

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

SOME “NEW”
VIRTUES OF A
GOOD TEACHER

CREATIVITY

DEPTH

VISION

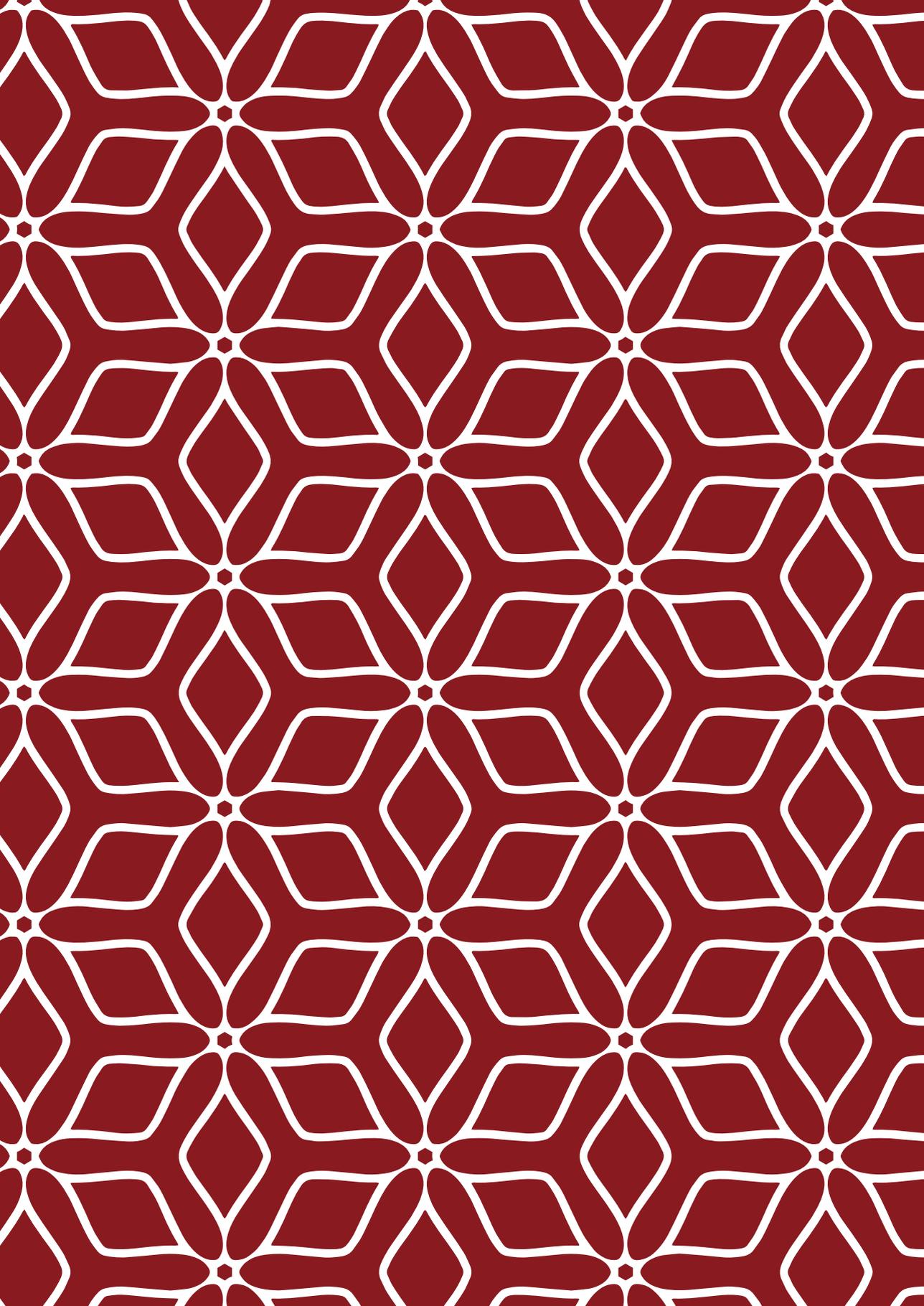
AUTHOR

BR. GABRIELE DI GIOVANNI, FSC

La  Salle

MEL BULLETINS

66



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**Brothers of
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MEL BULLETIN No. 66

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

Some “new” Virtues of a Good Teacher. *Creativity. Depth. Vision.*

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PRESENTATION

“The virtues of a Good Teacher” have been part of Lasallian ethical and spiritual heritage since the early days. In the first editions of the Collection of Short Treatises, we already find the list of twelve virtues: seriousness, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, restraint, gentleness, zeal, vigilance, piety, and generosity. The first printed edition is from 1711. It is very likely that these short treatises had a previous autonomous and handwritten existence.

What is striking about this list is that, to a certain extent, it formed the ethical framework of the first Lasallian community. We could understand them as a harmony of echoes of the spirit of the Institute in the pedagogical relationship.

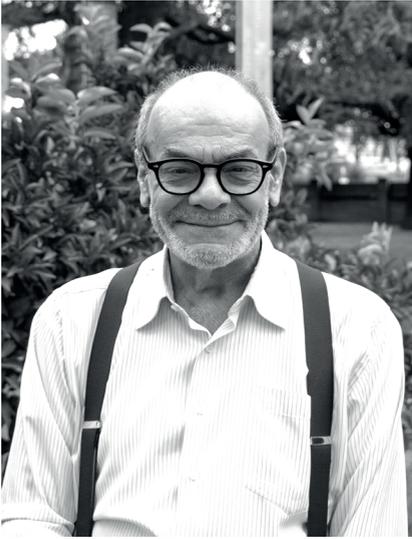
A little less than a century later, it was Brother Agathon, Superior General during the French Revolution, who attempted to rethink the whole from the perspective of his contemporary culture. Those teachers had become sufficiently professionalised and specialised to review their own foundations. Their endeavour was to create a new specific literature. Among other initiatives, he wrote a commentary on the twelve virtues. In it, he even argued for a reform of the order that Mr De La Salle had given to the virtues in order to articulate a more logical discourse.

Now, more than a century later, Brother Gabriele Di Giovanni has sought to draw attention to one of the most important documents that the Institute has produced at the beginning of this 21st century and to find in this Declaration on the Lasallian Mission, once again, a teaching ethic rooted in spiritual experience.

We thank him for his work and hope that it will help us all to experience our task as a fruitful ministry that bears witness to another possible world.

Brother Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, FSC
Director of the Office of Lasallian Heritage and Research

The author



Gabriele Di Giovanni is a Brother of the Christian Schools.

Born in Rome in 1957, he is a former student of the Angelo Braschi School.

He holds a Degree in Education and a Doctorate in Theology. He has explored the Lasallian vocation from many angles. He has been a Primary School teacher, lecturer, head teacher and community director. In 1991, he attended SIEL (*Session*

Internationale d'Études Lasalliennes). He has served in various positions in the District that have led him to participate in related European Commissions. His interests are mainly in the areas of pedagogy, pastoral ministry and catechesis (he edits the magazine *Sussidi per la catechesi*).

He has been in charge of the Lasallian Family and has been involved in teacher training. He participated in the 45th and 46th General Chapters. He is currently Visitor of the District of Italy of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

He has published several books and articles on Lasallian and catechetical topics. This publication brings together some of his contributions to *Sussidi per la Catechesi*.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, the pedagogical work par excellence of the Lasallian world, De La Salle and the first Brothers list 12 virtues of a good teacher, without further comment.

Subsequently, Brother Agathon,¹ (Joseph Gonlieu), Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (FSC) at the time of the French Revolution, commented on them in a more detailed manner in a text that was also brief, and in this form they entered the educational tradition of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, becoming a small classic that provides access to their educational style.

The list of 12 virtues is as follows:

- Gravity
- Silence
- Humility
- Prudence
- Wisdom
- Patience
- Reserve
- Gentleness
- Zeal
- Vigilance
- Piety
- Generosity

More recently, *The Declaration on Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions, Hopes* (2020) states,

If there is anything that distinguishes the Lasallian proposal, since its origin, it is the dignity of the teacher, the importance assigned to his/her role in the educational process and the recognition of his/her

1 For more detailed information on his life, see F. Ricousse, “Frère Agathon, Supérieur Général del 1777 a 1798. L’expérience d’un siècle de pédagogie lasallienne : fidélité et adaptation” in *Rivista Lasalliana* 1, 2014, pp. 111-126. Brief notes are also available on Wikipedia.

*ability to impact the character formation of the children and young people assigned to their care. Currently functions, methodologies, and paradigms have changed. However, the presence of **an upright, generous, creative, and respectful** teacher continues to be the primary element for the success of the Lasallian educational process.*

***Integrity, example, depth, vision, respect, tenderness, ardent zeal, faith and hope** will always be the virtues that will characterize the upright teacher's ability to mediate. The practice of these virtues points out pathways, encourages dreams, shows horizons, accompanies toward the achievement of autonomy, challenges, and generates mediating scenarios. The result of all these actions is the growth and personal development of the student, the empowerment of their personal capacities and solidarity with common projects.*

*Not in vain did Saint John Baptist de La Salle conceive of the teacher as an **older brother / sister, guardian angel, minister of Jesus Christ, role model, reflection of transcendence and depth, and inspirer of opportunities and projects.** The rich educational achievement that this vision creates generates life, forms character, enables learning, builds fraternity, and enhances the personal vocation of each child and young person it educates.*

The classic list of 'Good Virtues' is enriched, even if the *Declaration* uses the same words (e.g., tenderness) but employs and interprets them differently. It is a 'new' list: the essential nature of the teaching function remains.

The latter is a statement of principle that we feel we can endorse. However, it seems to us that this statement needs to be verified today, because the world has changed. And it needs to be verified also and above all from a spiritual and theological point of view. It is the conviction of the author that the activity of educating has an eminently spiritual dimension and that it is a path to holiness, even in the rapidly changing educational context.

What is the role of the educator today?

Yesterday

In Agathon's world, at the end of the 18th century, the importance of the teaching role was taken for granted and it was absolutely essential to emphasise it.

This, among other things, was the main lesson of John Baptist de La Salle: a good school is made by good teachers alongside excellent and meticulous practical organisation, functional to the purpose, which alone can eliminate most problems by anticipating them. Therefore, La Salle was concerned with training teachers thoroughly and, at the same time, with organising the school so that it would 'run well', which ultimately meant that the children enjoyed attending and were happy to go there. This in itself was no small ideal.

In reality, one of the main reasons for going to school, apart from being with classmates (this has always been the real reason), was to meet adults who took a genuine interest in us. I don't think anyone ever went to class to study maths or history: there are books for that. That was the bread: a good teacher broke it for you and, if they were exceptional, made you enjoy it. To do that, they had to be a 'good' teacher. Agathon taught you to be one, making you reflect on the virtues you had to, had to, have.

Today

Things are perhaps no longer like that. The transmission of knowledge takes place in a different and more varied way: the school, the place that the modern state has designated for this purpose by funding it, is now just one educational agency among others and perhaps not even the most influential one: how many debates have we heard over the decades about the 'mis educational' role played by the media?

The Covid period has confronted us all with the reality of distance learning and the means that can be used today. Books? It seems they are becoming less and less necessary.

Wikipedia has everything, from the Fourier transform to the rule for using the letter h (I checked both), and now AI has been added. Note: online, you will find not only illustrations but also explanations, often well done... so what is the point of teachers who explain? Perhaps we need to change the way we teach.

The Changing School

In a changing world, schools 'should' also change. They should, because the school structure is one of the most resistant to change, at least in Italy. Even today, going to school means entering a classroom with desks arranged in rows, facing a teacher's desk behind which there is a blackboard, perhaps now replaced by an interactive whiteboard. The teacher's desk is sometimes still placed on a platform (after all, everyone needs to be able to see), behind which the teacher sits. Even today, we go to school (and I am also referring to university) to 'listen' to the teacher, to learn from them, to receive study guidance, in order to then learn on our own (alas, the study method that, for some reason, some people have never possessed!), to be tested, to be promoted and to wait to find a job that matches our results.

But does it always have to be this way? Can't we start dreaming, thinking about a different kind of school? And what role will the educator play in it? What spiritual values should be developed?

An important clarification

What do we mean when we talk about virtue?

Virtue is a personal quality acquired through the habitual practice of good actions. In this definition, we must bear two aspects in mind.

The first expression to bear in mind is 'good deeds': 'good' does not mean 'easy', but that they have a positive value for us and for others. Performing good deeds is the result of voluntary choices, sometimes

difficult ones, which habit gradually makes easier and, in some cases, almost becomes second nature.

The second expression is 'acquired quality'. We are not born virtuous. We become so through conscious practice, which is only possible through self-control and repeated voluntary choice. Virtue is perhaps the highest fruit of education: ancient knowledge, but perhaps not so well remembered today.

In this sense, the acquisition of virtues is a kind of ascetic journey in which we learn to do good habitually, almost as if it required no effort: it comes almost naturally to the virtuous, or so it seems.

But we do not want to bring the concept of virtue into the idea of muscular effort. As an image (one of many possible ones), we refer to the sequence in the film *The Last Samurai* where the protagonist gradually learns the art of sword fighting. Repeated exercise and training lead to harmonious movements that appear natural.

Above all, an educator does not work with the intention of developing these virtues for himself: he does so for his disciples. The goal is not personal perfection: the goal is the mission of educating.

It is a fact that in order to educate, we must become better people than we are. This is to avoid two dangers that are present, at least in Italy.

The first is that we too easily approach young people without having done any work on ourselves, as if it were a totally natural gift or simply a matter of good will. The very concept of virtue says that it takes practice. But perhaps today we do not even think about the fact that an educator must have certain virtues: is good will not enough? Is it not enough to want to accompany young people? Unfortunately, no.

Education is not a voluntary activity: it may be so at the beginning, but it must quickly evolve. As volunteers, we can do some repetition and even find personal satisfaction in it, but educating is something else. The statement is harsh, but we leave it in its harshness for the reader to reflect on.

The second danger is similar to the first: focusing only on 'what to say', without ever considering 'how' and 'to whom'. We managed to love impossible subjects only because those we met were able to convey something to us. Content alone, even if essential, is not enough to educate. Of course, we must have content, but they will not believe in the content, they will believe in us. And they will do so sincerely if we have content. The essential thing is called 'charity', which, coincidentally, is a theological virtue in Christian terms. Here too, we invite the reader to reflect.

Editorial note

The texts presented here are a reworking (thanks to Ms Ilaria Iadeluca) of a series of articles that appeared in *Sussidi per la catechesi*, the historic magazine of the Italian Lasallians. In fact, over time, all the Virtues of the Good Teacher have been commented on, both the traditional ones (based on a new Italian translation of Agathon's text) and the new ones proposed by the *Declaration*.

In Italian, therefore, there is a complete, fairly substantial commentary on the 'old and new virtues of the good teacher'. However, this text has not yet been published in an organised form, nor has it been translated. Anyone who wishes to do so may request it from the author.

From that commentary, we have extracted only three 'new' virtues taken from the *Declaration*:

- Creativity
- Depth
- Vision

As these are "new virtues", no research has yet been done on any Lasallian references that may exist: this would be a specific task that could be carried out in the future.

The style adopted in their presentation, although sometimes assertive, is intended to be stimulating, encouraging the reader to develop further insights on their own. The analysis is conducted in Italian, which may create some problems due to possible shifts in meaning in other languages.

CREATIVITY

Creativity does not seem to be a virtue (i.e., something that can be acquired through exercise and practice until it becomes a *habitus*) but rather appears to be a personal gift: people are born creative; it is a quality of the person, not a virtue. This perception is based on two questionable assumptions.

The first confuses creativity with spontaneity, which is the ability to express oneself without too many filters, in a direct, uncontrived and therefore 'new' and 'naive' way. It is a quality that we naturally attribute to children (whom we praise), but which adults also possess (and which we sometimes complain about: ultimately, it can be seen as a lack of education). We like spontaneity because it makes us feel free. But it is not creativity. Spontaneity is based on nature, creativity produces culture.

To think that they go together means to assume that, since we are all naturally creative, this creativity will emerge on its own if we do not filter it. But it is one thing to be unique and unrepeatable, and another to be creative: the former concerns our being, the latter our doing. From this perspective, everyone should be creative simply by virtue of existing. But perhaps we are all repetitive, not creative.

The second idea, which makes us see creativity as a quality we are born with, depends on the fact that we generally link it to genius and artistry, in short, to areas where personal intuition (often identifiable with taste) counts more than consequential reasoning. Seen in this light, creativity is something esoteric and mysterious that can only belong to a select few, and we forget that painters, sculptors, actors and directors are not born: they are made through hard work and study, a suitable starting point and sometimes (if success comes) even a pinch of luck.

Looking at things more simply, when we think of a creative person, we think of someone who, in a given context (fashion, design, art, cooking, even finance... education?), produces something new, something (even just a detail) that was not there yesterday. This is obviously a very broad way of understanding the concept.

One thing is certain, however: creativity has to do with the ‘new’, and we need to be careful about this.

Novelty (what we now attribute to creativity) is not, in fact, the absolute new: it is the everyday new, that touch of difference that piques our curiosity in the moment.

Novelty is ephemeral (tomorrow we will need to find another one), it touches the surface, whereas the new goes deeper, changing things and people. A child is new, the result of a football match is novel.

Then, when we talk about creativity today, what and who are we actually referring to: novelty or the new?

Qohelet claimed, as if it were an obvious observation, that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ and that even if we do many different things (therefore relatively new, at least for us), in the end the world is still there, barely aware of our personal presence. Saint Hilary of Poitiers, confirming the Old Testament scholar, saw the only human novelty in Christ, who *omnes novitatem attulit semetipsum afferens*.²

Finally, a non-trivial note should be made about stimulating our imaginative capacity (creative in the broad sense) by using more or less legal substances.

We do not wish to open a discussion on this, which would be endless. Let us simply say that people ‘help’ themselves to maintain the creativity that comes from drawing on their own imaginative world. In today’s world, it seems to have become an increasingly widespread practice at certain levels and in certain ‘creative’ circles in order to cope with the stress of having to keep up with the pace demanded by today’s reality and having to constantly produce ‘novelties’, at a time

2 The phrase, taken from the work *Adversus Haereses* (but also made famous by St. Irenaeus of Lyon, who expressed an identical concept), refers to the mystery of the Incarnation. “*He brought every novelty, bringing himself*”.

when some feel that everything has already been said. Seen in this light, substance use finds its apparent justification, at least in those who resort to it. The problem is that with use comes addiction: the creativity sought turns out to be slavery found, which is no longer made up of fantasy, but of hallucination, which in the end is also needed in order not to feel bad.

It is a serious issue with no easy solution. Without resorting to facile moralising and without wishing to judge anyone, we can nevertheless say that creative drug use is induced, forced creativity. Is it true creativity?

We are at the same level as doping in sport: even if the result is achieved, it is not recognised: it is a falsehood in a public act, an untruth. On the contrary, according to today's standards, if taking substances leads you to produce a successful album, then yes, it is creativity. Today's contradictions. And in any case, drug-induced creativity is creativity that you pay for with your life. Perhaps it is worth asking ourselves if it is worth it. Certainly yes, if our only god is money and success.

THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF CREATING

The term takes on different shades of meaning, which we will try to analyse: devising, designing, conceiving, inventing, discovering... It is by exploring these different meanings that we will find a way to talk about creativity in education.

Naming

The first meaning (which is not generally considered) is taken from the Bible.

In the strict sense, 'creating', i.e., producing something that did not exist before, is typically only God's prerogative. According to

Scripture, He creates from nothing using the Word: while His Spirit (*ruah*) hovers over the waters, He speaks, and things come into being. Before, they did not exist.

Man, created in the image and likeness of God, shares in this power.

We all remember the biblical moment when man is called upon to give 'names' to animals and things: he does not 'create' them because they already exist, but he 'names' them and in this sense brings them into his world, which we can call cultural (the starting point of culture is worship). And by naming them, he gains power over them: he controls them.

This mechanism (the ability to name) is the basis of human knowledge and science: the unknown, by definition, is that which has no name and, as such, frightens and intrigues us. By naming it, we feel we can get to know it, bring it into our world.

This is why knowing words is power: the children of Barbiana understood this perfectly.³

But precisely because words are power, naming presents risks and requires considerable responsibility.

This is why most educational processes, teachings and disciplines focus on knowledge of the words that compose them.

It is not just a literary or purely linguistic fact: tangent, median, parallax, ampere, watt, farad, electromagnetic field, spin are words that refer to physical realities and only frighten those who do not know them, who do not know how to use them. This observation alone opens up a vast field of pedagogical reflection.

³ Barbiana is the village where Don Lorenzo Milani's educational experience took place. Among the reference texts, we recommend "Letter to a Teacher".

The point is that naming things is something we can all do: we do it from an early age, inventing our own fantastical language. It remains ours: when it becomes everyone's, we call it culture.

Maintaining and developing the ability to 'name' in the manner described above is an integral part of the discourse on human creativity, also in the social sense: consider the historical impact of the word 'equality' proposed by the French revolutionaries, but which mathematicians have now removed from their vocabulary.

In a human context, 'creating' is first and foremost having the ability to 'name'; an ability that comes directly from God and that we risk distorting with the use we make of it.

In some cases, names are learned because they have already been assigned (this is what we call deposited culture); in other cases, they have to be invented. Dedicated teams do this for a new car model or a new product to be marketed... Naming things has become a (creative) job.

Imagining

This is our ability to create images, to represent things that are more or less real in our minds.

We also call it imagination. We generally think that a person's creativity is linked to their imagination. The term derives from Greek and has its root in 'to show' (*faino*), i.e., the ability to see and show something, especially in the absence of the thing itself. Imagination produces novelty in our minds, not so much in reality. It is therefore first and foremost a cognitive tool that allows us to approach things (perhaps better: situations), to anticipate them in some way, not so much in their reality as in the impact (in expectations) they might have on us.

It is this characteristic that makes modern visual arts so important today. Even prehistoric man imagined and drew paintings on rocks,

but since we discovered the possibility of giving movement to images (cinema with all its subsequent audio-visual variations), our fantasy world has exploded.

For some, even too much so. We have even given it a name, 'virtual reality', which has become a reality parallel to that of our daily lives. So strong that some people, especially young people who stay glued to their video games all night long, now live more in it than in the real world. This is a problem.

It is a point to bear in mind in the field of education for a variety of reasons.

First and foremost, it is a question of learning: an image or a film sequence can teach us more than simple words because they find in us a terrain already predisposed to imagination. They are an opportunity, but they can also be a danger. It is a social and human issue: it is not good to live detached from the real world, where there is no possibility of starting over every time by pressing a button.

But demonising it, as we adults easily do, serves no purpose. The important thing is to be aware of the diversity of the two worlds (the virtual and the real) without confusing them and perhaps (important) without being swallowed up by just one of them. Because even in the real world, we cannot help but imagine. We would not be able to live.

What sets the imagination in motion? There is no simple answer.

A sweet dipped in milk: from this sensory memory, Proust developed his *Recherche*. But Dante, even with the taste sensation of someone else's salty bread, perhaps constructed his Comedy with its variety of situations, on highly articulated conceptual structures and strong feelings. However, something (even if not particularly important: a word, a memory, a sensation) must strike us deeply for our imaginative mechanisms to be set in motion and transport us. For this to happen, we need 'contemplation', perhaps just our nose pressed against the window watching the rain fall, or lifting our head from a book after a passage that has particularly engaged us.

Imagination: it arises from our emotional sphere rather than our logical reasoning. It is activated when this sphere is affected. Furthermore, 'imagining' takes time, which we certainly have little of if we are forced to put together lunch and dinner every day. And hunger makes us have strange dreams.

Dreams: imagination, in its imaginative power, comes close to dreams and sometimes merges with them. It is in fact in dreaming that we develop our imaginative abilities. We all dream, even if we do not all remember what we have dreamed when we wake up. When we sleep, we are all creative: when we are awake, we are a little less so. But dreams can be had with our eyes closed (while sleeping) or with our eyes open (while awake), and in this case, imagination can create some problems for us and become linked to illusion.

In a positive sense, therefore, imagination is a faculty that helps us to represent reality; in a negative sense, it can be understood as a kind of escape from it (daydreaming). Not to mention that there is a whole dimension of fantasy that is not at all reassuring: along with pleasant dreams come nightmares. Along with the dream of a utopian reality, we can also imagine (and we are doing so more and more often in relation to the ecological problems we face in the world today) dystopian realities.

Dreams are clearly a vast subject of study and develop a series of meanings that cannot be explored in depth here. Let us just say that when we dream while sleeping, rather than creating new images, we rework what we experience in a fantastical form. We all know that dream interpretation is a tool for getting to know ourselves deeply and is an activity in which we need help: here too, it is ultimately a matter of 'naming' what we perceive internally. To do this requires study and clinical practice.

Inventing

In addition to naming and imagining, humans are capable of inventing, which in its Latin origin means 'to find' and in Italian has

remained in the term 'trovata', in the sense of an impromptu idea. And here we touch on a different characteristic of creativity.

Inventing (conceiving, devising) refers to the practical or even just imaginative activity of creating something that did not exist before. Certainly, in the common sense, it is more related to things: gadgets, machines and mechanical systems are invented, rather than music or artistic objects. It is no coincidence that the common icon of the inventor is Disney's Archimedes. The human ability to invent machines is astonishing today: it gives us a feeling of power that we did not know before.

Inventing seems to have to do with a particular type of creativity, which does not so much produce something new as see a new application for something that already exists. The tools we invent, in fact, translate certain physical discoveries into practice: without Shannon's (proven) mathematical theories, many 'new' objects, which we define as invented and are now in common use, would have been impossible, nor would Archimedes have stopped the Roman fleet by setting it on fire if he had not understood a new use for mirrors.⁴ In short, inventing, which is also clearly linked to creativity, seems to us to have little to do with romance and a lot to do with study.

Discovering

The term refers to the activity that leads us not so much to produce new things as to bring them to light (to reveal them, in the sense of removing the veil) and in so doing make them appear new, in the sense of never seen before.

Discovery seems to be the prerogative of science, or rather of a scientific attitude, which is not typical only of the physical sciences,

⁴ During the Second Punic War (214-212 BC), the city of Syracuse was attacked by Roman forces led by Consul Marcellus. According to tradition, Archimedes used a series of polished bronze mirrors to reflect the sun's rays and concentrate them on a single point on the Roman ships, causing them to catch fire from a distance.

but of any discipline carried out with recognised methods. Even discovering an ancient manuscript can shed new light, bring novelty, recreate the story that has always been told...

The logic of scientific discovery (the title of a well-known book by Popper, 1934) is deeply linked to research and the methods we use. It is easy to insist on the necessity of research: it is what makes us human, never satisfied with the results obtained, because we were born "*non a viver come bruti, ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza*" (not to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge).⁵

This is a much-studied topic, so we will not dwell on it. Let us simply say that, even in this case, there seems to be little sentimentality and a great deal of reasoning, method, field research, and continuous and tireless commitment. It is true, however, that many discoveries have been made almost by chance, while looking for something else: Columbus was looking for India and found America without knowing it. The same is true for penicillin.

Innovating

It is not 'renewing' in the sense of giving the walls a fresh coat of paint or replacing the furniture in a room, but introducing new elements that progressively change the entire system. Put this way, we must recognise that we are living in a state of constant innovation. Consider how life has changed with the advent of electricity and all the household appliances connected to it that we could not even imagine before.

Of the terms analysed so far, 'innovate' is perhaps the most widely used in education, partly due to the increasingly widespread use of digital tools, which inevitably change the way we teach and learn. However, innovation is mainly discussed in relation to industrial processes, which are becoming increasingly robotised and less and less reliant on human manual labour. This is something that needs to

5 Dante, *Divine Comedy*, Inferno, Canto XXVI.

be understood in terms of education: it can be perceived as a threat (machines are replacing humans) or as a great opportunity (machines free us from repetitive and alienating work and give us back the freedom to devote ourselves to something more satisfying).

In either case, we must not make the mistake of anthropomorphising machines, which will always need someone to turn them on and direct them: they remain tools, and the power (and responsibility) remains with those who use them. But these are other issues. We are interested in emphasising that today's idea of creativity also rightly includes the idea and practice of innovation.

Remembering

Last but not least, we believe we can link this to human creativity.

At first glance, memory seems to be the exact opposite of creativity. Memory seems to refer to the past, while creativity, as we have seen, refers to the new. Yet in Greek mythology, *Mnemosyne*, the goddess of memory, is the mother of the Muses (their father is Zeus), and the Muses are the inspiring deities of all human arts (hence 'Olympian'), and therefore the divine source of creativity. Why this mythological identification between memory and creativity?

For the reason we have stated: human creativity is never creating from nothing (only God does that), but rather transforming (giving new form). This is the discussion we had earlier about the difference between new and novelty. Let us put it another way: in nature (and we are part of nature) nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, but everything is transformed. This is Lavoisier's fundamental postulate, something that has to do with the physical world, but which we believe can be extended to the spiritual world. Novelty with respect to memory is given not so much by the mere act of remembering, but by reading it from a different point of view: the experience is 'relived', but in a new way. It is made present.

In Christian terms, this is what happens every time we celebrate Mass: we remember Jesus' gesture of breaking bread and at the same time that gesture makes it present, new.

This is the lesson that Proust offers us. Past events (even the most trivial and no less evocative) are reinterpreted and transfigured: they recall the experience, but they are new.

On the other hand, in order to judge something as 'new', we must always compare it to something that already exists. If this were not the case, we could not even define it as new. If creativity makes us proud and sometimes out of step with what we think we are doing, remembering makes us humble, places us in history, puts us back in order. Therefore, in order to be creative, we must not lose our sense of history.

In summary

Creativity is made up of many things. If the idea that it is a virtue and therefore something we can acquire through practice is valid, it goes without saying that by exercising and practising all the different meanings identified, this virtue can be gained, at least in part. But as with all things, you have to want it.

What we mean is that we must not be discouraged in this field: in some way, we can all be creative. In fact, contrary to what is commonly believed today, we believe that creativity, especially in the field of education, should not be sought after frantically: it will come naturally if we are able to persevere in the areas indicated. We will be creative without even trying.

THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT

Naming, inventing, discovering, innovating, remembering... As believers, we ask ourselves about the meaning of what we have said about human creativity. It seems to us, in fact, that it lives in close

relationship with the presence of the Spirit in us. Essentially, the Christian perspective sees human creativity as a reflection of divine action, a spiritual principle attributable to the action of the Spirit in each of us. Inspiration, intuition, enlightenment, discernment are the terms involved, not always clear and distinct, which refer to our inner world, to our spiritual dimension. Spiritual because it is inhabited by the Spirit.

Theological reflection has questioned the role of the Spirit in the economy of salvation. Thus, if the Father creates the world, the Son redeems it, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies it. By associating human creativity with the Spirit, we cannot avoid linking it to his action of sanctifying the world. The impulse towards creativity that the Spirit gives us ultimately reveals itself as a call to holiness, which is nothing other than the newness of life that comes to us when we embrace the newness of Christ. The Spirit, in fact, takes us beyond newness to draw us to the new, Christ, and does so by teaching us everything, by reminding us of it.

CREATIVE EDUCATORS

Then, what do we mean when we say that today's educator must be creative in the sense that he or she should possess the virtue of creativity? The most immediate and common answer to this question is that he or she should not be boring, should not always say the same things: in short, someone who knows how to keep people's attention. Ultimately, a sort of *showman*.

We believe this is one way of looking at things, although we certainly do not feel called upon to play the role of a clown (with all due respect to this art form). However, sometimes the clothes of an actor and storyteller are also necessary. In any case, the creativity required of an educator is not that of a 'creative' as we understand it today: they are not obliged to invent new things every day, but they certainly must avoid boredom.

Overcoming boredom

Boredom arises because:

- The topic proposed at that particular moment is not interesting.
- It is presented in a flat manner, without enthusiasm or passion: it seems to bore us first.
- The level of attention does not last very long.

A boring educator is someone who (due to the topics they propose, how they propose them, and the time they take to propose them) does not arouse/maintain the curiosity/interest of their students. Boredom is therefore linked to a lack of curiosity.

Human beings (we often forget this) are naturally curious: it follows that curiosity must be maintained rather than simply aroused. To achieve this, we need to think ahead. Things must be organised so that interest is not lost. If it wanes, we must find a way to rekindle it. Most of the work of an educator (and their success) lies in preparing in detail for the moment when they will meet their students. This also applies to the priest who has to give a homily when celebrating Mass. It applies to anyone who addresses an audience. Even a film can be boring.

Boredom caused by the subject matter can be overcome by changing the subject. Not always telling the same things, for example, is easily achievable: every day, whatever the subject being taught, there is something new to learn; we need to educate people to see it, to discover it. To do this, we must first have seen it ourselves. One might say that this makes sense at a basic level, but when we are obliged to conclude our explanation of a text by Horace in the original, there seems to be no escape. And there is no escape if the only thing we think we have to do is repeat the commentary written at the bottom, which accompanies the text in small print: essentially repeating it.

A boring educator is one who gives the impression of repeating what they know. Let's not repeat: let's comment seriously, drawing from our own resources, and it will be much more enjoyable for us and for them. This also applies to a text from the Gospel, read countless times. We should be more aware of the beauty of 'explaining', a verb that also refers to setting sail, facing the wind and the sea. 'Explaining', removing the folds from things, expanding them, is one of the most creative things an educator can do. But in order to explain, one must have truly understood.

The boredom caused by an anonymous and flat presentation can be resolved by modulating that presentation. We can change our voice, show a video, organise a competition or a debate, tell a parable, give examples, or set an exercise. The important thing is that things are not left to chance: all this is called educational organisation. In such organisation, everything is important, but it remains essential to give the perception that we ourselves are passionate and believe in what we are doing and saying.

Boredom resulting from a physical decline in attention is a particularly sensitive issue today, when attention spans seem to be decreasing significantly and attention disorders are being diagnosed.

After a certain amount of time (to be assessed), we all experience lapses in attention (the obvious sign is yawning, if not actually 'dozing off'): we need to learn techniques to deal with this. First of all, we need to learn to speak appropriately to the audience in front of us. Lars von Trier voluntarily cut the Italian edition of one of his films presented at Cannes on the grounds that Italians cannot sit through films that are too long. What can we say? He was absolutely right. The question is: how did he come to this conclusion? He knew his audience.

Just as Jesus knew his audience and decided to speak in parables that referred to the everyday lives of his listeners.

HOW TO EDUCATE FOR CREATIVITY

We said it before: practising the different meanings we have assigned to creativity is the way to educate ourselves in it. Let's look at them briefly, in an exhortative way, referring directly to the educational action. In general, to be (become) creative, you need to remain fluid.

If we look at it from a Christian point of view, creativity consists in leaving room for the Spirit, allowing ourselves to be moved by Him, recognising His inspiration. What we said earlier about the Spirit applies here.

Practise remembering. In the Gospel, it is said that *'every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old'* (Mt 13:52).

A good practice for remembering is to keep (and update) a diary, not so much to recount events, but to note down a thought, a line of reasoning, an image. It is from who we are, and who we have been, that we draw out new ideas, solutions to problems (let us write them down, because it will help to clarify them).

Practise naming. Never stop learning new words, whatever field they come from. Every new word, and it is an overwhelming intellectual experience, gives us a special joy, opens up a world for us. Possessing words (provided we possess them and they do not possess us) means possessing reality, at least what humans consider to be reality. To do this, we need to study, read and learn about a wide variety of fields: we need to remain curious, whatever our age. It is in the practice of naming that we learn to tell stories, to narrate events, to give them words and meaning. Best practices include the regular use of dictionaries and spending time filling in crossword puzzles.

Practise imagining. Never stop dreaming or fantasising. It is not a waste of time, as long as we do not lose ourselves in the dream. It is a fact that not everyone has a vivid imagination. In this case, which is true for many, we can rely on the imagination of others expressed in books, films... At first, it will be copying, but gradually we will acquire

the ability to elaborate on our own. Take painting, for example. All the great painters had an initial phase in which they copied: this was necessary in order to learn techniques and also to reject what they were doing in order to find their own way. Imagination develops by consciously using 'models'.

Practise innovation. Basically, this means being open, in practical terms, to experimentation, not being afraid of the 'new'. In some cases, the new must be sought out, in others simply accepted: it is not mandatory to embrace it. However, we need to be aware of it. This is only possible when we are sure of the 'old'; we need it for comparison.

Practise discovery. Never stop searching, and not only in our specific field: we must cultivate 'wonder' because this is what brings us closer to the new. We need to make an extra effort to overcome our wise habit of no longer being surprised by anything.

Practise inventing. We understand inventing as the ability to solve problems: we complain about them every day, but our life is all about them. We can be overwhelmed by them, or we can see them as opportunities. We may not find the right solution, but at least we will have tried. And that is enough.

Even if some of the meanings of creativity identified prove more difficult, together they will compensate for any shortcomings, so that we will still be creative even if only by recalling facts, events and experiences from memory.

THE DANGERS OF CREATIVITY

After analysing its characteristics, let us also take stock of any excess of creativity, especially in education. An advertisement insisted that power is nothing if it is not controlled: it dissipates. The same applies to creativity: when it is not channelled and disciplined, it can only create chaos. We need novelty (the goal is not to bore), but not every

minute: it is like salt, which is needed in the right amount. 'Creativity' does not mean journeying on your own.

Agathon said that when an educator came up with new ideas/methods, they had to discuss them with their manager before applying them. Therefore, in education, creativity is good, but not at all costs.

DEPTH

One virtue required of today's teacher is 'depth'. At first glance, this would seem to be a virtue that is immediately understandable. But on closer inspection, 'depth' is not so easy to define: it has many meanings and encompasses many aspects.

In relation to De La Salle's list, which Agathon commented on, it seems to us at first glance that educational depth can go hand in hand with 'gravity'. And in that list, gravity was in first place, which should make us cautious. But perhaps in asking today's educators for 'depth', we are asking them for much more than seriousness and good preparation, which are, in themselves, professional characteristics... Being profound is a habitual attitude (which makes it a virtue) of a person who engages in reflection, introspection and deepening, but also something else that we will try to identify. We emphasise that in our approach we always consider 'depth' in the context of educational virtues, i.e. good habits that can be achieved through practice. In short, one is not born deep: one becomes deep, and, never more so than in this case, one becomes deep only if one wants to become so, because, from an educational perspective, one sees the need to do so. Educators cannot afford not to be deep.

Before summarising the aspects that make up 'depth', it is important to point out that it is a concept relative to the point of observation: depth must always be considered in relation to something. The consequence is that in order to talk about 'depth', we must first define the starting point, otherwise what is deep for one person may not be so for another.

THE STARTING POINT

It is the surface, what lies flat. This too can be relative: let us say that we consider the appearance of things, their showing themselves, to be the surface. This appearance can:

- Refer us to something else, which we will qualify as deep;

- Making us focus on ourselves, preventing us from seeing anything else.

What happens here is what happens with ‘beauty’: it is such that we cannot see anything else, or it manages to suggest further beauty. Much depends on the object and much depends on the eye that sees it.

The prerequisite for talking about depth is to admit that this depth, perhaps not perceived at first, is present in everything we see. This statement is not trivial and, above all, it is not obvious: we must accept the fact that beneath the phenomenon (of depth) lies the concept of *noumenon* (from the Greek *noúmenon*, ‘that which is thought’), *doxa* (from the Greek *dóxa*, ‘opinion’, ‘belief’), and *aletheia* (from the Greek *alétheia*, ‘truth’, ‘non-concealment’). This brings us to the most classical metaphysical reflection.⁶

Talking about depth is therefore not easy: it has to do with something that goes beyond what we can perceive with our senses. On the one hand, this is the realm of the ‘spiritual’, while on the other, it raises the problem of understanding how the latter relates to what does not appear to be spiritual.

Let's start with a quick overview of the many meanings we give to the word ‘depth’. This is not a useless exercise: it will help us to define the broad semantic spectrum of the term.

THE MANY DEPTHS

1. Physical depth

From a purely physical-material point of view, to say ‘deep’ it would suffice to indicate how many metres a certain thing is from the

⁶ Philosophical reflection on this subject has long been debated with varying results. Essentially, it is a question of understanding whether, beyond the ‘physical’, there is also the ‘meta’ physical.

surface of the ground: 50 metres deep, 100 metres deep. Deep like the Mariana Trench, where the Challenger Deep, the deepest point on earth, is located. Generally speaking, 'deep' from a physical point of view is something that lies below. For this reason, 'being deep' is a characteristic typical of the sea and water, from which life itself seems to have emerged: before we are born, are we not all immersed in liquid?

In our physical world, we encounter highs and lows, and we have learned from experience that every descent (going down) is also an ascent, and every ascent is a descent: it depends on which way you take the road. And if the ascent is tiring, the descent can be dangerous, because you can easily pick up speed and risk hurting yourself.

Finally, in material objects, thanks to the force of gravity, it is possible to define weight. Our experience in our world shows us that every weight naturally tends downwards: it goes down. 'Heaviness' is thus linked in some way to depth: those who want to break the depth record in freediving attach weights to themselves in order to descend. To reach the bottom, you need weight. But this characteristic of depth can, in the long run, be a problem.

2. Geometric depth

This is linked to the graphic representation of solid bodies: it is a characteristic property of solid bodies (width, height, depth, the three dimensions). It is depth that provides the third dimension that allows us to define a body, otherwise we would only have surfaces made up of width and height. Width alone is a line, as is height: they become solid when they have depth. For a surface to acquire consistency, it needs depth, but geometrically, the location of this depth cannot be defined a priori. Depth comes third, but where it is located depends on how we look at the surface. Therefore, the third dimension must be discovered each time from the point of view from which we evaluate the surface.

These may seem strange arguments, but they express the complexity of the idea of depth, which in this case has to do with thickness. Don't we say, 'He is a person of depth'? And isn't thickness in turn linked to a thing's ability to withstand impact?

3. Depth in a painting

In art, there is also the representation of depth that we call 'perspective' (which has its own specific geometric laws) and which we generally assign to a painting. Perspective is entirely based on the viewer's point of view, i.e. ours. But this is not always the case. In icons, a form of representation belonging to Eastern Christianity, perspective is reversed: in this case, the point of view is assigned to God.

The discovery and use of the technique of perspective was one of the turning points in the history of art, even if today it is not particularly appreciated (Cubism did away with it), because figurative representation has disappeared. But the idea and perception of depth in a work of art has not disappeared: it is placed elsewhere. So, we still say that a painting has 'depth', but in general we place it in the background from which the figure emerges.

These are also complex issues, but have we ever said that 'the figure, the image, seems to come out'? This is where reflection on planes comes into play: the background is undefined; it acts as a backdrop. What appears is the foreground, which is such because there is a background.

4. Psychological depth

From a psychological point of view, since Freud we have realised that our psyche has its own depths. Depth psychology is the investigation of the world inside ourselves, a world that does not appear directly on the surface, except for small signs that we describe in the worst cases as illness, and in others as tics, slips of the tongue... Depth psychology investigates our unconscious world, which acts within us

without our being aware of it. Not all schools of psychology describe this deep reality of ours in the same way or assign it the same effects on the surface of our lives.

However, it remains an established fact that beyond what goes on in our brains (including sensations, if we accept the findings of neuroscience), there is a deeper layer within us that is not easy to understand, is not easily accessible and with which we all, to a greater or lesser extent, have to contend.

5. Intellectual depth

We generally attribute it to ‘learned people’ when we feel that, thanks to their studies, sensitivity and reflection, they are able to say something new, especially with regard to the serious issues of life. A scientist, a philosopher, a poet and those who qualify themselves, sometimes with a certain vainglory, as such (today, in fact, they are all placed under the generic name of ‘expert’, i.e. someone who has the right to have their say on the subject), should have intellectual depth. Does this also apply to educators? Certainly yes: perhaps it is expected of them.

Intellectual depth is made up of curiosity and research, serious study, and awareness of the complexity of things. Its opposite is banality, clichés, the obvious, the predictable: we live on these things. So instead of remaining silent, we feel the need to fill the non-void of silence by saying nonsense. Banality, in fact. Having intellectual depth means not stopping at what has always been said, at what has always been known. Not stopping at the manual.

True intellectual depth is rare today because achieving it takes time and effort: for the most part, it is passed off, recycled and sold as something it is not. We adorn ourselves with the depth of others: we play on a phrase, a thought that is ‘profound’ by definition but belongs to others, which we are not ashamed to present as our own and post on social media.

In everyday conversation, we generally stick to trivial topics (the weather) and say trivial things, perhaps elevating them to 'profound' thoughts: how many words, photos and comments are there on recipes and more or less refined foods?

Fortunately, cooking is also an art and has its own depth. We are not convinced that this saves us.

6. Depth as a symbol

Based on what has been said, the idea of 'depth' evokes countless meanings in us: it has a huge symbolic significance.

Quantitatively speaking, depth lies below us and, from our perspective, can indicate an abyss, something whose bottom cannot be seen and which, in this sense, can be frightening. Depth is a symbol of darkness, of the unknown and therefore of fear, of dread... But veins of gold can flow in the depths... Its symbolic opposite is what lies above, far beyond the surface of the ground.

In general, we give a positive symbolic meaning to the top and a negative meaning to the bottom: heaven and hell. Above is the sun, the light; below is the darkness.

In any case, let us now speak only from a material point of view: to reach the top, high up, and to go down, lower and lower, we need, even in practical terms, specific preparation and suitable technical equipment. In both cases, for example, oxygen is needed. Mountaineers and speleologists have something in common.

If we then approach the matter from a moral point of view, in a certain sense it does not change: we need steps, situations and opportunities to go up or down in life. And in both cases, it is a journey of discovery.

This raises the non-trivial question of why it is better to go down (the educator is told that depth is needed) rather than up (here we could say that transcendence is needed).

Perhaps it is just a matter of taste, or perhaps going deep and going high are ultimately the same thing on a symbolic level: they indicate going beyond one's own appearance.

Deep and high are symbolically placed in the verticality of life, which would otherwise be flat.

What is certain is that in both cases, few people set out towards the deep or the high.

Most of us remain on the surface, in the breadth, possibly flat, which presents no obstacles and requires no effort of preparation, nor venturing into potentially dangerous situations.

But flat things are not always the most interesting. Going deep requires accepting some risk.

In summary

The concept of 'depth' has enormous symbolic power.

There are various ways of understanding depth, but those we have briefly described (from the physical to the intellectual) do not fully capture the meaning we wish to assign to the educational depth required of teachers today.

For this reason, we will pause a little longer to investigate a further aspect of depth. The opposite of 'deep' in common parlance is 'superficial'. But the superficial is not yet the sky (which is up there): it is the middle ground, the one we *Hobbits* generally inhabit.

SUPERFICIALITY

In defining the starting point, we identified it as the surface, the appearance of things.

Staying on the surface is the normal condition of human life: we are on earth; we enjoy its beauty and we draw our means of subsistence from it. Today, we have realised that our staying on the surface has not always been adequate and respectful: we are learning to care about keeping this surface tidy. Our very survival depends on it.

‘Superficial’, on the other hand, has a strongly negative connotation. ‘Superficial’ is said of a frivolous, unserious person who does not deal with things in the way they should be dealt with, giving them their proper weight (see how the words come back). A superficial person is unreliable, has no anchor, is tossed about by the waves because they lack the convictions that should keep them stable. Superficial is someone who stops and is satisfied with the appearance of things, unable to see beyond their own nose.

Being labelled ‘superficial’ is therefore not a compliment: it says that we are insubstantial.

We do not think we are doing anyone an injustice when we say that today’s social world is generally ‘superficial’, because it seems to care more about form than substance. It is easy to give thousands of examples of this: we often speak without really knowing, we rely on first impressions, we react ‘viscerally’. We are often more concerned with the image of who we are than with substance. We often avoid the effort of delving deeper, of learning more. But by judging hastily, we fall into the same trap that we are condemning.

Not everything that appears is superficial: behind appearances there is often the work of many people. It is a sought-after, desired appearance, sometimes for commercial purposes, but one that requires a good deal of depth. In this case, we can also say that the form produced, what appears, manifests the substance.

The same applies to personal opinions: they are not the absolute truth and, if expressed correctly, do not claim to be so, but some of them come closer to it, carry more weight and are better thought out. It is therefore not true that people do not know how to be serious

and profound, but perhaps, more simply, they would like to avoid the heaviness that this seems to entail.

Lightness

Thus, superficiality can sometimes be confused with lightness. Lightness and superficiality are related, but they are not sisters, even if it is true that a light body does not sink.

Being light is often a result, while being superficial is rather a crude way of being, which has not had the opportunity to evolve: it has not been educated to go further. Light means 'of little weight', but here we take it as a way of staying on the surface: it depends on how we are made (for some it comes naturally, they are slim and know how to move nimbly), but it is often the result of training. It is about learning to manage our centre of gravity (it is essential to understand where it is) when we move on a surface that is not necessarily flat. In some cases, this management can lead to movements that are exactly the opposite of those that would come naturally to us. To cushion a fall, for example, it may not be a good idea to brake, but rather to accompany it, perhaps by rolling.

Lightness is therefore a result, a learned behaviour, even a style. In a sense, to be truly light, one must be profound. It is because one has gone to the bottom of things that one can take them lightly: give them their proper weight. Referring to human affairs, we can say otherwise: we need to know ourselves. This brings us to at least a preliminary definition of the kind of depth we are looking for: a profound educator is someone who knows themselves and, through this self-knowledge, is in tune with others. But this does not necessarily imply that they cannot be light.

KNOW YOURSELF

The title of this paragraph is one of those profound phrases that are part of our culture, at least in the West. The phrase is too well known

to be commented on adequately. Let us simply say that it indicates a condition of life that mankind (not so much the individual, but the species) has always been aware of and that has driven him/her to seek, study and try to understand. It is the phrase that underpins religious, philosophical and scientific reflection and research, the whole of knowledge, understood as the activity that makes man truly human, distinct from all other living beings.

It is the knowledge of ourselves, of our inner world and what passes through it, of what truly moves us and our contradictions, our stumbling blocks, our qualities, our sins, that makes us profound, that makes us go beyond the surface of things. Knowing ourselves is a task that is never fully satisfied, because we remain a mystery to ourselves, however long our lives may be. The fruit of self-knowledge is depth, which in this case we can describe as humility. And perhaps this is the specific value of the profound person, which does not mean 'perfect', but rather aware of their limitations and possibilities. The depth that is achieved is in the sense of truth about oneself, and when we become aware of this, we realise that we are insignificant, dust, chaff scattered by the wind.

For example, a profound person is someone who, when they speak, gives the impression of having thought about what they are saying and who manages to say it in the simplest (lightest) way possible, without having to impose it. They affirm, but they do not assert themselves. Profound people generally speak little, because what they say is weighed, almost always on their own skin.

How can we get to know ourselves?

Good question. In short, there seem to be two ways:

- From the outside;
- From within.

The first way involves being able to step outside ourselves and observe ourselves: this is not easy and generally relies on the judgement of others, because it touches on aspects that we do not see. It is therefore

essential to choose someone who looks at us with a merciful eye, starting from the assumption that we all make mistakes. To observe ourselves from the outside, we can use something or someone to act as a mirror, with the awareness that the image we obtain is still refracted (reversed) compared to the original. Because that is what a mirror does. To put it in different and certainly more complex terms, the mirror gives us the image, but not yet the likeness.

This is basically the path of education that is imparted to us, education that we receive when we are young, but throughout our lives, every time we interact with others. It is the truth about ourselves that comes to us from outside.

The second path, the one that starts from within, involves observing our own inner world, which is in itself an extremely complex reality, sometimes hidden, but which is a mysterious bearer of truth, as St Augustine reminds us. It is the path of self-awareness, of self-training, a path that only we can walk, even if someone accompanies us. They accompany us, but they do not reflect us, they do not act as a mirror: rather, they stand in front of the mirror with us. The therapist does this, but from the perspective that moves us, Christ does it with the help of the Spirit. But we will return to this point shortly.

In both cases (they are paths), we must be aware that we need to make:

1. *A choice of will*, especially for the second path indicated. It is a path that only we can take, and it is impossible if we do not decide to embark on it. This choice must, of course, be renewed from time to time.
2. *Willingness to put yourself out there*, which means accepting that you are different from what you thought you were and not letting it overwhelm you. Getting to know yourself really well can be destabilising (and painful) on the one hand, but on the other, it can be exhilarating. Accept the former and focus on the latter.

3. *Time*, getting to know ourselves is not something that happens in a minute. A whole lifetime is not enough. We therefore need a lot of patience with others (who seem not to understand us) and with ourselves (who take longer than necessary). There is no point in getting nervous: rather, we need calm, which is not static, but that walking pace that suits us and does not stop. A good dose of self-irony does not hurt: those who cannot laugh at themselves (this is where lightness lies) will never be truly profound, even if they will certainly be heavy.

A FURTHER STEP

We said that, from a Christian perspective, the one who accompanies us in knowing ourselves is Christ, and here we need to make a further, if not abysmal, effort of understanding. We enter the realm of Christian mysticism.

We truly know ourselves only in Christ: in Him we know how much we are loved, wanted, sought after, despite what appears, and perhaps starting from what appears. In the story of St Teresa of Avila, there is a mysterious indication (*Conosciti in me* – Know yourself in me –)⁷ that opens a window onto all this. We need to understand each other, but it is not easy: traditional Christian practice, right in itself, stands in our way.

Christ is, and has been proposed to us as a model, and a model is to be imitated, we try to emulate him, to repeat him, to interpret him according to each person's abilities: this is the path that is proposed to everyone, probably because it is the most immediate and easiest. Even a painter copies before developing his own style. But a copy, even a very good one, is not the original. It is the external path, the one that relies on heteronomous education. However, no one can ever say, with regard to Christ, that they have equalled him: he is a model unique in his characteristics. He tells us to learn from him, but

7 See J. Manuel Morilla Delgado, *Conosciti in me. Itinerario mistico esperienziale in Teresa d'Avila*, San Paolo 2010, p. 14, note 8.

not to be like him: he is the vine, we are the branches, he is the Son, we are all brothers, he is the Master, we are the disciples.

Let us try to put it this way, even if it is perhaps even more complicated: Jesus is not a model who stands at the end of the path (becoming like Him), but at the beginning (we have always been like Him). Unfortunately, we have forgotten this. The most dramatic consequence of Adam's sin is the forgetfulness of our origin: we are all affected by it, it belongs to everyone. So, we will never become like Him, because we cannot be (He is God, we are not), but we resemble Him from the outset, even if we are unaware of it at the moment. We can recognise ourselves in Him because He was our face. This is what His incarnation tells us: it reminds us who we are, even when we find ourselves in the most varied and tragic situations in life. This is why seeing Him, and seeing Him on the cross, brings us back to ourselves (if you knew who was asking you for a drink – I am thirsty). Christ has the power to bring us back to ourselves, beyond ourselves and the banality of what appears in our lives, even if it is the evil that crucifies us with Him.

To know ourselves is to recognise ourselves in Him, to rediscover our lost and forgotten truth. Herein lies the unfathomable depth of the Christian and of every human being. To recognise our absolute value, not because we are the only ones who exist, but rather because we can only be ourselves and no one else. The absolute value of five is five, the absolute value of Anthony is Anthony: Anthony's responsibility is Anthony.

If this happens, we rediscover ourselves, we return to being ourselves, unique and unrepeatable. Rediscovering ourselves, recognising ourselves: activities that are all the more necessary today because of the fragmentation in which we live. It is therefore not an easy path, because it allows no distractions, it requires contemplation, it demands silence. However, it is a path that has always been traced, but it is still to be travelled.

THE DEPTH OF THE EDUCATOR IS SPIRITUAL

From what has just been said, it follows that depth is directly related to spirituality.

Depth and spirituality are sisters, perhaps even two sides of the same coin. In lay terms, we call “depth” what we as Christians call “spiritual”.

Therefore, when we demand that today's educators be deep, we are asking them to be spiritual. And spirituality is not only the awareness of depth in all the meanings we have described: it is recognising, thanks to the Spirit, the presence of Christ in us and in the things that we do and experience. This recognition is called the ‘spirit of faith’ *in* Lasallian terms. To possess it means to be deep; to transmit it means to make others deep, to go beyond the usual veneer.

Spiritual depth is gained through prayer, a word that is politically incorrect today. But true prayer is dialogue, encounter, confrontation with that Christ who asks us to recognise ourselves in Him. Prayer makes us aware of ourselves, it forces us to know ourselves even in the sometimes-unconfessed desires we have. Today we are trivially banal, we have no depth, because we no longer pray, we no longer allow ourselves the time to do so: we live on the flat surface of life where it is easy to run, and we are not interested in anything else. Put like that, we recognise it with irony, it seems like a moralistic tirade, not at all deep: however, the need to pray remains if we are truly seeking depth.

THE RESULTS FROM AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW

Let's try to list them briefly, in no particular order.

1. *Increased weight: authority.* Depth gives weight to the things we do and say: this gradually makes us authoritative. We must

certainly avoid the risk of heaviness, which lies in being authoritative about insignificant things. We need to learn to give the right weight to events. This result is very important today, because our disciples live surrounded by fake and half-truths that are not always easy to recognise.

2. *Resilience*: this is almost a consequence of having gone deep within ourselves. The deep educator stands firm: they are deeply rooted, know how to face the winds of change and do not allow themselves to be overwhelmed. In this way, they offer a secure point of reference to those around them.
3. *Self-control/Calmness*: the deep educator knows how to control themselves and is calm in their approach. When they speak and/or act, they do so in a clear and thoughtful manner, aware of the problems that need to be addressed. To walk the tight-rope (as is the case with education), it is always useful to have a balancing pole that allows us to adjust our weight. Depth allows for healthy relationships that foster growth.
4. *Wisdom/Common sense and reasonableness*: the educator who has been able to go deep appears and is a role model, who knows how to offer the right support, appropriate, reasonable, common-sense advice, an attitude that is necessary today in the general upheaval in which we find ourselves living.
5. *Patience*: the journey of self-discovery leads the educator to be patient with others and with themselves because it makes them aware of the time needed to reach their goal. Patience is a rare virtue today because waiting is seen only as a waste of time.
6. *Justice/Mercy*: the educator who has reached a deeper level has a more confident and thoughtful judgement. At the same time, they can exercise mercy more effectively, which, as James says, always prevails in judgement.

There is no educational depth when...

- a. We are superficial and insubstantial: it seems that we do not take things seriously, without giving them the right weight, which must be assessed by those who bear it, not by our own judgement.
- b. We are overcome by uncontrolled passions: as a result, we end up being aloof, unpredictable, perhaps even capricious, and we do not allow others to find stable references in us.
- c. We are hasty in our judgements: we react, we do not reflect. This is called being guided by our gut and leads us to speak out of turn.
- d. We are hasty in our actions: this is a direct consequence of the previous attitude; depth requires prudence.
- e. We willingly talk about trivial things and fail to grasp the essentials: because of a banal desire to please, to be accepted, to be liked, when our role should be something else.
- f. We forget that we and they have a spiritual dimension that needs to be cultivated.

Educational depth ultimately requires solid individuals who, before putting themselves forward, have been able to come to terms with themselves. We believe that we all have a lot of work to do in this area.

VISION

“Visionary” is a fashionable term today: it is used to describe individuals who have become particularly wealthy and famous, often thanks to the new economy linked to the world of digital innovation. In some cases, the visionary seems to border on the megalomaniac.

Therefore, to state, as the *Declaration on Lasallian Educational Mission* does, that an educator today must be visionary, may generate some perplexity, but at the same time it means recognising their role as agents of “change” and innovation. This is a particularly important function in the current context. However, it remains difficult to consider all this a “virtue”, that is, good behaviour acquired through practice. We must therefore reflect on this carefully.

CHANGE

This is the big problem today. Reality is constantly changing. Some changes are sudden and therefore noticeable, while others take place over a longer period of time and are less perceptible. In a predominantly agricultural society, changes were particularly slow; in today's society, thanks in part to the introduction of new machines and technologies, they are very fast. There are cyclical changes (the seasons, day and night) and there are changes that occur on a straight timeline. It is precisely the speed of change today, which is of the latter type, that creates problems for us: we are not used to it, it seems to accelerate life, constantly shifting our points of reference until we lose our direction.

Of course, all this affects the world of education, which, on the one hand, is increasingly required to support change, but on the other hand seems to travel at the speed of old steam trains, if not ox carts.

Certainly, reality, however we want to consider it (on a personal, social, educational, environmental, atomic, astronomical level...), is changing: it cannot help but do so. So much so that we can say that when something stops, it does not simply stand still, but dies, decays. Popular wisdom says that ‘he who stands still is lost’. All this is to

say that there is no need to be afraid of change: it can be annoying, but that's the way the world works. However, it is also true that at the same time (and this seems a contradiction), popular wisdom says that we need to be able to seize the moment, that is, to live the present fully, since neither the past nor the future belong to us. But the present can be painful.

All this discourse has to do with the way we experience time. We distinguish between past, present and future, and today, thanks to the enormous and rapid proliferation of IT tools, the emphasis is on the future, which is easily prophesied to be different and better.

How much ideology is there in all this? Who supports this dominant idea that we must necessarily look to the future? How can we be sure that the future will be better? Who pushes us to believe this? The future, yes, but be careful: is it not a coincidence that one of the new terms in circulation is 'dystopia'? In short, it is not certain that the world to come will be happier than the one we live in now.

So, if change is a fact of life, taking it to an ideological level, as seems to be happening today (everyone talks about it as if it were a weighty thought that justifies everything, when in fact it is a banality), can be problematic: it means sanctifying the new simply because it is new, without any process of beatification. The issue becomes complicated.

Let's say that when faced with change, we can try to resist it (the new scares us, the old is better), but from what has just been said, this resistance is doomed to failure. Things will change anyway. Or we can try to steer them: this is what having vision should be for.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

In Italian, the term 'visione' has a predominantly negative connotation. A visionary is someone who has 'visions' and, as such, is close to the mystical on the one hand and to all shades of the dreamlike on the other, ranging from the dreamer to the hallucinatory. In any case, a visionary is someone who has lost touch with the real world.

With this semantic spectrum, it is difficult to think of visionary thinking as an educational virtue. At first glance, therefore, the term does not excite us.

To understand it a little better, we need to refer to English, where the term has a much more positive meaning, but also, it seems to us, some ambiguous aspects. 'Having vision' in this case means being able to 'see' in the sense of 'foresee'. 'Vision' has to do with the future and with change. In concrete terms, it means being able to form a mental image or idea of what might happen in the future. But this 'vision' does not always appear clearly, both because its elaboration retains somewhat esoteric characteristics and because the area on which it should focus is not immediately understandable. Let us try to understand.

These are the words of a visionary of our times, universally recognised as such...

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary. Be hungry. Be foolish". (Steve Jobs)

The reference to 'vision' here is linked to the development of individual potential in relation to these terms: listening to your inner voice, following your heart and intuition. These are all things that touch our feelings, but are very difficult to define: in some way, they all try to say that if you want to realise your full potential, you need to go beyond pure rationality to access the depths of your being; ultimately, this is what should produce the vision that will in turn generate the enthusiasm we need to do things. Let us reiterate: here, the invitation to have vision is centred on oneself. This presents some difficulties in our eyes.

Why is this deep 'vision', which seems not to be dictated by rationality, so important and particularly exalted today, considered in some way necessary?

Because it is considered to be fundamentally creative and therefore truer, while thinking about the future and trying to anticipate it can depend on many preconceptions that we carry within us. In this perspective, 'having vision' is considered (and sold) as an essential element for deeply motivating our lives: thanks to it, our lives will be unified, centred and focused. In short, happy. Insisting on having vision, it seems to us, is the secular and entirely human response to the thirst for meaning that we carry within us. We insist on vision because we no longer know what mission is. In other words, we no longer know what we are doing in the world.

Although there is something positive in this personal search, from a Christian point of view we already have an answer to our place in the world, we just have to learn to make it our own by turning it into a vision. As Christians, we know that we are here to love, that our restless hearts lead us to God, that our destiny is the Kingdom. It may take us a lifetime to understand this, but it is not only the result of the work we can do on ourselves. Let us recognise that this creates some problems for us with the idea of visionary thinking that is widespread today, which places great emphasis on individual self-improvement (having a winning vision of oneself). How should we respond to statements (more frequent than they seem) of this kind?

What vision do you have of yourself in the depths of your heart? Ask yourself this question and do not be afraid to take the next steps to move in that direction, because it is your life calling you... do not keep it waiting any longer.

Everything in this sentence is vague... Ultimately, it is an attitude that has no real content. It is one thing to go where our heart takes us (assuming that the heart is totally free and enlightened), but it is another to know where the heart is heading. If we have already defined why we are here (the mission), the destination should be

clear: but the vision is not always presented as clearly dependent on our being. Rather, it is presented as standing alone.

In reality, there are profoundly different ways of looking at life's journey. In the first case (*follow your heart*), you put your trust in fate, while in the second, you consciously set your sights on a specific goal. In the first case, perhaps a little madness is necessary, while in the second, one is much more down-to-earth: one dreams, but starting from the concrete reality in which one finds oneself, with the intention of changing it, perhaps by starting a revolution.

Historically, we have many examples of 'vision'. The Marxist-style proletarian revolution was characterised by being a 'vision' that wanted to remain grounded. Revolution yes, but starting from objective data, power structures to be blown up.

We can also define as 'visionary' the entire movement (the Italian Risorgimento) that led to the unification of Italy in about fifty years. In both cases, men dreamed of a different world and worked to achieve it. In a certain sense, all the great narratives that preceded our post-modern age, which for many is already coming to an end, were 'visionary', because if what has been said above is true, we are now constructing a new visionary narrative: what we call the 'metaverse'.

In Italian, 'avere vision' (to have vision) could be understood as 'lungimiranza', the ability to look far ahead. But 'lungimiranza' does not convey the full meaning of 'vision' in English, where it seems to retain a romantic/emotional/fascinating dimension that is by no means trivial.

Foresight relates to prudence, and perhaps calculation, while 'vision' relates to possibility, to something that does not yet exist but could exist. In this case, having vision seems to be above all a quality that leaders should have, and one that has been applied to many contexts over time. The idea of leadership brings the group, the company, and society as a whole into play, and this changes the perspective on having vision: it should serve to inspire, galvanise, and engage others.

The essence of a structure (of any kind) relies on and becomes concrete in the shared 'vision' that underlies it, which may have originated in the mind of one person, but which over time has become the heritage of many. So inevitably, it is not enough for the visionary to have a dream: they must make it the dream of others too.

And here lies one of the major difficulties associated with the idea of vision as personal self-realisation: it concerns only me and can only rely on me. A 'vision' that unites many is different: it is above all this second type that brings about real change. And this is the 'vision' of an educational nature that we need to refer to and that interests us most.

In everyday language, however, we talk about 'vision' both in relation to the individual and in relation to a structured group: the two things overlap, and this does not facilitate precision.

It is therefore appropriate to clarify the different aspects, especially with regard to groups. In fact, we can distinguish (speaking in general terms) within any activity carried out together (and education is one such activity):

- Mission
- Vision
- Values
- Objectives

When working in a group, it goes without saying that all these aspects must be shared in depth.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES, OBJECTIVES

Mission indicates the profound and ultimate reason why we are who we are and do what we do.

The question it raises is: 'Why do we exist? Why are we here?'. Mission therefore has a strong motivational power, but it is presented in a rather idealistic way. Its strength depends on how much we feel that

ideal is ours: sometimes, rather than being chosen independently, the goal may be imposed by circumstances.

Vision, and this is where its importance lies, marks the transition from mission, understood as a goal, to its realisation. In concrete terms, the 'vision' concerns the future and the ability to imagine it, but also the definition of the steps to be taken to achieve it. It is imbued with a hope that is not just a yearning: it seeks the steps to be taken to realise it. It is therefore composed of two things:

- a certain projection of ourselves into the future;
- the concrete steps to be taken to make it possible.

Its question is 'what must we become in order to achieve the mission?'. In other words: 'Are we ready to embark on a journey that will lead us to the result we have imagined as possible?'. Please note: the question is addressed first and foremost to being, rather than doing. It requires adjustments on our part, a change of perspective.

Values refer to the ethical framework within which we intend to operate.

In this case, the question is: "What are the values that guide our actions? How should I behave today to give substance to the vision?".

If we can be clear about our values, about what is important to us, this perspective allows us to go beyond the job description, the written rules. When issues arise, they are dealt with in the best possible way and shared almost instinctively: in short, without agreeing beforehand, because the response of the individual is accepted by the others from the outset.

Finally, **objectives** are what we expect to achieve from our motivated actions, what will make the difference. It is clear that the expected objectives must also be specified in order to be able to evaluate them at the end.

The question in this case is: “What will tell us that we have achieved our goal?”.

VISION

As we have seen, vision is part of a broader process and represents a specific juncture. Considering it in isolation, as is often done today, shifts its meaning.

Let us therefore look at it in more detail. We have already distinguished two aspects of it.

A. Vision as an image of ourselves in the future

Regarding the first aspect (the image of ourselves in the future), the ‘vision’ is not necessarily a structured worldview, but a sort of emotional/inner perception, however formulated in words, perhaps rhetorically, about ‘what we should be for’...

One of the most renowned motivational authors (Stephen Covey) defines vision as follows: “Vision means seeing with your mind's eye what is possible in people, projects, causes and businesses. Vision is the result of our mind synthesising need and possibility. When people lack vision, when they neglect to develop their mind's creative capacity, they fall prey to the human tendency towards victimhood”.

Let's try to understand better why it is a complex definition composed of heterogeneous elements.

“Seeing with the eyes of the mind” (which are not the ones you correct with glasses) stands for an image of yourself (us) that you see in your mind. But be careful, there is a difference between visualising an image and having vision.

In the first case, we are dealing with a conscious mental process, while in the second, it would seem that we must access our inner self.

This access can be organised (there are techniques for this) so that 'vision' becomes the result of exercise and practice. In this sense, visionary thinking can ultimately be considered a virtue, both at the individual and group level. But access can also be achieved through the use of drugs.

One way to overcome this impasse is to focus on a single aspect of our future that we could change. Perhaps we cannot change the world, but we should be able to change a single thing, even if we are aware that changing a single thing leads to a much more extensive change.

B. Vision as the ability to define steps

Returning to Covey's definition, we can note other elements.

Having a vision tells us what is possible to achieve in people, projects, causes and businesses. In practice, it allows us to look at potential that is not yet expressed but glimpsed. This is a particularly important element in education, because it allows us to grasp the potential present in young people, but also in colleagues and in the situations we experience. Please note: in order to have a vision of a different future, the starting point is to have a clear awareness of our present and what is wrong with it. Why try to see the future if we are happy with the present and have settled into it?

Furthermore, it is said that vision is the result of our mind synthesising need and possibility. This seems to us to be an operation that starts from the emotional (the empathic perception of need) but becomes rather rational in prediction, planning... This element can also have a significant educational impact. Having vision focuses us on an image of the future that recognises and responds to a need for change expressed by the present, understood also in an empathetic way: it helps us understand (and not always through a purely rational approach) how to behave tomorrow, with respect to what happened today.

Finally, it is said that when people do not have a vision, when they neglect the development of the creative capacity of the mind, they fall prey to the human tendency towards victimhood.

This phrase sounds vaguely threatening (if you don't have a vision, you will be eternally unhappy) but also difficult to understand: what does it mean to neglect the development of the creative capacities of the mind?

Let's put it this way: if we stop at the data alone, we will be blocked by it. The answer will inevitably be "It can't be done". We must move beyond mere observation from the outside in order to 'see' what that data allows us to do differently. This further seeing is only possible through a form of intuition about how it could be. But put like that, it sounds like a revelation from above (or from deep within), and sometimes we feel that it is.

In summary

The concept of vision is problematic, especially if it is centred only on oneself and acquires ideological significance. Despite these critical observations, however, we can take some operational aspects of this attitude that seem important to us, even from an educational point of view, especially if read from a shared perspective.

VISION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

What does it mean to say that educators must commit themselves (this is the virtuous dimension) to having a vision? First of all, we need to define what the capacity for vision is exercised around, and this is no trivial matter. In a very general sense, it affects the way we look at reality as a whole, questioning its possible future.

The ecological issue is teaching us this way of thinking, which, in its problematic nature, requires us to have a shared vision of the future and invites us to pursue it. Many people are working on this overall

vision because they realise that only through everyone's contribution, however small, will we achieve real change, which is the purpose of having a vision.

Here, we will focus solely on the educational aspect.

THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF THE STRUCTURE

The term 'educational environment' refers to several things:

- The physical reality of a specific school;
- The ideal reality: the idea of 'school' and education that we carry with us;
- Finally, creating a bridge between the concrete and the ideal, the very meaning of an international Institute that deals with schools and education.

It should be noted that, at first glance, the third aspect seems to fall outside the scope of these pages, which nevertheless arise in the Lasallian context: the list of virtues we are commenting on is not abstract, we did not invent it, it arises within a tradition that has been renewed or is in the process of being renewed, but which seems to us to struggle considerably to be shared.

Mutatis mutandis, the argument can be extended to the Church: the underlying ecclesiological vision determines the type of Catholic school we will obtain.

In any case, we will have:

- A vision directly linked to our immediate environment;

- A vision that concerns in general the way of seeing the school and the world of education and finally;
- A vision that concerns the international Institute to which we belong.

It is clear that there is a connection between the three modes: the more general vision logically affects the more specific one, but the latter gives it the necessary substance.

Let us start with the most immediate aspect.

From the point of view of a place

From a more specific point of view, the vision we should have directly affects the place where we are.

What will the image of us and our school be in 5 years' time? How would we like to be? How would we like others to see us? Answering these questions means having a vision.

The prerequisite for all this work is that these questions are asked, and this can happen out of necessity or foresight.

Necessity depends on the perception of an objective inadequacy with respect to what is happening: for example, our educational proposal is gaining less and less support.

Foresight, on the other hand, is a gift of the Spirit: even before the objective problem arises, we take steps to renew our proposal and anticipate events.

In any case, in order to respond seriously, we must be clear in our minds about:

- Where we are starting from: this indicates both the analysis of the situation and the mandate that has been (or has been) assigned to us;
- Where we want to go: this is, in concrete terms, the vision;
- What results we want to achieve: the results are the verifiable objectives;
- And, above all, what values support and motivate us: this refers to the ethical drive that moves us.

As you can see, these are the aspects (mission, vision, values, objectives) we mentioned earlier. And they are concrete, tangible aspects: we can put them into practice and we can do so at any time. This is the virtuous dimension of visionary thinking.

In arriving at a vision, we must not be naive (this is the difference between vision and dream): in particular, we must not start from this, to avoid it being someone's private illusion.

First, we need to clarify for ourselves who we are, what we want and what we are willing to do to achieve it. The plural is not a rhetorical device: it refers to the group that intends to achieve something and within which it is necessary to discuss, not to oppose, but to converge on the same basic ideas, sharing the same values. It is not easy.

In concrete terms, in order to arrive at one vision, the first step (which will certainly take time) is discussion. One vision cannot be imposed. Of course, it can be proposed by someone (in this case, we will have a leader), but it must still strike a chord with everyone: it must be engaging. In this case, the leader gives voice to what everyone perceives. And it is normal that not everyone feels involved: if this happens, it is normal (and also honest) for them to leave.

This is followed by reflection (personal and collective) that must be written down, in the literal sense that it must be put on paper.

This writing process is not immediate, but can be guided by various techniques that are perhaps more emotional than rational (searching for evocative images, intuitions of meaningful words): it involves rethinking, clarifying, refining until we arrive at a synthesis (a motto) that we feel effectively expresses what we want to say. A motto that 'speaks to us', that reveals ourselves to ourselves and to others. That motto is the 'vision' expressed in a concise form.

It seems like a trivial mechanism, but it is actually a mechanism that enhances our work, reminding us of what drives us every day to do our best and to keep going even when everything seems to be against us. The vision must become the guiding star, setting the course and motivating every action. It is therefore not a trivial matter, nor a purely formal issue of ecclesiastical apparatus: when one becomes a bishop (and thus assumes leadership of a diocese), one of the things that is required is to choose a motto.

It should be noted that in the world of Italian Lasallian structures, in more than a few places, history has handed down to us a coat of arms bearing a motto, which is in fact the vision that was held for that place. Some examples:

- *In puero spes* (hope in the child)
- *Fides et scientia* (faith and knowledge)
- *Fides et labor* (faith and work)

In the diversity of symbols (bees, lions, lilies, mountains...) the star is everywhere.

The star on the coat of arms may seem marginal, but it is not. Let us simply say that, culpably, we no longer pay attention to it. Perhaps it is not a question of inventing a vision, but rather of recovering the meaning of the original vision, the spirit of the place where we find ourselves working.

Perhaps that motto simply needs to be rediscovered, or perhaps it needs to be adapted to a world that has changed, even if restructuring and readapting often costs much more than starting from scratch.

And perhaps today we find ourselves in this dilemma: restore or change?

The presence of the coat of arms shows that those who came before us had a 'vision', which leads us to say that visionary thinking is not so much a 'new' virtue of the educator as a virtue to be rediscovered, especially today, when the complexity of the world makes everything extremely difficult and competitive. Vision is no guarantee of success, but its absence is a certainty of failure. If we are still here, it is because the vision handed down to us by our predecessors has worked, at least until now. Should we maintain it or renew it? And in either case, how?

The general perspective

From a general point of view, today's vision of school and education is undergoing profound change.

To quote de Certeau, it is no longer the word of our age (it has been for three centuries): now the word is 'to communicate'. And if it is true that education for all is still one of the world's goals, we feel that there is some truth in de Certeau's observation.

On the one hand, we talk more and more about lifelong learning, while on the other, today's trends are linked to the advent of new technologies, continuous and universal connectivity, and communication. There is talk of an anthropological revolution in relation to information (which is not the same as education).

Despite these changes, we are not exempt from having a general vision of education, its necessity and its importance. Echoing what was said earlier, the words that should be included in today's educational motto are 'responsibility' and 'global pact': a responsibility that affects everyone.

And perhaps we still need to work on this a little: there are too many changes we are experiencing.

The Institute's vision

Finally, between the general and specific perspectives, there are realities, such as an international Institute dedicated to education, that mediate between the two aspects. These mediating realities also need a vision.

The FSC (Brothers of the Christian Schools) traditionally have the star and the motto *Signum Fidei* as their emblem. Are these symbols sufficient to tell our story today? Do they represent the vision we propose to the world today? Will they represent it in the medium term? These are questions that run through the Institute, even if they are not expressed in this way. Let us speak rather of identity and belonging. In other words, of a symbolism that makes us all feel that we belong to the same home, with the awareness that we want the same things.

However, the reality of the Institute has changed profoundly in many ways over the last 50 years.

- From a structure mainly dedicated to basic education to one increasingly oriented towards higher and university education;
- From a structure mainly composed of Brothers, religious educators, to a structure mainly composed of lay people;
- From a structure rather centred on a specific national location to a structure that has become aware of its international dimension.

To all this must be added the objective fact of the ageing of religious personnel, especially in some parts of the world. And as we age, we lose the desire to think about a future beyond tomorrow.

The new symbolism, which took some time to establish itself, retains the star, albeit in a very stylised form, which perhaps makes it a little anonymous. However, there is no motto, unless we want to adopt the traditional one (*Signum Fidei*). Who should come up with it?

The Brothers alone or the entire Lasallian world, which presents an impressive variety of situations? Here, we believe, lies today's difficulty: we have a general vision, but it is not yet fully developed. In other words, we have symbols, but not yet mottos.

A basis for moving forward could be provided by the *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission for the 21st Century*, which concludes with a 'Creed'. We therefore think it would be interesting to study the symbolic development that has accompanied the various international gatherings of the Institute over the last 50 years. In fact, we believe that the symbols adopted (logos) show an evolution that goes beyond the graphic design, which has certainly been renewed. For example, for the recent 46th General Chapter, the logo is a hand supporting a world: the star is there, but it is a kind of satellite, a moon. But the moon does not give light, it reflects it.

In summary

The question of vision in education must take into account the environment to which it is addressed.

This 'environment' ranges from the particular to the universal... each of these environments requires a vision. To simplify matters, we have focused our attention on heraldry, which we believe is an excellent way of understanding the question of vision.

VISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: LOOKING TO THEIR FUTURE

A visionary educator (and here we also consider parents) has a vision for the young people around them. This vision concerns young people in general (*in puero spes* – hope in the child –), but it also concerns individuals: the two are connected. Of course, the whole argument is based on the idea that educators have faith in young people and their abilities, something that is often stated in theory, but just as often contradicted by our words: how often do we complain that

things are getting worse and worse and think that there is no limit to how bad they can get? Isn't this a way of discrediting those who will come after us? It is therefore a sensitive issue that requires a change of perspective.

A vision starts with ourselves. Therefore, talking about one vision for young people means thinking about them and imagining them in the future, when they will be 'grown up'. All this can be understood by the term 'expectations', which in the worst case can become pressure. It is our vision, not theirs: we cannot impose it on them.

This also applies when the vision we develop for them has aspects that we might define as negative.

The attentive educator's eye discovers potential in their students that sometimes the students themselves do not see. These are abilities that are present but rarely expressed, attitudes that shape them and on which they will stake their lives. Sometimes these are elements that, in the long run, can lead them, to put it traditionally, down the wrong path. This gives rise to an enormous responsibility: we are not allowed to make mistakes, because other people's lives are at stake. Young people must be encouraged to have a positive vision of themselves, but they must build it themselves, even in the presence of traits that, at least to us, appear negative.

The role of the visionary educator is therefore twofold:

- On the one hand, they must help to block (prevent) the negative elements they observe;
- On the other hand, it must stimulate the positive elements that are also present and that it must be able to bring to light.

In the first case, it will act as a corrector; in the second, as a companion. In both cases, it must be able to truly read what is there and predict what will come. Vision is a prediction that involves a path to get there. No one knows the future: we draw up a scenario and work to achieve it.

A first observation: all this can also be seen as explicit help in discovering one's vocation. But this would be a long discussion and would open up new scenarios.

A second observation. We often hear that young people today are unmotivated. This is not necessarily true. They certainly have different motivations from ours, and this leads them to a vision of themselves that, not corresponding to ours, they keep hidden. Perhaps they are afraid of judgement or think they will not be understood. They do not hide it from us for some unknown reason: they simply do not tell us. And we do nothing to make them tell us. This prevents us from helping them.

In reality, it is a very difficult balancing act between many elements that may arise:

- Our fear about how things might turn out, which leads us to become rigid and demanding. Here, we are not thinking about correcting, but about punishing. And ultimately, it is a lack of hope in them.
- Our illusion/blindness about their qualities: they are ours and therefore they are the best. We have become adoring fans and we lose our critical sense and sometimes our dignity.
- The confusion we make between our expectations and theirs, whereby we push them (let's say we manipulate them) to direct them according to our dreams.

In traditional language, the educator with vision must ensure that each person's temperament (the cards, the talents we were dealt at birth) becomes character (how we will use our talents, what the quality of the game we play to win will be like).

Our 'temperament' is given to us, our 'character' must be built. It is a hard construction that takes place every single day. The word 'character' has various meanings: here we emphasise the fact that it

is the root of the term 'characteristic': the specificity of each person depends on their character.

A person's character (but in a certain sense also that of a place or a structure) is born, founded and developed from the vision of oneself that one has developed. This is particularly important and worth reiterating: personal character (we could perhaps also call it style) is the result of the vision we have developed.

In a proper and functional educational relationship, the vision of the educator and that of the person being educated should tend to converge.

After all, the purpose of an educational relationship is to train people to know how to be in the world while maintaining their own specific identity. And we can (and should) call this 'success'.

OUR VISION OF OURSELVES AS EDUCATORS: LOOKING TO OUR FUTURE

In order to operate at their best, educators must also be visionary with regard to their role and the work they do. Teaching is a profession, but it is also a vocation and therefore starts from a mission that we can broadly describe as helping/accompanying young people in their growth. We must be aware of all this: the way we see ourselves, the vision we have of ourselves and what we do is necessary for us to be successful in our work.

People approach education for various reasons, some noble, others much less so. However, everyone, and this is in the nature of things, hopes to succeed. This does not always happen: it used to be said negatively of some educators that 'young people eat their brains' (i.e. they prevail over them). This happens when we do not have a vision of our role.

This vision is made up of various aspects that give substance to this virtue.

First of all, we must believe that we can succeed in educating, whatever the conditions in which we find ourselves. It is an act of self-confidence. We do not suffer the environment (this term also includes our temperament), we face it and use it. In modern terms, this is referred to as proactivity.

In more ancient terms, it indicates the awareness that we did not happen upon our role by chance, but rather that God himself called us to it.

Secondly, we look at the goal. This allows us to:

- a. Go beyond any partial failure. It allows us to put it into perspective, to consider it a dead end that we have reached and from which we can turn back and take a different path, not a definitive block.
- b. Classify what is essential from what is secondary in the path: it brings out priorities. And this, among other things, saves time.
- c. Be humble: we become aware of what we can do and what we need to ask for help with. In the educational relationship, help must be sought from various agencies, but we must not forget that it must above all be sought directly from the children: we will not educate them in any way if they themselves do not give us a hand. You cannot educate those who do not accept being educated. Because solutions must be found together: this means getting used to working synergistically directly with them, never forgetting that accompanying does not mean replacing.

This last aspect means, on the one hand, that we must gain their trust and, on the other, that we must show them that the work we are doing is also beneficial for them: our victory ultimately takes the form of their success. If they win, we win.

Trust is gained by giving trust, with unconditional acceptance: we are capable of listening, we have no prejudices, we do not judge based on preconceptions. We do not think their problems are trivial. We do not snub them. Trust is earned by taking them seriously (and making ourselves be taken seriously), even if they are six years old, even if we do not actually have the solutions to the problems that arise.

Finally, the visionary educator learns by doing and therefore also learns from their mistakes. They have taken them into account. The overall vision remains, but the steps are adapted and new paths are chosen.

Let's not forget that here the overall vision concerns who we should be in relation to the work we do. In this sense, success does not consist in making money or becoming more or less famous, but in being (becoming) capable educators.

To sum up...

In summary, the visionary educator is someone who has been able to build character in the sense we mentioned above. A person of character remains true to their values and open to others. Therefore, these are some features of visionary educators:

- They make commitments and keep them, honouring the promises they have made;
- They admit their mistakes immediately and openly;
- They assess the gap between stimulus and response;
- They rarely 'have' to do something, and when they do, it is by choice; they understand that time is precious and that 'success' simply means being ourselves, but in an organised way;
- They are also willing to do things that others do not want to take on in order to achieve a higher goal.

The truth is that to be (or become) habitually visionary, we must first grow as individuals. Before we can start doing, we must appreciate and perfect the person we are.

But personal growth comes not so much from doing something new, but from the ability to see the same thing in a new light. And this is what developing our own vision should be for. It is this power of change that makes vision important. Educating ourselves to have vision (at the different levels we have seen) is therefore, especially today, an essential virtue for those who educate.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Firstly, unfortunately, this type of approach is not common in the world of education. It is much more common in the business world; indeed, in a sense, this world imposes it because it is necessarily in a state of constant change.

Education does not: it has a much slower pace and also a certain resistance to change, tending to settle into a rut, not perceiving discomfort (if Wilde's statement is true, discontent is the first step towards progress) and therefore finding no reason to take a step forward.

Secondly, having a vision means looking to the future, and this means learning to postpone the satisfaction of achieving results. The present involves effort, and this clearly goes against the laziness that each of us carries with us: being fit is good, but getting up at five o'clock every morning to find time to go to the gym is not always a price we are willing to pay.

Thirdly, sustaining a vision requires willpower, determination and perseverance. We need to learn to come to terms with this. Our will is weak and our determination falters when faced with the first difficulties. It helps to have a vision that is engaging, motivating and 'possible'. This is why a vision cannot only have the characteristics of a dream: it is linked to reality, starts from it and ultimately aims to change it.

Fourth. The discussion of what is possible highlights the importance of the fact that every single small step taken represents an additional stimulus, a push, and should therefore be considered a success. If one remains on the microscopic dot that one has placed today, one may become discouraged, but if one steps back a little and sees the theory of dots that one has placed in line over time, one realises how far one has come, perhaps without even noticing. The vision is the design of a function, but the calculation is done using infinitesimals.

Fifth (as a consequence of the fourth): to maintain the vision, you need to gain distance from time to time, see things in perspective, see the design, and not get overwhelmed by the things that happen, which in the long run make us lose the overall meaning of our actions.

In summary:

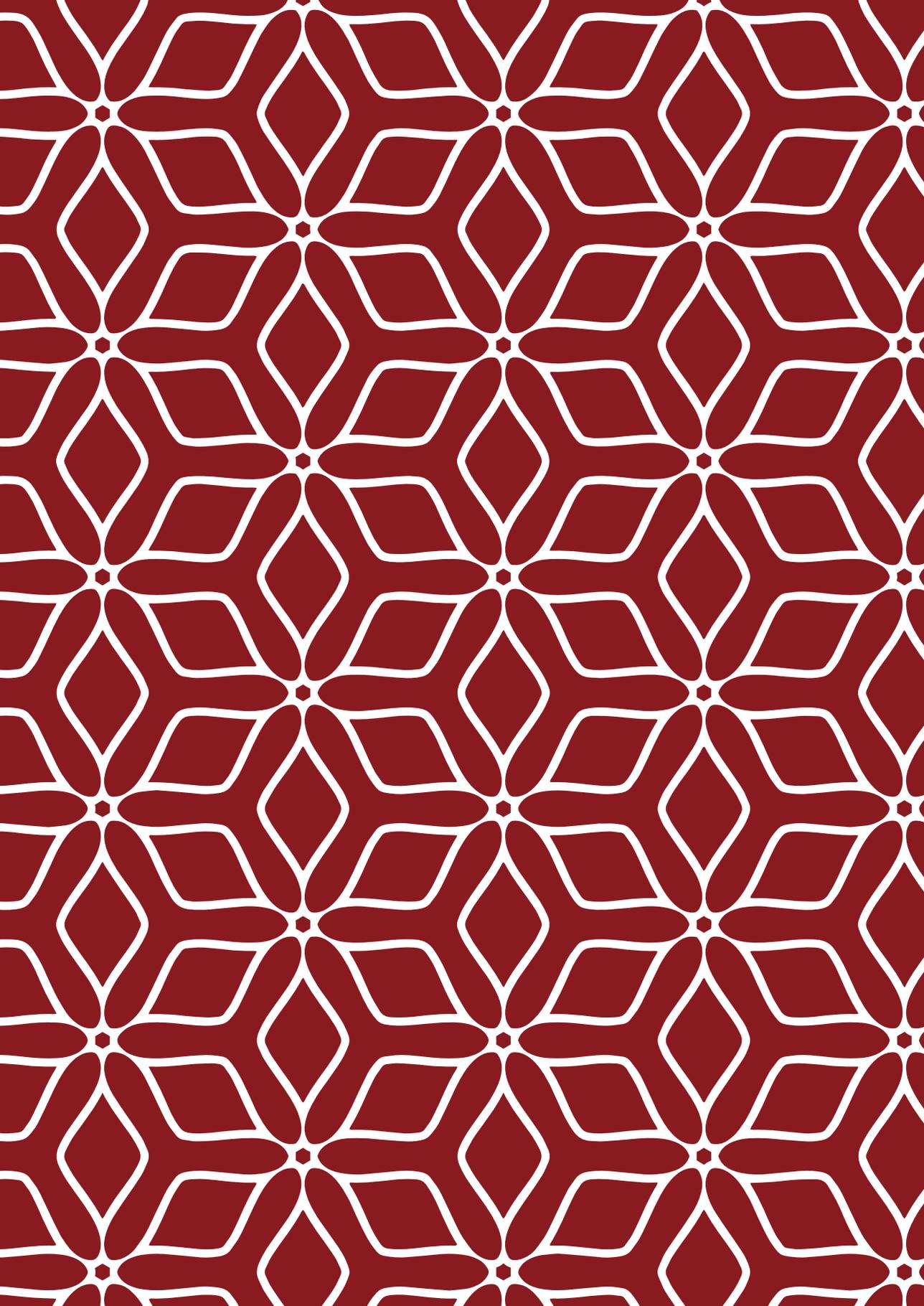
Educators are therefore visionary when:

- They have been able to build themselves up and are aware of themselves and the role they play.
- They are open to change and proactively seek it out.
- They have faith in their disciples and hope for the development of their abilities.
- They have a vision for their students that they propose rather than impose.
- They have a vision for the educational environment in which they work and share it with others.
- They can see the big picture and not just the individual steps.

Educators are not visionaries when:

- They are satisfied with what they do and do not expect anything else from themselves or those around them.
- They do not perceive the discomfort in which they are immersed, so they do not want or even hinder change.
- They do not believe in the potential of young people and think that they are bound to end up badly.
- They complain about today because they cannot see (or do not want to see) any tomorrow.

This allows us to conclude that beneath the virtue of having vision, there is a greater virtue called 'hope'. But that is another matter entirely.





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