

IF YOU ONLY KNEW WHAT GOD IS OFFERING...

LETTER OF THE YEAR 2022



MAITE URIBE BILBAO



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PRESIDENT OF THE TERESSIAN ASSOCIATION

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IF YOU ONLY KNEW WHAT GOD IS OFFERING...

The year 2021 has come to an end, and it leaves us with good memories of having walked through it together. We all felt moved by a shared, rekindled desire to grow in *the wisdom of goodness*.

The experience of the pandemic and its aftermath has helped us become aware of deep changes happening in people and society. We, as believers, have been feeling the need to change how we relate to God, creation and other people.

We are aware that something new is happening, something as yet nameless, because still in the making. Yet it is part of a vision of the future that lights up new paths, and that helps us to move forward, to invent, trust, hope.

We come up against questions and challenges in a quest we share with all humanity.

Among the things I would like to highlight are the *desire* to organise our societies differently, the *dream* that all relationships be governed with humanity, and the *effort* to act with greater justice and solidarity in using creation's resources. There is also the urgent need to ensure that each person and community can be free to express, celebrate and share their own response to the search for meaning, their religious experience, their lived and personal relationship with God.

There are two processes that I would like to emphasise particularly, as all of us who are involved in the wider Teresian Association family are committed to them.

First of all, there is our participation in the *synodal pathway* we have just begun and that we will travel as the People of God in our local Churches and also as the Teresian Association. Our charism calls for a close and neighbourly presence, the style of lay presence that Pedro Poveda left to the Church.

Secondly, we are all contributing to the preparations for *ATA a.e. 2023* through the various commissions and sub-commissions that are already under way. With this universal vision, we aim to find new responses to the lines of action set out by the 18th General Assembly.

It is at times like those that we are experiencing now, that we feel so powerless and unable to cope alone. We realise the truth God has placed in our hearts: neither our origin nor our purpose comes from ourselves; we do not belong to ourselves, and our hearts are restless until we find the source of life that Saint Augustine addressed in these words: *You created us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*¹

The year 2022 is going to be an important year in the forging of history. Life is taking on a kind of normality that is different from what we envisaged at the start of the pandemic, but we sense new ways forward, availing of the lessons of recent years.

¹ St Augustine, Confessions, Book 1, chap. 1.

It is providential that the 18th General Assembly's Plans for the future will guide the Association's path for this year 2022 towards Pedro Poveda's vision. His ideal was that people could have a living faith that is embodied and reflective and that commits them totally. At the same time, they would have the wisdom to know how to study and reflect on the world today so that they can have more understanding of the emerging changes. This is the kind of know-how you find in a person who possesses the qualities cited by the Apostle Peter in his second letter: faith, knowledge, temperance, patience and piety.²

This is how Pedro Poveda puts it, commenting on that letter from Peter, in a very meaningful text written in 1919:

*First comes faith... Then, or rather together with faith, virtue; for if faith is alive, it works, and its works are the virtues. You must also bring in knowledge, for without knowledge you cannot have virtue, because the fulfilment of your duties demands knowledge, as you cannot teach if you do not possess it.*³

At a time when a new world is in the making, we are invited to integrate the double invitation of faith and knowledge. It is to have experience of faith and to have wisdom that is born from a heart in search of the deep meaning of things, of events, of the unfolding of history.

The marginal areas that we refer to so often include all those parched lands that are dried up, waterless and thirsty for a spring of life. They also include the roadsides where so many people sit, trying to make sense of the world they live in, looking for people to help them *look at the world from a balcony full of light*, as Josefa Segovia liked to put it.⁴

² Cf. 2 Peter 1: 5-6.

³ Pedro Poveda, *Obras Vol. I Creí por esto hablé*, [111]. (From now on this work will be referred to as *CpH*).

⁴ Josefa Segovia, *Cartas*, 15 September 1939.

I. BESIDE THE WELL

Jesus sat down by the well

Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' Jews in fact do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied, 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.' (John 4: 1-10).

The story of the Samaritan woman is captivating. Tired from the journey, Jesus sat down by Jacob's well. Then along came a woman to draw water. She was not just an ordinary woman who was not named. This woman was excluded by birth because she belonged to a people despised by the Jews.

However, Jesus did not hold anyone in contempt; he treated them with unflinching tenderness. Here he was the first to start the conversation: *Woman, give me a drink.*

When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to give him a drink, even though it might seem to be a simple gesture, he was breaking through a number of prejudices: Jews did not speak to Samaritans and men did not speak with women in public. Jesus, however, was free. He did not feel bound by the social prejudices of his time. He was not afraid. He got into conversation without judging her, and he made her feel respected, recognised and willing to go further than her normal daily routine. He asked her for a drink, making her aware of her own deep inner thirst.

The woman was taken by surprise. She was not yet able to move beyond those prejudices she had always experienced, and she was used to nobody talking to her, nobody considering her worthy of engaging in a one-to-one conversation. How can it be that someone connects with me, addresses me, a woman he does not know? Who is this man?

The words of Jesus would surprise her even more: *'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.'*

These were mysterious and stirring words, an invitation to talk and come to understand what was behind them, and above all, who was behind them.

For the Samaritan woman, these were words that would question her own experience: did she feel satisfied with her life? For what was she thirsting? She was at Jacob's well, but what good had it done her to drink of that water for so long? How had it changed her life? She did not understand, but this meeting was starting to change her view of herself, of this man and of her own future.

Her experience at the well challenges us. Where is it that we look for living water? What well do we go to in order to find answers to our deepest quests: for happiness, love, hope, joy?

We may even share the temptation felt by many people who lose their sense of direction and so they distance themselves from God without realising what is really going on in their inner selves. When we are confused, God becomes a distant being whom we may abandon before we have even come to know him.

Let us seek God for what God is, and not for what God gives, and so we will always follow God, we read in Pedro Poveda's commentary on the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman.⁵

If we were more familiar with the experience of God felt by Jesus and proclaimed by him, then perhaps we would seek God and even allow ourselves to be found by Him. *Late have I loved You*, Saint Augustine used to say.⁶

Jesus went out to meet the Samaritan woman to awaken a desire that she held but that she did not yet recognise. God's desire always precedes us and challenges us to open up new spaces deep within ourselves.

Jesus decided to wait there beside the well. He was not in a hurry. He met a woman who came along with an empty vessel, and who in the end would leave it behind because she discovered water different from the water she was seeking. This water would never fit into the vessel she carried, water that had become a spring that flowed from within her and that mysteriously had its source in this man.

In our daily experience, in our fellowship meetings, we allow opportunities to ask ourselves, what do I want? What am I looking for? What sources do I seek out? What am I striving for?

The Samaritan woman had no idea that someone was waiting at the well to engage her in conversation, someone who would question her about her life, who would offer her a different kind of water to quench her thirst, and who would help her listen to her own self and her deepest desire. A desire like this grows when it is recognised, welcomed, expressed and shared. The psalmist turned this desire into a prayer: *My soul is thirsting for God, when will I see his face?* (Ps 42).

⁵ Pedro Poveda, *CpH*, [19].

⁶ *Confessions*, Book 10, Chap. 27.

Jesus, perceiving this woman's quest, made suggestions and did not impose himself. He welcomed and valued her deepest intentions and guided her desire: *If you only knew what God is offering...*

His words awaken freedom, an attitude of trust in our hearts and openness to a path of conversion and friendship that only that person can travel. It is the only way to discover and recognise our own experience of faith, and to accompany other people on their journey as they become pilgrims and seekers of God.

"I am going to tell you the gift I have most valued all my life, a gift that I now appreciate better and also one, I believe, that increases the older I get. It is the gift of faith," wrote Josefa Segovia in an autobiographical note.⁷

At some point in our lives we can find ourselves, like the Samaritan woman, near a well with an empty vessel and the hope of finding an answer to the deepest aspiration of our hearts, the only response that can give meaning to existence. Many are the wells that are offered to quench humanity's thirst, and we need discernment to avoid contaminated water that fails to give life. Which kinds of water attract us? Stagnant or running water?

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?'

Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'

⁷ Josefa Segovia, "Escritos autobiográficos", 1946.

'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.'

Like Jesus at the well of Sychar, we are invited to sit down beside the men and women of our time to listen to them, to awaken and accompany their deepest thirst which can lead them to the source of life. **God can be found in situations as simple as a conversation by the side of the many wells on the roads of the world.**

The meeting with the Samaritan woman is a teaching moment. It shows us how to enter into a free, personal and unique relationship with Jesus, to awaken an experience of living faith.

Living faith, personal faith, is born, born again, and grows strong in this way. It is not a question of duty, obligation, something that must be done, but one of accepting a loving look, allowing a meeting of eyes that can be life changing. Faith, a spiritual life, a believing experience, depends on the loving gaze of God. *If you only knew the gift of God...*

Coherent faith

'Go and call your husband' said Jesus to her 'and come back here.' The woman answered, 'I have no husband.' He said to her, 'You are right to say' I have no husband,' for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.'

I see you are a prophet, sir,' said the woman.' Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.'

Jesus said:

'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews.'

But the hour will come — in fact it is here already— when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: this is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.'

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah— that is, Christ— is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus, 'I am he.'

As the woman did not understand, Jesus went a step further; he helped her to examine her own life and to confront the facts about her intimate relationships. It is not easy to accept the truth so starkly. The woman could have been offended and left. Nevertheless, Jesus ventured into dialogue with the Samaritan woman because he trusted her and he knew that she was searching and was dissatisfied. Then she came to understand that “Jesus is a prophet.” This was no ordinary man. She realised that Jesus was not speaking about physical water but that he was a prophet who was speaking in symbols. To be a prophet means to come from God to announce God’s Word, to reveal it and to awaken us to a life of freedom that is coherent and based on love.

It is striking that the Samaritan woman, once she had faced the truth about her life, took a crucial step by accepting it and also by opening up the conversation to a new and different dimension. She shared with this stranger a question that so preoccupied the Samaritans. She asked, “Where are we to worship God?”

Her conversation with Jesus had allowed her to change focus and leave behind her fears, hurts, frailties and her past, and to move to a deeper level. She discovered how to enter into a relationship with God, and where to find, recognise and worship God

Jesus gradually helped her to understand that the true relationship to which she was being invited was to worship in spirit and in truth. That means to do so in freedom. Jesus was revealing to her that God chose to engage with humanity to the point of sharing the human condition and respecting and cherishing it.

Faith is a force, an energy that mobilises the whole person. It is not limited to only one area of who we are, such as our ideas, our spiritual or ecclesial sensitivity, or our actions. Faith permeates our whole being. Jesus showed the woman that we worship God by setting out each morning looking for signs of God's presence in our lives. It is not a matter of reducing our search to special occasions or sacred spaces, but of discovering and recognising God in the hidden corners of this complex world in which we live.

To worship in Spirit and in truth is to move forward amid the uncertainty and vulnerability of our lives. The people we encounter every day should challenge us by their faces, stories, sufferings and hopes, and this should inspire us to put the Gospel into practice.

We encounter God in everyday life because our history unfolds on God's earth, which is holy ground. God said to Moses, *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground"* (Exodus 3:5). Jesus met the Samaritan woman at an ordinary communal well, and there he gave her a new insight into herself and a new understanding of God and the dream that God has for humanity. He helped her understand what it means to believe and to trust, and how to enter into friendship with the incarnate God who is revealed to us in our daily life.

On the other hand, when faith does not bring about self-giving and generosity, then it is faith without hope. This is faith that ends in sadness and inner turmoil, as happened to the rich man whom Jesus looked at with love, but who went home sad. He did not know how to savour the beauty of making his life a gift through availability, relationship, generosity and love.

This was not the case for the Samaritan woman. The change of course in her life that Jesus suggested to her would allow her to take a further step in freedom. She felt the need to pass this on. The Samaritan woman became a messenger and announcer of a new way of looking at reality and of being engaged with it. *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town.*

She ran to the town where the people had judged, condemned and rejected her, and she told them that she had met the Messiah, a person who had changed her life. Every encounter with Jesus changes our lives, always. The Samaritan woman may have felt that her life was mundane, but her meeting with Jesus transformed it into a realm of utopia, a privileged platform from which to announce the Kingdom of God.

The Earth Charter points out that we need to reinvent a new way of being in the world with others, with nature, with the earth and with God. We must learn to be more with less, and to meet our needs with a sense of solidarity.⁸

To believe is to act and be committed, as were the people in the very early Christian communities, so dear to Pedro Poveda.

The spirituality of those earliest communities translates to the modern world as a spirituality of relationship, communion and friendship with Jesus. It invites us to build bridges, ease relationships, open doors and

⁸ Cf. *Earth Charter*, UNESCO 2003.

seek dialogue. It is to move on from traditional ways of seeing things and to embrace other ways and customs. It is to feel sent out to the margins wherever the Spirit leads us, and it is to give high priority to a spirituality of care and hope.

Every change is an educational pathway. Care and education go hand in hand in shaping a world of fellowship by means of concrete actions, and these involve taking care of the words we speak, forgiveness, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the building of bridges.⁹

When Pedro Poveda left Guadix, he wrote some biblical reflections in which he communicated his experience of faith through recommendations and thoughts. He expressed them as everyday ideals that can help us in difficult times.

Familiarise yourself with the phrase “onward.” Understand what it means and go forward with confidence. We are travellers, and in order to reach the end of our journey quickly, we must always look to see where we are going and what we are missing by letting ourselves be distracted by the scenery along the way...¹⁰

As it was for Pedro Poveda, it is also time for us to look ahead and to act accordingly. It is time to foster communities that care for each other and that do not confuse happiness with success. These are communities that focus on tenderness and generosity and that have a spirit of mercy and forgiveness, an embrace that gives security. These communities are practising a fresh style of sharing which is an expression of gratuitousness. It recognises everyone’s abilities and is close and attentive to those who are different. Outsiders are made welcome.

⁹ Luis A. Aranguren Gonzalo. *Es nuestro momento: El paradigma del cuidado como desafío educativo*. 2020.

¹⁰ Pedro Poveda, *CpH*, [34].

These communities celebrate life and protect it. They are communities that are present to those who need support and help, regardless of whether or not they belong to their circle. Where they were born or where they live do not matter.

These communities open up spaces to rethink life and prayer, places where we can have conversations in friendship with the One that we know loves us (Teresa of Avila). These communities encourage and speak about a way of being people of faith as expressed by Pope Francis in *Fratelli tutti*:

*Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense... it is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters.*¹¹

In Pedro Poveda's 1919 letter, *To your faith add knowledge*, he comments on the second letter of Peter, which we mentioned above, and he addresses it to the first group of associates. He says:

*You must acquire a spirit of faith that makes you serene in what you do, serious in how you live, exemplary in your practices ... The true secret of the early Christians' holiness is ... in their living faith that led to charity, and that produced its natural effects which are virtues.*¹²

Josefa Segovia, who shared with Pedro Poveda the responsibility for directing the Teresian Association, wrote in 1928:

The Association has such a beautiful history! Pedro Poveda's faith made it great. Often in the midst of storms, whirlwinds, squalls and downpours, being very close to him, I would hear him repeat: "Lord, let me see" ...

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n° 86.

¹² Pedro Poveda, *CpH*, [111].

Our Association is a work of faith, and so you and I and all of us must walk with our eyes closed yet open, very open, with the eyes of the Spirit: like those of the blind man, the Canaanite woman, the centurion. Exercise this virtue throughout your life in the hope that at the end of your journey you will hear what Saint Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed are you because you have believed.¹³

II. BY THE WAYSIDE

A deaf and dumb man was brought to Him

There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (Mark 7: 32-37).

Social outcasts can be seen on roadsides all over the world. They are people who find it difficult in one way or another to integrate into what we call ordinary life. They are begging for alms and waiting to be noticed. They are always on the edge, not only of the road, but also of society and of any experience that recognises their dignity.

Sometimes these people cry out because of their personal suffering. Sometimes, just like the deaf and dumb man in Mark's Gospel, they let themselves be led by others who speak on their behalf and ask Jesus for

¹³ Josefa Segovia, *Cartas*, [80].

healing. Let us hope that we are not among those who are irritated by the cries of the blind or the sick, or of those who beg for dignity, freedom and human compassion.

Jesus in the Gospels was always close to social outcasts and friendly towards them. Those people included tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, lepers, widows, children and the uneducated. He broke the social conventions of his time, as in the case of the Samaritan woman. He spoke to everyone, to the unimportant, to the unsuccessful and others.

Jesus approached all these people to tell them that salvation had come to those who were “by the wayside,” to those who were expelled from society for various reasons, to the little ones, to the illiterate and to the vulnerable.

Jesus' intervention not only declared their dignity before God, but also attacked the root causes of their social insignificance which were the material conditions of their existence and their possibility of a future.

It was part of Jesus' mission to reach out to those on the margins and to reintegrate them into human fellowship. It was to integrate into society those who were considered to be very disadvantaged and excluded.

Jesus did not accept that marginalisation should exist and he did not tolerate it under any circumstances. For that reason, everything he did was in line with this approach and he always looked for ways of integration.

In Guadix, there were many people on the edge, not only of the road, but also of the city. Those people were segregated, isolated and excluded, and they lived in a separate neighbourhood. They were excluded for many reasons, but Pedro Poveda understood immediately that, without education or preparation, their exclusion would only increase their marginalisation.

The man who was deaf and speech-impaired was also excluded and so he had become closed in on himself, uncommunicative and limited. Given his situation, similar to that of many people today, we can imagine the difficulties he would encounter in trying to relate to others, the dangers he would be exposed to by not being able to hear, the despair his condition would cause him when he was surrounded by people and did not know what was happening. How could he understand what was going on around him?

When people lack the education and culture that help them interpret and relate to the rapid changes we are going through, then they develop mistrust, isolation and shame and in many cases are left by the wayside.

Through Jesus' intervention and his word *Ephphatha*, the man in the Gospel was able to open up to life, to start on a path of healing and of opening up to others, to the world and to himself. At last he was able to communicate with the outside world and to relate to it in a new way.

People may feel isolated and excluded, and the cause may not only be due to their sensory organs. They are closed up within themselves, at their very depths. Jesus came to release them from this situation so that they could fully embrace their relationship with God and with others, and their relationship with themselves and with society.

Ephphatha (open up) sums up the mission of Jesus, one which is ours too. It is to liberate those many marginalised people that our society leaves by the wayside. Pope Francis tells us to make a stand against today's throwaway culture and social exclusion. Let us do it with the tools Pedro Poveda offered in his time and that are still valid today: instruction, education and culture.

The schools that Pedro Poveda opened in the caves district marked the beginning of a new stage for the cave-dwellers, for the children and for whole families; it was a pathway towards socialisation, towards openness and communication with the city.

This also asks us today, as partners in Poveda's dream, to be committed to our own preparation and training and greater adaptation to the cultural expressions and modes that help to motivate learning. We are asked to be competent in searching out suitable and inclusive language and methods to enable everyone to find their place in society. We are asked to study, to research.

*Study the lives of the great teachers, those who sacrificed themselves for education and culture for the sake of humanity, and you will be convinced that this is the way to make progress and do good, not by speechifying at all hours,*¹⁴ Pedro Poveda wrote in 1911 to those who were in charge of the first Academies, warning about talking a lot while studying very little when it came to taking on responsibilities.

The art of paving the way

Between 1925 and 1930 Pedro Poveda's projects and tasks reflected his desire to consolidate the Teresian Association. This he did through what he wrote and by focussing on two areas: affirming the identity of the Association and the need to train both the members and others who were involved in the enterprise.

Training, education, study, a critical and clear-eyed way of viewing current affairs, that is to say, being prepared to anticipate events in order to respond to people's challenges, quests and concerns – these are

¹⁴ Pedro Poveda, *CpH*, [56].

fundamental elements in the identity of those who take part in his projects, achievements and dreams.

On the 10 of October in 1928 Pedro Poveda wrote to one of the centres directed by the Association, speaking of personal development: *Awaken in them deep desires to become holy and to reach a high level of studies and cultural appreciation so that later they will worthily practise the apostolate they profess ... I would like to see them besiege you with questions...*¹⁵

For Poveda, paving the way meant appointing people to active situations, confronting the challenges of the time. It involved his colleagues becoming educators and trainers in a way that elicited responsibility and enabled them to take on the task they were committed to and to do so competently, in an appropriate, active and co-responsible way.

To achieve this, the advice is clear: in his programme, knowledge is placed along with faith. He proposed to develop in each person a taste for learning, for discovering new ways of reading reality and for accepting the new learning tools being offered by society. This is to be done with a deep sense of discernment in order to be able to give an account of why we do it, for what purpose, whom we want to serve, and where and for whom we want to pave the way and offer new possibilities.

¹⁵ Pedro Poveda, *CpH*, [283].

I ask you for a new system, a new method

In 1911 when Pedro Poveda created the first teacher-training centre in Oviedo, he did not stop scrutinising the present and thinking about the future. His thinking and all his work are directed towards a pedagogy that is capable of responding to the demands and characteristics of the times.¹⁶

Maria Dolores Gómez Molleda, speaking of this time in Pedro Poveda's life says, *Poveda's writings reveal his profound awareness of the times. For him, the idea of change is intense. He had a sense of time passing, a sense that the present in which one lives is not the same as yesterday, nor will tomorrow be the same. Above all he saw that if one wants to win the future one must foresee it, one must anticipate it without trying to channel it or fight uselessly against it.*¹⁷

Miguel de Unamuno, with his philosophical view of existence said, "It is better to be parents of our future than children of our past."

In these times of momentous changes that are continuous and rapid, in an era like ours of accelerated transitions that are pluralistic and contradictory, Poveda assigns to education a key role for people to fulfil their human calling. He liked to say that an educated generation makes for a great people, a nation.

¹⁶ Cf. Angeles Galino, *Textos pedagógicos hispanoamericanos*, 1982 (4 ed.), p. 1473.

¹⁷ María Dolores Gómez Molleda, *CpH*, Editor's notes, p. 803.

This is what led Pope Francis to propose a *Global Compact on Education*. When launching it, he invited all those who in diverse ways work in the field of education to

...dialogue on how we are shaping the future of our planet and the need to employ the talents of all, since all change requires an educational process aimed at developing a new universal solidarity and a more welcoming society.

...Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity.¹⁸

Later, on World Teachers' Day, speaking to representatives of different religious traditions, he said,

We are concerned to ensure an integral formation that can be summed up in knowledge of ourselves, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Transcendent. We cannot fail to speak to young people about the truths that give meaning to life.

...

Today we want to state that our religious traditions, which have always played a leading role in schooling, from teaching literacy to higher education, reaffirm their mission of integrally educating each individual: head, hands, heart and soul. ... If in the past, our differences set us at odds, nowadays we see in them the richness of diverse ways of coming to God and of educating young people for peaceful coexistence in mutual respect.¹⁹

¹⁸ Pope Francis, "Message for the launch of the Global Compact on Education", 12 September 2019.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, "Religion and education: towards the Global Compact on education", 5 October 2021.

For Poveda, nothing is improvised. It is essential to be well prepared and professionally competent in order to be at the level that the times require. To be able to explain things in order to fulfil the task and complete the mission is indispensable and requires time and dedication.

Study, essential for discernment of reality

This year we want to go more deeply into the call by Poveda to combine a lively and consistent faith with the ability to study, learn, research and bring the good news of education and culture to society. The Church too is going on pilgrimage, discerning, walking on the synodal pathway.

We can ask ourselves to what extent we can, without reflection and study, discern the purpose of the changes that we are seeing in society and the Church. We could develop the kind of sensitivity that would give us the viewpoint of the most disadvantaged, of those we consider vulnerable, those who have been left behind on the edges of society and of the Church.

Study, reflection and active curiosity that make us search for greater understanding of our reality are converted into a demanding personal activity which also needs open spaces, opportunities to explore together, to meet and be challenged, to debate and discern together.

When Pope Francis presented the Synod he said,

The Gospel is full of... encounters with Christ, encounters that uplift and bring healing. Jesus did not hurry along or keep looking at his watch to get the meeting over. He was always at the service of the person he was with, listening to what he or she had to say.²⁰

²⁰ Pope Francis, "Synod opening address" 9 October 2021.

Pedro Poveda's call to integrate faith and knowledge gives substance and a sense of the future to those of us who feel sent to the mission spearheaded by Poveda.

For this mission we must be experts in the art of encounter and of listening. It is important too to be able to organise events, reflect theoretically on problems, but above all we must take the time to listen, welcome, understand, analyse and discern. In this way we will find pathways to future responses to the questions, cares and hopes of our world as well as to the challenges and changes they present to us.

Let us not become entrenched in our certainties. Convictions are vital and necessary for dialogue, but certainties often prevent us from discerning.

As we said in the 2015 letter on study,

Key to this is regular study that can give us a clear and discriminative view capable of identifying and naming the challenges that are presented. To name something is the first step towards understanding and knowledge of the reality in which we live. Study understood in this way is attractive and pleasing. So too is the pleasure of discovering that things and especially life have meaning, and that we can be co-creators with God in human history.²¹

This immense task calls for the life-giving and spiritual approaches that Leonardo Boff²² called 'essential care': nurturing tenderness, a needed caress, basic kindness, necessary companionship and total compassion. It is an ethical-spiritual renewal or revolution in keeping with our times. The author tells us that caring is what makes the other person become a precious being.

²¹ Maite Uribe, *Letter on study*, 2015.

²² Leonardo Boff, *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature*, 2008

Similarly, George Steiner, on observing the world in which we live, said that we are all invited guests, and as such we must organise society by making it a vocation:

We are guests in life. On this small, endangered planet, we must be both guests and hosts ... the word 'hosts' [in French] denotes both the one who hosts and the one who is welcomed, and as such could be regarded as a miraculous term. It is both. Learning to be the guest of others and at the same time leaving the house to which one has been invited a little richer, more human, more just, more beautiful than one found it. I believe that this is our mission, our task, our vocation, our call to the journey of human beings, always pilgrims of the possible.²³

I would like to conclude with a quotation from the Assembly of all the Associations a.e. 2018 asking: How are we going to make our “virtue and knowledge” serve the urgent demands of evangelisation to which we must not turn a deaf ear?

The Assembly pointed to how we are directing our energies in this six-year period through diversity, dialogue, inclusion and equality, with a focus on two social sectors in peripheral situations, families and young people. The Assembly left us with this message:

With hopeful realism we can dream and ask: What would happen if the potential we have for education, science, culture and media – whether much or little – could be put at the service of these situations? It is not just about drawing up a narrative that might please or disturb us. It is about fidelity to the origin, the path and the shared destiny of humanity. It is about putting ourselves, together with many others, on the path of humble and daring, confident and grateful conversion. Only together, and with the grace of God, can we not only dream about it, but actually undertake it.²⁴

²³ George Steiner, Antoine Spire, *La barbarie de l'ignorance*, 2003. [Our translation from the Spanish version]

²⁴ *Assembly of all the associations a.e. 2018*, p. 60.

As a discerning community, inspired by the charism of Pedro Poveda, we continue to listen to the voices crying out in our times so that we may respond accordingly. We will follow the synodal process as the People of God. We want to sit beside the well and stand by the roadside listening and welcoming. We feel the thirst that animates us all and we learn from one another. We try not to fall into the temptation to dominate but always to seek how best to serve. We want our journey as a people to be a school of fellowship.

So the prayer that will accompany us on our journey for the coming year will be:

**Lord, make us people of living faith, prophetic and engaging,
empowered by prayer and study.**

With warm good wishes,

Maite Uribe Bilbao



ta teresian association