



Federación Internacional de Fe y Alegría
Movimiento de Educación Popular Integral
y Promoción Social

**POPULAR EDUCATION TODAY
AND ITS EMBODIMENT IN OUR FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES
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- Final Document-**

*“Fe y Alegría was born
in order to promote social change
by means of Integral Popular Education”*

Fr. José María Vélaz, s.j.

Fe y Alegría is a Movement of integral Popular Education and Social Development. With these words we sum up our mission and our identity. Popular Education is the fundamental element that defines us; it is our commitment and our challenge. We will truly be Fe y Alegría to the extent that we faithfully implement Popular Education and insofar as our practices respond to its principles and exigencies. Consequently in this Congress we are referring to the framework out of which we must imagine, dream and create an educational contribution for all Latin America.

The Congress has built upon a prior process of reflection on a preliminary document as well as upon contributions from diverse countries about the continuing validity of the options and constitutive elements which Popular Education presents to us in these times of globalization. This reflection was subsequently illumined and deepened with the presentation of position papers, many case studies of significant practices in formal and non-formal education and the contributions of the delegates.¹ The conclusions, which are resumed in this document, express our perspective on Popular Education today and on the challenges it presents to Fe y Alegría.

From our history we reaffirm our commitment as a movement which maintains an attitude of permanent self-criticism and of search for adequate answers to the problems of the impoverished and excluded sectors of our people. If we in truth want to be faithful to our own identity, all of our programs should be conceived, structured and continually revised from the perspective and the challenges of an authentic Popular Education.

I. REALITY IN AND FROM LATIN AMERICA

The world has changed much in the last few years. The new social, political, economic and cultural realities of Latin America affect quite directly the conditions of the people with whom we work and, therefore, our own responsibility and functioning. The root of these changes is found in

¹ Preliminary document: “Popular Education in Times of Globalization” by Antonio Perez Esclarin. Synthesis of the national contributions by Fe y Alegría of Guatemala. Papers: “Reconstructing Fe y Alegría in times of globalization. Deconstruction: a strategy for doing it” by Marco Raul Mejía. “Popular Education and Formal Education” by Antonio Perez Esclarin. “Rediscovering the Identity of Fe y Alegría: Popular Education in relation to non-formal education” by Juan Luis Moyano. Case studies of practices of formal and non-formal education from Fe y Alegría of Bolivia, Columbia, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

the process of globalization, whose characteristics have been treated in earlier congresses and analyzed in their position papers.² Four aspects may be highlighted here because of their importance for updating the perspective and the challenges of Popular Education.

- A technological revolution is in process, above all in the field of communications and cybernetics. The modes of production are transformed radically, with a corresponding increase in the value of knowledge; technology penetrates ever more deeply our daily lives; information accumulates with greater speed, and access to it is computerized and globalized; new forms of organization appear; and in general the ever swifter pace of change presents us with the necessity of permanently updating and adapting ourselves.
- In the economic field we witness the following factors: the ascendancy of neoliberalism, which leads to a growing commercialization of personal and social relationships; a weakening of the nation-states, which evade their social responsibilities; the growing influence of the large transnational corporations; and the internationalization of the whole of economic life and the consequent changes in the forms of labor. The result is a growing inequality in our society and a greater vulnerability of the poorer sectors. In the face of unemployment and deepening poverty, a survival logic has taken over which weakens the traditional forms of social organization by breaking down the bonds of solidarity and imposing the logic of the marketplace.
- The cultural context appears to be dominated by the mass media industry, which has become the most significant agent for education and socialization. The traditional cultures today encounter new realities, which are the fruit of processes imposed by a universal model based on consumerism, competition and individualism. Those realities include: the emergence of hybrid cultures in which different forms of living, feeling, acting and being coexist; a loss of a sense of territory; and the appearance of new symbol systems and new forms of organization and encounter. Young people embrace more and more elements from the mass cultural industry, thus creating a new relationship with respect to their original cultures and transforming their traditional identity. These dynamics have made more complex the symbolic structures of domination which are hidden in the local traditions.
- In the political domain we have witnessed a crisis in the popular liberation struggles and in the experiments of real socialism, a crisis which generates a type of thought which believes itself unique and without alternatives. The traditional institutions for popular participation are increasingly discredited, although there also appear new movements and new forms of social organization and participation. The public realm and local politics are devaluated, even while new concerns emerge on the international political agenda, such as gender, environment, citizenship, human rights. We view with hope the forging of a growing consciousness of world citizenship which will be organized around the demand for another type of globalization, that of solidarity.

In this challenging context of crisis and opportunity, we wish to reaffirm our right to the ideal vision enunciated in our mission statement. Fe y Alegria is a Movement of Integral Popular Education and Social Development, dedicated to the service of the excluded sectors of our people and with the goal of creating a project of social transformation based on the Christian values of justice, participation and solidarity.

These are times when disenchantment and desperation prevail, when pragmatism is sweeping

² See the documents of Congress XXVIII "Innovative Educational Responses to the Reality of the Year 2000" (Colombia, 1997) and of Congress XXX "Education and Technology for Sustainable Development and the Demands of the Labor Market" (Ecuador, 1999), both published in *The Identity of Fe y Alegria: Documents* (International Federation of Fe y Alegria, Caracas, 2000). See also the document of Congress XXXI "Popular Education, Community and Sustainable Development" (Peru, 2000), Federation circular 122/2001. For a broader treatment one should refer to the position papers.

aside ideals and dreams, and when selfishness and individualism are considered essential values. In such times it is necessary to construct a new world for today, which is not bound by projects which no longer have relevance. It is no use returning to the past, for we need a new embodiment congruent with the new historical reality. Now more than ever the ideal vision of the Kingdom has validity, an ideal vision nourished by a spirituality of hopefulness which impels us to undertake an ethical struggle for the life and the dignity of every human being.

Fe y Alegria desires to remain attentive to this evolution of the reality in which it is inserted, in order to be able to give an adequate response to the new problems which confront the poorer sectors. The fundamental condition for maintaining intact the creative vitality of our movement is not forsaking our grandest dreams. This implies rethinking the place of dreams as a part of educational practice.

We must be transformed into militants of hope, we must be men and women of daring, committed and determined, able to take risks for the creation of a Latin America which is more just, more inclusive and globalized in solidarity, where power and leadership are converted into service and the defense of the human, political and economic rights of the poor majority. We desire a Latin America in which we are liberated from every type of slavery, in which we are all productive and creative persons with an integral formation, steeped in solidarity and committed to our ideals and our history.

II. POPULAR EDUCATION AND FE Y ALEGRIA

1. What do we mean in Fe y Alegria by Popular Education?

The word "popular" is used with a variety of meanings. Some people define it as the opposite of private education; others as that education which is imparted to poor people or which is accessible to the public in general. There are some people who still identify Popular Education with non-formal educational practices, such as training and instruction of adults. And of course there are those who believe that in these times of globalization there is no sense in continuing to talk about Popular Education, least of all for those who announce the end of history and all ideal visions.

In the face of these conceptions we define Popular Education not in terms of its beneficiaries or its modalities, but in terms of its transforming intentionality. Further, we understand it as an alternative movement which confronts the traditional educational practices and attempts to promote a more just and more democratic society. Popular Education is that education which accompanies people as they create their own identity in the process of becoming active subjects in an alternative historical project, one that guarantees participation and a worthy life for everybody. It is a humanizing educational conception, whose center is the person and which is possible only from, with and for the impoverished, the excluded, the losers of this society.

En Fe y Alegria we understand Popular Education as an ethical, political and pedagogical proposal for the transformation of society, in such a way that the excluded become subjects of power and action in their own life and in a humanizing project for the society and the nation.

It is not a question of simply working "for the people", but of working "with and for the people", reaffirming and appropriating their values and their vocation as subjects and creators of history. Popular Education arises from the very life of the people, from their knowledge, values and experiences, from their capacity for struggle and resistance. It is positively oriented towards producing concerned persons and responsible citizens, capable of visualizing a different model of society and committing themselves to bringing it to birth. It is education which defends the historic vocation of every man and woman as authors of the future and propounds the human and Christian values which impel us to abandon mediocrity and to seek forms of life which are ever more human.

This ideal vision is not an empty illusion or an unreal dream; it is an exploration of new possibilities and human potential for transforming the present dehumanized world. Popular Education combats forcefully "the dictatorship of the unique thought" which renounces every type of reflection and action which might lead to profound transformations of society. It combats

soulless pragmatism, as well as the self-seeking consumerism which proposes a vain personal fulfillment; and it opposes itself to the populism of those who speak in the name of the people but who are opposed to the people's true political growth and maturation.

To lose the capacity to dream and be surprised is to renounce the right to act as citizens, to be authors and actors in the changes which are necessary at the political, economic, social and cultural levels. To accept the dream of a better world and to stand by it is to accept participation in the process of its creation. For that reason we reaffirm the continuing validity of Popular Education as an embodiment and an expression of our mission.

2. Popular Education as liberation education

What we mean when in *Fe y Alegria* we define ourselves as a Popular Education Movement will be better understood if we review briefly the history of Popular Education in Latin America.

We could claim that Popular Education was born in the decade of the '60s and has its roots in the "Liberation Education" proposals of Paulo Freire. In the face of a type of education which was uncritical, memoristic, domesticating, repetitive and submissive, the Brazilian educator proposed an educational practice that was based on problem-solving and awareness of the social environment, a practice that helped the student to overcome domination and to become an active subject in history. In traditional education the educator is the one who "knows" and therefore deposits his/her knowledge in the minds of the students. Liberation Education opts rather for a pedagogy of dialogue, one that is born from a critical framework and generates critical consciousness, a pedagogy that is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and a mutual confidence between teacher and student. Liberation Education utilizes processes of dialogue, communication and cultural negotiation and is thus most definitely oriented towards developing the student's capacity for understanding reality, speaking authentically and writing the history of personal and communal liberation.

The project of Liberation Education gained momentum when the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference (Medellin, 1968) deepened the renovating spirit of the Catholic Church and adopted the ideas of Paulo Freire. According to the Medellin documents, ignorance is an inhuman servitude; it is thus necessary to free people from the fanaticism, the fatalism and the passivity which result from a lack of education. But the task of education consists not only in incorporating people into existing cultural and social structures, but rather in striving so that people, as authors of their own development, become capable of creating more human relations within society. The proposition of Liberation Education was closely coupled with the activities of the committed Christian groups and with civil organizations which strove to bring education to the marginalized populations which the State did not attend to. These were times of profound ideological debates, in which there was a confrontation between the development theory, which defined Latin American countries as developing countries, and the dependency theory, which argued that Latin American countries were dependent and would never reach an adequate development -- unless perhaps they were to undertake a profound revolutionary transformation of their political, economic and social systems.

With the change which took place in Chile in 1970 there arose great hopes of being able to change society with non-violent methods. As a result Liberation Education took on a new importance and grew accordingly. Around that time Liberation Theology emerged forcefully, and throughout the continent there proliferated groups which opted openly for socialism. In response, the politics of national security, coming from the previous decade, became more entrenched, and Latin America was awash in dictatorships which imposed political and economic regimes which were contrary to poor people's interests. In 1979 The Third General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops took place in Puebla, Mexico. Despite the repressive political measures which were being implemented in most of the continent and the suspicion with which the authoritarian regimes viewed Liberation Education, the Puebla document not only maintained but also emphasized more forcefully the ideals of Education Liberation. In this same year the Sandinista

revolution triumphed in Nicaragua, and groups of committed Christians played an important part in the process. In the face of growing repression Liberation Education found its place among the resistance forces, committed itself with the victims of repression (organized or not), and became "popular".

Starting in 1981 the name Liberation Education gave way to the name Popular Education. Since Marxism possessed a theory that explained poverty, dependency and domination, Popular Education drew upon it, especially the interpretation of Althusser, which considered education to be an ideological apparatus of an oppressive State which existed to serve the dominant classes. In consequence a conflict arose in these years between formal education and Popular Education; this latter found its expression primarily in social experiments such as literacy programs, community health programs, cooperatives and cultural groups. During this period Popular Education became very politicized and ideological; education was seen as an instrument to support a determined political project; much emphasis was put on class-consciousness and the need to gain state power; the catechism of the manuals substituted that of reflection and analysis; thus the pedagogical dimension was gradually abandoned, and pedagogy was seen as limited merely to using participative techniques.

As it became evident that direct political and social results could not be expected of the movement, some popular educators undertook around 1985 a serious questioning and self-criticism which brought about a grave crisis in Popular Education. The crisis deepened and broadened with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the socialist regimes and the ascendant triumph of neoliberalism. It was gradually recognized that many errors resulted from an excessive ideological bias, which, even while using the language and the deeds of liberation, was incapable of uncovering and confronting the practices of domination and submission in everyday life. The lie was given to the incoherence which confused proclamations and desires with practices and which substituted ideology for pedagogy.

For that reason the call to re-found or re-conceptualize Popular Education began to gain ground. A need was seen to begin a process of deconstructing theories and practices in order to detect and overcome those elements which harbored inequalities and attitudes of domination. Popular Education ceased to believe that it had a monopoly on the truth and abandoned the dogmatic line of the manuals; it allowed itself to be questioned and to be enriched by the contributions of different social sciences (sociology, psychology, anthropology...); it entered into dialogue with the currents of critical pedagogy; it recovered its essence as a liberating and humanizing practice, and, upon returning again to the theme of pedagogy, it began to draw closer to the world of the school.

3. Fe y Alegria as a Popular Education Movement

Fe y Alegria developed its international mission statement, which clearly defined it as a Popular Education Movement, at a time (1984-1985) when Popular Education was still viewed with mistrust and resentment by those in formal schooling. Fe y Alegria, which had been born as a Christian educational response to the cry of injustice and which held that ignorance was the principal reason for poverty and dependency, never accepted the reduction of Popular Education to non-formal educational practices; it always opted for Popular Education in the widest sense. Accordingly the 18th International Congress, which met in Cali in 1987, two years after the publication of the mission statement, included among its conclusions the following: "*We have seen with satisfaction how the principles of Popular Education operative in non-formal education are completely applicable to ordinary educative processes in formal schooling, and we thus definitively repudiate the myth that Popular Education belongs exclusively to non-formal, extracurricular activities for adults*".

In defining itself as a movement, Fe y Alegria was opting for a process of continuous transformation. Being a Popular Education Movement implies a permanent creative destabilization and a continual re-interpretation of reality from the viewpoint and the interests of the poor and the

excluded. Being a movement implies an attitude of earnest seeking, as well as large doses of audacity, defiance and sincere and constant self-criticism. The goal of the movement is always to overcome the many incongruities that exist in our practices and to adapt those practices to the requirements and the challenges which are presented to us by an ever changing social reality and the increasing impoverishment and exclusion of the great majority of our people.

In fact, if we take a look at the topics and the proposals of the International Congresses which took place after the approval of the mission statement, it becomes evident that Fe y Alegria is ever more concerned with an earnest and faithful adaptation of its educational practices to the requirements of its mission. The creative dissatisfaction which arises upon confronting what we are actually doing with the needs and the challenges which we have before us is what impels Fe y Alegria not to rest content with its present achievements but to carry on a process of continual renewal. For us deconstruction is a requirement for our identity.

When we contemplate the reality of our country with the eyes of the poor and the excluded, we see that the fundamental options and the constitutive elements of Popular Education continue to be as valid today as ever. Poverty and marginalization have become more extensive and profound in our lands and in the world. For that reason all the greater is the necessity of building a society without throwaways, in which nobody is dispensable and everybody can live with dignity. On the other hand, never as much as today, in the so-called society of knowledge, has so much importance been given to education, which is considered a key element for increasing productivity, combating poverty and achieving sustainable development.

We therefore reaffirm our identity as a Movement for Popular Education and Social Development. This identity not only requires of us a preferential option for the poor, the excluded and the marginalized, for the losers in this relentlessly competitive rat-race, and for all those who suffer discrimination, but also demands of us a concrete educational project which helps to transform all of the poor and the marginalized into autonomous subjects and responsible citizens.

4. Popular Education as an ethical, political and pedagogical project

In Fe y Alegria we understand Popular Education as an ethical, political and pedagogical project aimed at transforming our present society.

The starting point of Popular Education is the conviction that present-day society needs to be transformed. Thus it is that Popular Education presents an ethical option: if we are not convinced of the need to transform society and to found it on radically different values, then we cannot practice Popular Education. The transformation of society and the ethical option are exercised from "below", that is, from alongside the excluded, the impoverished, the throwaways of society. Thus our pedagogy is geared to endowing them with an alternative, critical type of knowledge, which gives them the power to be true subjects in this social transformation.

For us in Fe y Alegria the fundamental basis of our political and pedagogical project is ethical. Since we recognize that all human beings, as sons and daughters of God our common Father, are unique and irrepeatable, essentially equal, bearers of values and endowed with a mission to realize in life, we are opposed to all forms of domination and discrimination, and consequently we refuse to accept a society which excludes and denies life to the majority of its people.

We therefore denounce the present world situation and make an option for the poor, since Jesus opted for them, and with them we commit ourselves to working for a world which is inclusive of all and which makes possible the true fraternity of the Kingdom. We make an option for those majorities that are ever more deprived of life and of dignity. Jointly with them as protagonists and subjects of history we commit ourselves to transforming society and to overhauling our own daily practices and relationships. Finally, we strive to transform our very selves, for we are conscious that it is only in the measure that we seek to become new women and men, by incarnating in our lives the practices and values that we proclaim, that we will contribute to the birth of a new society.

We envision a society which is profoundly democratic and participative, a society of authentic

citizens with voice and power; a society which rejects authoritarianism and which considers misery, ignorance and poverty as insults against humanity, as intrinsic obstacles for the exercise of citizenship and for sustainable development. Genuine democracy suppose a radical confidence in human beings and is founded upon a sense of personal and collective equality. Dictatorships, populisms and purely electoral democracies do not put their faith in human beings or in the human capacity to fashion a new world.

But equality must be translated into real and effective participation. Equality is both a starting point and an arrival point: since we affirm the essential equality of all human beings, we work for a society without excluded members, a society which allows each and every member to contribute according to his/her uniqueness. The option for the poor and the excluded must become a tenacious and persistent struggle against poverty and exclusion and against the historical and structural causes which produce and maintain such conditions.

Consequently we make the choice for a pedagogy and a methodology in keeping with our ethical and political options. We choose a pedagogy which favors transformation and not simple adaptation, a pedagogy which starts with the innate knowledge and culture of the students and which is aimed, through cultural dialogue and negotiation, at empowering the students, that is, at endowing them with a voice and a power which enable them to become active subjects in the transformation of their living conditions and of the very society which excludes them. Misery and exclusion are definitely linked to a lack of voice and a lack of power among the poorer classes. A people which is ignorant or only superficially educated will forever be at the mercy of corrupt leaders; they will always live in hope of a savior or a messiah, and be ever prone to the threat of the fanaticisms which proliferate in countless forms of intolerance.

5. The option for a globalization of hope and solidarity

In Fe y Alegria we are not unaware that we live in an epoch of globalization. Globalization is a metaphor which expresses the rupture between local reality and all the more universalized spheres of human activity. Today we are co-responsible and interdependent, and isolation is impossible. Whatever happens in any corner of the planet in some way affects us. We have become citizens of the world without ceasing to be children of the village.

Globalization as such does not have a negative connotation; rather it offers immense possibilities for the development of humankind. However, viewing it with the eyes of the poor and the excluded, we see that in reality globalization brings along with it a more precarious labor market and an increase in unemployment; in consequence it causes a dramatic increase in poverty and inequality among nations and among people within each nation. Latin America has the unwelcome privilege of being the continent with the greatest degree of inequality, that is, the continent where wealth and income are most unequally distributed and where the differences are greatest between a privileged minority and a impoverished majority. This situation gives rise to the spread of every type of violence and fosters the emergence of illegal economies, such as drug trafficking.

Furthermore, we view with concern the tendency of neoliberalism to dominate technological development, a tendency which widens the digital breach between those who have access to the capital of the new information and knowledge technologies and those who are deprived of such access.

In Fe y Alegria, nonetheless, we practice a Popular Education which provides the students with the power necessary to change the face of the current process of globalization. Our committed faith and hope help us to see globalization as a phenomenon which is human and attractive, offering immense possibilities. Globalization has created conditions for universalizing the paradigms of human rights, intercultural relationships, environmental concern, ecumenical dialogue, gender equality, the struggle for equality and justice, and the sense of co-responsibility and solidarity. For the first time in history scientific and technological development permits us to create the conditions of a dignified life for all people. Globalization has made possible the creation

of wide networks in civil society and has allowed us to express more clearly our aims and desires; it has permitted a consolidation of our protests and our proposals. Without a doubt, globalization has offered us the possibility of knowing and feeling ourselves to be one humanity co-inhabiting a common home, the planet earth.

In light of this, in *Fe y Alegria* we wish to recognize globalization as an opportunity and a responsibility, and we commit ourselves, in these times when despair and self-seeking become globalized, to working for a globalization of hope and solidarity. We seek a globalization which is at the service of humanity, one that has at its heart the concerns and the desires, the dignity and the fulfillment of the human person, and not just the values of the marketplace. Because we believe in a God who is present in history and who joins in our effort to transform the world, we affirm that any globalization which is not at the service of the whole person and of all persons and peoples is contradictory to the salvific plan of God and will be nothing more than a new form of servitude and dehumanization. We thus make ours the words and concerns of his Holiness John Paul II, as expressed in his message for the World Day of Peace in 1988: *"Our challenge consists in assuring that there is a globalization of solidarity, a globalization without marginalization. This is an evident element of true justice, which has notable moral implications for the organization of the economic, social, cultural life of all nations."*

III. CHALLENGES FOR FE Y ALEGRIA

The renewed option for a Popular Education capable of contributing to the globalization of hope and solidarity confronts *Fe y Alegria* with a series of challenges. Among these we stress the following:

1. The recovery of the central principles of Popular Education

The history of Popular Education contains a great wealth of designing, criticism, redesigning and self-criticism. Since we have not all experienced this process, we ought not take for granted the necessary knowledge, assimilation, empathy and practice of Popular Education among present-day educators, or its implementation in institutional functioning. Thus it is important to recover critically and explicitly the criteria, the principles and the options of Popular Education.

This recovery will require a second task, both for formal education and for non-formal education. Questions will arise to which we will have to give a response. For example: What is the meaning of a quality school in Popular Education? What is the place of educational administration, both in the functioning of each center and in the network of all the centers which are part of the movement? How do we deal with the necessary tension between a Popular Education Movement and an institution which has to take into account the sustainability and the continuity of the educational project in its larger dimensions? How do we reconcile a curriculum which is in principle open to the surrounding social realities with the attention that must be given to the official curriculum? What is the intentionality or the inner essence of our educational practice? How do we develop the mystique and the option for life inherent in Popular Education, both in the educators and in the other people who participate in an educational institution where inertia plays a role? Among other criteria that need to be rethought in our educational practice are: the need to start from the value judgments of the people, the transformative character of reality, the process of personalization founded on local identity and culture, community participation, and the empowering and the political action of the people who are the subjects of our education.

In other words, we still have before us the challenge of effectively making Popular Education a central constitutive element of *Fe y Alegria* and thus of determining its diverse implications in the different dimensions of our practice and operation.

2. Including and giving special attention to the poorest

If it is the case that today knowledge is a key element for being productively involved in society and for developing completely all one's personal talents, then it is necessary to guarantee a quality education to everyone, especially the poorest people who do not have the requisite means

to obtain it by themselves. It must be an education which allows everyone without exception to develop all their creative qualities and abilities in such a way as to become responsible for themselves.

Educational marginalization generally produces and consolidates social marginalization. The students who most need education are precisely those who have no access to the educational system or who leave it early; they consequently leave the system without having acquired the basic skills necessary to realize their true mission in life. The schools of the poor are usually quite inferior schools which serve only to reproduce poverty. Most of us would consider it incredible if hospitals or clinics were to send home the people who are most seriously ill or in need of intensive care, but strangely we consider it normal that our schools expel and sideline the students who are most needy and problematical and hold on only to the best students.

While we proclaim our vocation of service to the poor and cry out for educational justice and equality, possibly even in Fe y Alegria, often without becoming aware of it, we are marginalizing some of the most needy students. We must therefore analyze and revise what we require and demand of people in order to enter our educational programs, with a view to giving real priority to those who most need our help.

But it is not sufficient that the students we admit be among the most needy. The challenge consists in that the students remain in the educational programs as long as possible so that we can guarantee their success.

It is not at all easy to prevent the failure of the weakest members of a society which is geared to produce such failure. It is therefore imperative that we understand the failure not as the fault of the students but as that of the society and the educational system. Behind each student who fails is hidden the failure of the family, of the teacher, of the school, of the society itself. Possibly the student fails because we are not able to offer what he/she needs. We thus see the need for a reverse discrimination which gives preferential attention to those who have most deficiencies, in order to compensate as much as possible for inequalities of whatever nature, including those of gender, and to avoid increasing social differences.

Thus in Fe y Alegria we will be required to work longer and harder days, using compensatory educational centers equipped with good libraries, student cafeterias, computer and science labs, sports fields, comfortable study and research spaces, attractive extracurricular activities, etc., all with the aim of insuring that the student have access to the necessary means for obtaining a quality education. This will also require of us seeking out and training good teachers who are capable of appreciating and loving all their students. We need teachers who will practice a pedagogy which recognizes the innate knowledge and values of the student and which develops the student's motivation and self-esteem. We need teachers who are well-motivated and who love their profession, teachers who are convinced of the need of continual formation and who will take responsibility for the results of their educational labors.

3. Quality public education

Since in Fe y Alegria we opt for quality education for everybody, especially for the poorest, we argue and work for quality public education as well, since this is the only education to which the majority of the poorest students will have access.

In Fe y Alegria we understand the public as the common good, that which is accessible to everyone. Independently of whether the education is provided by the state or by private bodies, it constitutes a "public service". Defending the public sphere presupposes negation of the common but erroneous conception which makes the public equivalent to state-controlled. Rather, it involves decisively opposing the mentality which privatizes what is public for its own benefit (whether that of persons or groups, of parties or organizations) and which prevents the general public from enjoying goods and services of genuine quality.

For these reasons in Fe y Alegria we ought to oppose all exclusivist educational policies. In our

countries we ought insistently to propose and work for quality education for all, by means of agreements with governments, political parties, civil society, churches, parents and communities, businesses, organizations and trade unions, mass media, professionals and workers, etc. We should defend education as a public project, as a hopeful and mobilizing proposition, as the first concern and business of society.

If education is a right, so it is also the duty of everybody. Defending the public sphere requires that we also work firmly in defense of a public ethic and that we make ourselves boldly present in the forums and debates where the great educational policies are discussed and decided.

4. The formation of free persons

We live in a world which invites us to a consumerist individualism as the means to attain identity and complete fulfillment, a world which cannibalizes our relationships and imposes social Darwinism with its survival of the strongest and ablest, a world which attempts to degrade citizens to mere consumers and customers. In such a world the essential objective of all the programs of Fe y Alegria must be the formation of free persons, capable of becoming responsible for themselves and of living in solidarity with others. It is a question of developing the seed within each person, of helping to bring to birth the man or woman we all have within us. To educate is to help us to know ourselves, understand ourselves and to value ourselves in order to be able to develop fully all our talents and to fulfill our mission in life jointly with other people. This is the meaning of empowerment: enabling the student to be a subject unto him/herself, capable of committing him/herself in the transformation of society.

Educating for the formation of free persons implies also educating for the profound living out of a committed and incarnated spirituality. For us in Fe y Alegria spirituality consists in following Jesus today, according to the Spirit, in our globalized and postmodern world. When Jesus invites us to follow him, he is offering us the way to fulfillment, the way to our realization as persons, the way to complete liberty. For us Jesus is the way towards the Father, the way by which we recognize others as our brothers and sisters and the way to find fulfillment by living the exigencies of our common fraternity.

5. Authentic democratization of all our educational centers

"Fe y Alegria as Popular Education is impossible without participation" proclaims with impeccable logic the document of the 21st International Congress in Lima (1988), entitled "Support and Orientation for Participative Processes in Fe y Alegria". It is obvious that the authoritarian and individualist postures which foment domination, submission and dependency have no place in the project of Popular Education which seeks to empower the excluded and the impoverished so that they can be active subjects of a dignified life and of a meaningful democracy. Thus in Fe y Alegria we understand democracy as a culture, as a way of being and acting, which, penetrating to the mind and the heart, is translated into relationships which are participative, cooperative and cohesive in all the ways of human life and action.

We therefore advocate authentic participation, which implies decentralization and distribution of power, and recognition of the right of students, educators, parents and members of the educative community to become actively involved in the running of the educational programs. All this demands structures which are agile, open to change, decentralized and supportive of reflection and commitment. Vertical and authoritarian management must give way to the establishment of cooperative management which encourages the participation, the commitment and the responsibility of everyone in the planning, coordination and execution of the educational tasks. Authentic participation means managerial teams which enliven debates, which can criticize and receive criticism, which consider pedagogy more important than bureaucracy, which do not fear conflict, which do not create dependency or make themselves indispensable and which encourage the delegating of responsibilities and the making of decisions by consensus.

Democracy in Popular Education not only consists in participation, but also seeks to have all educational practices reflect the values of genuine democracy, tolerance, respect, liberty,

responsibility, non-discrimination, cooperation and solidarity. Popular Education, since it works for equality, is equalizing and is opposed to biases based on social, gender, racial and cultural differences. Popular Education especially tries to instill in the student sensitivity to the predicament, the failure and the pain of other people. For that reason it educates in solidarity, which means to educate in love. Every person who loves begins to suffer and tries to take action because the pain and the failure of others are experienced personally, and a need is felt to remedy them. When the suffering of other people begins to be felt, it is a sign of personal and social liberation, the beginning of solidarity.

Educating in solidarity means awakening and putting into action one's understanding, love and sense of justice. Today, if we are dignified, we must become indignant if we are to dignify others. True solidarity frees us from demagoguery and rhetoric, from narcissism and the desire for power, and from the personal protagonism which neutralizes collective action. In the face of the competition and self-seeking which are tenaciously promoted and encouraged in the traditional school, we in Fe y Alegria commit ourselves to sow solidarity and to transform all our educational centers into schools of solidarity.

6. Productivity and learning

Fe y Alegria must confront in all its programs the challenge of productivity, both as regards life and the quality of life. Productivity requires educational centers organized as environments intentionally designed not for reproducing prefabricated responses and irrelevant contents, but for producing knowledge, abilities, solutions, capacities and values in keeping with the model of person and of society that we are seeking.

Nowadays there is no sense in a teaching method that is limited to transmitting packets of knowledge which students must memorize and repeat in order to pass exams and be promoted from one grade to another. Rather, the great need is that we teach students to learn in such a way that they progressively attain an ever more independent and autonomous reasoning power which allows them to continue the learning process progressively and permanently. This implies the development of the basic skills, especially oral expression, reading, writing, arithmetic calculations, logical thought and the solving of problems.

Popular Education strives to make of every student an autonomous and independent reader, a reader of text and of context, of the word and of the world; a reader capable of hearing and interpreting the heart-rending cries of reality, a reader who is not a passive consumer of texts but a critical interpreter of them and of the intentions of their authors; a reader of the new codes of communication and information and of the audio-visual languages, especially those of television; a reader who can process, utilize and demythologize the multitude of data which come our way, the sense and the nonsense of so many educational, political, economic, cultural and social propositions.

Educating for productivity implies also a creative response to the new challenges of development and of technological culture in order to *"inculturate the education of poor people in such a way that they are not absorbed by the new technological culture -- as hapless unrooted users of modern culture -- nor are excluded from it because they are unable to incorporate themselves into this new world,"* as is stated in the final document of the 30th International Congress of Fe y Alegria (1999, Quito), which had as its theme: Education and Technology for Sustainable Development and the Demands of the World of Labor.

We cannot continue to be either naive technophiles or fearful technophobes rooted in the past. We must thus urgently open up our curricula to scientific and technological transformations, and we must endow our students with scientific and technological literacy, we must provide them with the necessary skills so that they are not marginalized in the world of productive labor and can participate in the comprehension and transformation of society. The challenge consists in endowing the students with the ability to imagine and to mold an alternative social model, a society where productivity and growth are compatible with equality and justice.

The indispensable use and the critical appropriation of the new technologies should be, nonetheless, the consequence of a general pedagogical decision and not just a technical strategy. The challenge consists in appropriating critically and creatively the new technologies and integrating them into an educational project which helps to empower the students in such a way that they are capable of promoting the globalization of hope and solidarity.

7. Integration with the local community

For Fe y Alegria Popular Education is an educational practice linked to grass-roots communities, with a perspective of social change. An island-like educational program, closed to the community and its problems, is contrary to the meaning of Popular Education. Popular Education centers, both formal and non-formal, should be linked to local needs and should be open spaces where the community questions itself and progressively matures in political and historical consciousness. In sum, the educational centers should suffer with the community their common pains, should help express their dreams and hopes and should celebrate the small triumphs and advances in the transformation of the social reality.

This school/community integration implies a change in the ideas and the attitudes not only of administrators, educators and students, but also of parents and community representatives, who frequently believe that their educational commitment ends once they have registered their child in the school. This change will be possible if all involved begin to understand that Popular Education goes far beyond the transmission of certain subjects, abilities, skills or conducts, for it involves the search for and the communal creation of an ever more human way of life.

In general, but especially in the programs of non-formal education, integration with the community presupposes a conscious and systematic effort oriented towards *“strengthening the grass-roots communities in aspects such as decision-making ability, citizen participation, critical judgment, knowledge and exercise of rights and duties, living out of values, ability to discern between what humanizes and what dehumanizes, ability to propose alternatives, ability to organize, and ability to create a society without excluded or impoverished members, that is, a world of brothers and sisters, new creators of the universe”* (from the Final Document of the 30th International Congress of Fe y Alegria, Lima, 2000, whose central theme was “Popular Education, Community and Sustainable Development”) The embodiment of this challenge is realized in promoting and developing the lines of action set out in that same Congress, within all the spaces where our movement is present.

8. The “re-culturization” and the ongoing formation of administrators and educators

In order to respond faithfully to the foregoing challenges, all of us in Fe y Alegria must enter into a process of “re-culturization” and ongoing formation. Re-culturization means advancing away from a culture of routine, individualism, and irresponsibility, towards a culture of innovation, cooperation, and responsibility for the results of our educational practices. Ongoing formation is necessary so that all the educators of Fe y Alegria become professionally reflective about who they are, what they do, and what is happening about them. Such formation should consist not so much in the accumulation of credentials and titles as in personal growth and in the development and improvement of their pedagogical practice, so as better to respond to the needs of their students. Any problems of educational practice and students’ deficiencies should be factored into specific proposals for teacher formation in such a way that the teachers themselves become the basic protagonists of the needed changes and feel personally responsible for the results of their educational efforts.

All this supposes, among other things, an effort to improve the quality of the initial training, linking it closely with formation in service and making sure it has sufficient follow-up to guarantee its quality. The challenge consists in making of every program and every educational center a privileged place for the ongoing formation not only of the students but of the teachers as well. An essential part of this is laboring for improved labor conditions for the educators so that they are recompensed according to their efforts and the importance and quality of their work.

9. Becoming a true Latin American Popular Education Movement

In these times of globalization and the disappearance of distances and frontiers, in order to accomplish our mission with greater efficiency and credibility, we must work in Fe y Alegria to strengthen the dimension of our public action as an international movement. We must strive so that our proposals have an effective impact on the educational systems and the processes of human development in Latin America.

As multiform and diverse as Latin America is in all its extension, there are many common problems which afflict its peoples, and there are many values which unite them. In Fe y Alegria we have traveled a long and arduous course with a diversity of educational practices, both formal and non-formal; in the city slums, the rural villages and the Indian zones, we are always trying to offer responses to the most urgent needs of the people. In Fe y Alegria we can and we must be promoters of an education which is capable of overcoming the prejudices and false nationalisms which have helped to aggravate our problems and have made impossible the union necessary for our common growth and maturity as inhabitants of the great Latin American homeland.

We must now open ourselves to a wide vision of the problems of the continent. We must count on the interchange of resources and proposals, on disinterested support and solidarity, and on the seeking out of alliances with all those who clearly work to transform social reality and to globalize hope and solidarity. The Federation's Global Plan for Institutional Development and Strengthening, approved by the General Assembly (Quito, 2000), is a decisive step in the coordination of proposals and of international action. It opens up new channels for the creative mystique and the transformative boldness of the movement, always on the lookout for effective responses to the challenges of an authentic Popular Education.