



INTERVIEW WITH MIGUEL GIRÁLDEZ

Miguel Giráldez, (56) is the present dean of the Cristóbal Colón University in Veracruz, Mexico. He lives in the Paula Montal community and belongs to the Province of Andalucía where he was Major Superior for 11 years. He has been living in Mexico for nearly 2 years and he has this to say about that time:

I like Veracruz, the people have received me very well. As far as the job is concerned, it is mainly about management... Not what I most enjoy, but management is what a Dean does, and I do it with pleasure.

He was the delegate of the Father General for the Escolapio Ministry of the Order and he recounts that he found out about the Escolapios thanks to his brother who was an Escolapio student.

I myself wasn't a student, but I got to know them and I started my noviciate when I was 18. I was admitted there, I grew and here I am. If I ask myself the reason why, it's because God wanted it; I have no alternative explanation. I'm happy; I have been through some difficult times but I'm happy with my vocation and with what I do. It's well worth being an Escolapio: even at my age, it is important to say so and feel it.

Father Miguel, apart from the Deanship, works to coordinate Calasanz quality assessment in the Order's work.

The Cristóbal Colón Study Centre has about 6000 students, of those 4000 study at the university level. That comprises 18 degree and 18 master's programmes and next semester we are going to open the Faculty of Medicine.

How did you become Dean of the University?

I had already been linked to the University for 6 years because of the Calasanz quality assessment project ; I spent some time there and I met Vicente (Climent) who was the former Dean. Coincidentally, the Order needed to find a general

economist, and Vicente fitted the bill. He also felt that he should be at the Order's service, and so moving on after 8 years as Dean was no great trauma. So we changed dean. The fact of my having a link with the University and being a friend of the former Dean, has made it easy for me to be able to put into practice the ministry of the deanship.

Tell us about the quality assessment matter.

It all started from the question: up to what point is the essence of the charisma, and therefore the ministry, reflected in our work? The charisma is seen through the ministry, for charisma is the essence, the spiritual and life experience. Charisma is the mechanism that moves everything and that is reflected in the apostolic work which we call the *Escolapio ministry*. So it is necessary to find out if the ministry really reflects the charisma and if it is developed in our work. So we started, asking ourselves if we give Calasanz quality. A charismatic and ministerial quality.

Because we really knew we were providing good academic quality. The majority of the Tasks are assessed by official authorities, and because of this, we know that the academic quality is good.

Assessing Calasanz quality is difficult, because assessment is difficult, but assessing qualitatively is even more complex. To do so, a technical team was set up with whom we coordinated that assessment which was planned for the whole Order.

How do you define Calasanz quality?

The reflection in our Tasks and our work of what we consider the fundamental principles of our ministry, also those mentioned in the Order's documents and, above all, what is entitled the Shared Mission. Checking is performed by first setting up some Assessment Categories: Integral Education Project, Education Programming, Education Axes... In each one of these categories the principles are separated out until we get down to the instruments applied. As an example, we can say that in Education Axes, we found Escolapio Pastoral work. Education for Social Action is an important feature of the Escolapio ministry; Saint Joseph of Calasanz used to talk about the reform of the Christian republic from an educational starting point. In other categories we were able to see if the organisation responds to the principles. If it is flexible and open, if the

infrastructure makes pastoral work and companionship or active, personalised education possible.

The first part of the assessment, which ends with a diagnosis, was developed using instruments and collegiate reflections. However with this assessment we mean not to stick at only the diagnosis, but for this to provide a basis for an institutional reflection in each one of the establishments and personnel, and for it to end up with a strategic plan as an instrument for improvement. All the Tasks are now involved in this stage of an improvement plan. In 4 years' time the assessment will be applied again and we will thus see where we have gone forward. We will do this in 2006, when the 4 years are up.

Consequently, assessment is not diagnosis and evaluation, but a process of improvement and education.

What happens with the parishes? Are they also included in the assessment?

It's complicated because it is not clear up to what point the parishes have Calasanz characteristics. But we are trying to see if this Calasanz stamp is seen in the parishes or not. As a matter of fact, this has already been done in the Province of Mexico parishes and we seem to be on the right track. The first data out assure us of the virtue of the project. Its application to all the Order is being prepared.

How have the Escolapios reacted?

At first there wasn't an openly positive reaction, rather resistance was encountered. But the start of the assessment coincided with the time when total quality (ISO for educational centres and others) was beginning to be fashionable, and that coincidence helped to open doors.

It was also difficult at the beginning because evaluators had to be trained and conscience had to be raised in each establishment. Slowly everybody became involved. We now have the assessment implemented all over the American Continent and in Spain. The next step will be to apply it in Italy and Central Europe.

The scope of the assessment is extensive because students, fathers, teachers and former students all take part. After seeing the results, we check to see that it was worthwhile and that the results help. It has been interesting to discover that

there are incidences and coincidences which are universal, which are repeated in different scenarios.

What fundamental conclusions have been arrived at and what challenges have been raised due to the assessment?

The most important challenge is to convert educational-evangelising projects into ones which are not only theoretical but which affect life, and from life we arrive at the educational project. We have discovered that we have very theoretical educational projects.

Do you believe that this is a Calasanz institute problem or a general one?

No, it's general. For us it has been important to discover that we talk a lot about education for social action, so Calasanz, so up to date, and that we find it important to educate for citizenship, for solidarity, for justice... we theorise very well about all that and we include it in the document or documents which make up the educational project. But the assessment with its diagnosis has led us to see that theory and reality are far apart. In pastoral work we're on the right track, but we have discovered that we still have a long way to go.

We also discovered that we have to strengthen the link: we are sometimes like islands with links neither between the institutes of our own organisation, nor with other institutes. According to our charisma, the college should generate culture and to be open to the environment and have an effect on it ; remember that point about the Christian republic reform, as Calasanz used to say. This is impossible to do without linking ourselves to the environment.

As a very positive point, we have seen that we are very organised, hard-working and academically sound. However, at times, the spirit of Calasanz quality escapes us a little.

Could one say that Calasanz quality also depends on the Calasanz quality of each Escolapio?

Yes; however, if when saying Escolapio you are referring exclusively to the priest, then my answer is no. Today, more than ever, for the Escolapio priest and the

Escolapio laity. Because the Tasks are so great that it is impossible for a present community to transform a task by themselves. It is certainly true that the Escolapio priest plays an important role, unique I would say, in transmitting the charisma. It depends on how we priests experience it, how we transmit it and how we act with the laity and with the educational community in each college. We need an active priest who lives as an Escolapio and who communicates what he is experiencing.

According to your impression as an analyst, how are the Escolapios experiencing the ministry?

A long time ago a sociological study on our religious life was made. In its conclusions we saw that we were doing more or less average in the importance we gave to the personal experience of God. Well, that assessment (the white book) told us that we had to go back to the roots, to look for a strong experience of God and of dedication. We weren't at rock bottom, but there was a strong inducement to improve, to feel dedication as the fundamental mechanism balancing out apostolic activism. These are objective data taken from real life. And I believe we have improved: that the Order has returned to these aspects, and that is reflected in our ministry. Now, with the assessment of Calasanz quality, we have returned to our ministry and we have found that we need to improve in several ways. For me it is important to place a mirror in front of us. The mirror can be the assessment, community companions, spiritual companionship, a lay person who works with us... but we need a mirror which is real, either material or human.

How did you begin to work in assessment?

I started work on the first educational reform carried out in Spain when I was Major Superior in Andalucía. We started with an assessment-diagnosis. When the Order posed the question of measuring the quality of the ministry, at that moment I was the delegate for the General in that area, and so I got the job. Don't think that I was very experienced, but I had learnt, studied and found experienced people at the university, and so the Veracruz University team was born.

If you had to say what being an Escolapio means and what makes them different from other congregations, what would you say?

Firstly I would say that we needn't differentiate ourselves from anybody else, but just be what each of us is, and the shades of difference which enrich us will spring from there. For me, being an Escolapio is being a religious man, an educator and a priest because in fact we are a clerical Order.

This brings us to another problem which is also outside our scope and that is to come to an agreement about what it is to be an educator. Because a short while ago, many Escolapios believed that education was mainly about giving classes, but that's not it. To give classes, it is enough to be a teacher, but not necessarily to be an educator. We need to rediscover this ourselves. To be an Escolapio educator assumes educating, spreading the gospel. To be an Escolapio priest is to spread the Gospel, that it is up to us to spread the Gospel through education. I think it's simple, although the challenge is to rediscover it. I think the crises our colleagues undergo on this matter have occurred exactly because they were educated more for giving classes than for being educators.

As for figure of Calasanz, what has been seen in the assessments?

More advantage must be taken of it, to work more with the figure of our founder, something which we have been returning to for the last few years. This gives rise to the assessment of Calasanz quality: his figure, his intuitions, his adventure, his courage to face up to the society of that time. How he experienced the foundation, how he conceived the school. Saint Joseph of Calasanz didn't write any treaty on pedagogy: he was a totally practical man, dedicated to action and we must deduce the theory from his actions. Really interesting documents do exist such as the bulletins, but he didn't write any treaty on pedagogy or on how to educate.

Without doubt, he is a person of impressive stature, an incredible educator. His great discovery was to realise that for men's freedom, as mentioned in the Gospel, we need not only faith but culture too. That is an intuition of genius; along with placing the student as a protagonist in the teaching/learning process thus considering him as a person, he has thus made it possible for us to continue absorbing his pedagogic and spiritual intuitions. Luckily we continue rediscovering Calasanz, not only as a saint but also as a pedagogue.