentic meaning of love and service. Service-learning calls us to coherence in all universities so that they respond with fidelity to what they are called for, integrating knowledge and content towards humanization.

Scholas reinforces the dialogic experience. It relates theory and practice and highlights competences that enable professional development in public life and in today's pluralistic culture. In addition, it encourages transdisciplinarity.

Service-learning promotes an integral education and dialogic experience because students not only use the knowledge acquired on a subject, but also adopt its existential and practical character. Strength lies in service and in offering a response to social needs, developing personal awareness and valuing the student's commitment and personal contribution to the community. (Rubio & Escofet, 2017)

In addition, it brings de-centration, high-mindedness and a clear global ecclesial conscience. It educates for responsibility, supporting the development of critical and reflective young people for an open and plural society. It integrates plurality in pluralism, while it is especially aware of personal responsibility regarding a social need or community problem. It also reshapes the concept of solidarity, educating being together with others, that is, being, but in relation to "us" and the large human family. Service-learning projects and Scholas programmes make it possible to transform education by making social friendship and lived universal fraternity a reality.

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*Uniservitate* is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. It aims to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of an integral education and formation of agents of change committed to their community.

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

*Pope Francis*

## **2** Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

We are pleased to present the book *Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church*, a polyhedral text, born in different parts of the world, an expression of different voices and an invitation to reflect on Higher Education in view of a greater commitment to the universal human family. Its intention is to contribute to the generation of Higher Education Institutions (university and non-university, Catholic and non-confessional) capable of networking and generating life, of learning and generating meaning in their being and from their knowledge and doing, for others and with others, and not only cloisters that live for themselves. It is a text with a plural, global and diverse perspective, which opens up dialogue and builds bridges that contribute to achieving a more fraternal society.

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