

Book Review

Current Situation and Educational Proposals of Chilean Catholicism. Main Issues of Analysis

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Patricia Imbarack (Ed.). (2015). *Educación católica en Chile. Perspectivas, aportes y tensiones*. Santiago, Chile: Ediciones UC, 454 pages.

The book that I hold in my hands is an original and polyphonic piece in the context of current academic productions on Catholic education in the region. Its originality lies partly in the novelty of its arrival, given the scarcity of such studies in the Latin American space, and partly in its own diversity. The polyphony of the work is thus manifested through the perspectives of analysis, the various written levels of analysis, and the focal points outlined in each chapter.

As a curator, Patricia Imbarack carried out a thorough task of assembling experts and protagonists which had positive results. This edition is organized into two main parts: the first one contains a series of chapters dedicated to higher education, and particularly university education, while the second one outlines views on schools. At the same time, each part simultaneously intersects with two perspectives of analysis: the first one based on the theoretical and pedagogical discussions intended to clarify the meaning of Catholic universities and schools in the current cultural context. In this regard, the chapters become clear a series of challenges that can be identified as specific of the current state of embedded Western culture, in the Latin American region in this case. The second perspective of analysis traces the situation of Catholic institutions (including Catholic-inspired institutions) within the Chilean education system, with its social, political, and economic particularities.

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Tensions over the identity of the Chilean catholic university

In the part of the book referred to Catholic universities, there is no doubt that the main theme in several chapters is that of its identity. This is possibly the most complex issue in a culture marked by liquid modernity (Bauman, 2004), using one of the many à la page denominations. The challenge of identity thus reveals certain dimensions of the problem in these chapters.

Along these lines, Ignacio Sánchez, in the first chapter, presents some ideas of the ecclesiastical magisterium focused on the problem of the mission and identity of Catholic universities, and based on this he analyzes the challenges of identity, academic freedom, and quality. It thus becomes clear that, in the case of Chile, tension is developed between improvement of quality with tendencies towards standardization —promoted by the state and sought by some universities— and the necessary freedom and diversity required by Catholic universities, both to develop their ideology and to innovate in terms of the communities with which they work.

In the second chapter, Cristian Roncagliolo focuses on a topic that is always present in Catholic higher education: the university pastoral. He identifies a serious crisis since he states —taking up a critical diagnosis in the *Documento de Aparecida* (Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, 2007, 100d)— that the Church in Latin America has no relevant presence in the generation of culture in the university context. Once again it appears to be part of the mission of the Catholic university to recreate a present-day culture marked by Christianity. Based on his diagnosis, the author develops the elements that allow a renewal of the university pastoral and displays a working proposal to form a discipular Church that extends to peripheral areas. On this basis, a more specific model could be developed in the future to address the problem stated in the diagnosis, designing projects that allow cultural creativity and evangelization, both in the subjective dimension of community and in the creation of objective culture.

José Antonio Guzmán centers on the challenges that Christianity-inspired universities —not officially declared to be Catholic— face in terms of management, although their perspective could also be applied to the Catholic universities themselves. The initial argument is focused on reiterating the classical humanist approach regarding the need to integrate knowledge through interdisciplinarity —which includes the views of theology, philosophy, humanities, and social sciences— and the departure from positivist and utilitarian arguments. This is the only way of making a contribution to current culture characterized by fragmentation and the loss of meaning for life and profession. Within this framework, he argues that there is a need to embody a kind of institutional leadership (that can be preached by the rector and other authorities) which, bearing in mind the ideology, creates consensus and mediation without exercising a control that strangles legitimate spaces of vital autonomy. This involves a strategy that focuses on pressing the community towards its institutional identity, in this case strongly characterized by the aforementioned humanistic ideal, taking care of various aspects of academic life: the curriculum, pedagogy, the constitution of the teaching staff, freedom of research. This chapter thus articulates a central aspect of university identity, along with a kind of exercise of power and the proposal of certain ways to achieve the indicated purpose by guidance.

The fourth chapter, authored by Judith Scharager, Manuel Villalón, Alex Meza, and Gonzalo Hidalgo, presents the results of research addressing the quality assurance policy in Catholic universities. After acknowledging that the concept of quality in the Chilean system is related to each university fulfilling its own self-imposed aims, the study outlines the goals that the eight Catholic universities intend to consolidate. At the same time it verifies the level of accreditation of each of the dimensions proposed in order to define a balance that is clearly positive. However, the research provides data that allow asserting that the external pressure to achieve a standardized quality, a subject that is mentioned again as in previous chapters, limits the development of the institutional aims related to identity, comprehensive, ethical and social education; and the production of innovative research characterized by the institutional vision.

Mauricio Bicocca revisits the validity of humanist education in the Catholic university from another perspective. Reductive rationality and the limited ethics of contemporary culture are, in the opinion of the author, manifested in the tendency towards competency-based education. This would be the present form of the utilitarian resurgence in the educational world. This pedagogical perspective is criticized from a humanistic viewpoint due to its idiosyncrasies, separated from an appropriate contemplative approach

due to its functionalism and supposed neutrality. For this reason, it is proposed that the liberal arts or humanities should be revitalized, demonstrating certain positive consequences of their presence, precisely to enhance the same practical reason. This argument, while in agreement with the necessary integration between humanities and professional and academic education, leaves pending the problem explained so exactly in the previous chapter: the mere presence of humanist subjects in the curriculum, without vital and integrated pedagogical treatment that allows habits and capacities to be developed that embody a comprehensive education, becomes a kind of humanist encyclopedic approach that also contradicts its own proposal. Comprehension and the consequent human action based on an integral vision have already been demonstrated as not emerging spontaneously from the analysis of works and disciplines. It still remains to define proposals that outline an integrating and creative strategy that can overcome the limitations of both approaches.

Juan Pablo Faúndez addresses the question of subjectivism and plurality of contemporary culture, as a modern legacy, in its relationship with the magisterium of the Church and the situation of the university. The author considers that certain political and ideological trends in the last centuries have supported the facilitation of pluralistic coexistence through the hegemony of cultural minimums. In contrast, the magisterium and the educational experience of the Church, also in Chile, pursue maximums that must be integrated into and recognized in public debate. In this way, negative discrimination is avoided and a plural and dialogic culture is displayed. The text sets the course for Catholic education, and not solely the universities, to develop innovative policies of public presence, overcoming more defensive schemes resulting in part from the rationality of the Educator State and its assumptions.

Guillermo Marini ends the university section of this compilation by addressing the challenges of teachers at Catholic universities. He proposes a teacher profile marked by encounter, testimony and dialogue. To achieve this, he formulates certain tips to embody this characterization, simultaneously avoiding neutralisms that conceal indifference and narrow-mindedness that are close to manipulation. The text and its guidelines make it possible to achieve at the teaching level that which, in previous chapters, was outlined at the institutional level based on the assumption and explanation of the pedagogical vision itself and its relationship with institutional identity. These types of approaches that formulate essential ideas can also be strategies to establish academic and pastoral policies with the teaching staff.

In summary, in this first section, the Magisterium of de Church's view is developed —anchored in turn to Christian humanism— on the search for the harmonic truth, on the dialogue between faith and reason, and on the integration of knowledge embodied in the experience and testimony of Christian life. The chapters address orientations and guidelines to find ways that, within the framework of the post-conciliar doctrine, call on the university community to express the Catholic identity of the institution based on free adherence of personal consciousness. The challenge becomes broader because, as is clear from the above, the Catholic identity of universities does not solely imply —as specified by the authors— adhesion to faith, but also entails a certain preference, to say the least, for a personalist and realist philosophical worldview. It should be noted (it can be observed in several chapters) that this philosophical view integrates contemporary contributions without exhausting itself in archaic scholasticism.

The complexity and multidimensionality of the school challenges

The second part of this compilation begins with a chapter written by Tomás Scherz and Cristián Infante, which looks again at the tension between the identity of the Catholic school and assurance of education quality. The text proposes certain guiding criteria to operationalize the model of the Catholic school, thus shaping a particular *ethos* in the context of the plural society. However, this model and this *ethos* come into tension with the processes of standardization of education quality, because these processes do not allow all of the original dimensions of the confessional education model, centered on integral education, to be included. The assessment of quality thus becomes, once again and as manifested in the first section, a limiting factor for the institutional mission and its pedagogical richness.

Paulo Volante focuses on the processes of educational improvement in Catholic schools. In this chapter he produces a valuable synthesis of background research on the effect of Catholic education and the factors and dimensions associated with good educational outcomes. Based on his experience in charge of postgraduate programs for the training of educational leaders at the Pontificia Universidad Católica

de Chile, the author describes a series of improvement projects developed at Catholic institutions. They address two key dilemmas: process versus product, and the training of individuals versus the achievement of quality and performance standards required by the system. The case studies that the author presents in conclusion confirm the specific dimensions and factors of Catholic schools, as well as the possible resolution of the dilemmas posed on the road to integration.

Religious freedom, in the chapter by Ana María Celis, here becomes another axis of analysis of educational reforms in Chile. The author goes back to the origins of the Chilean educational system and explains how the confessional school is a child of the freedom of religion as defined in the nineteenth century. She then presents a quantitative overview and a canonical characterization of the Catholic school, along with the regulatory developments that govern the relationship of the state itself with society, its convictions and its schools. The author postulates a concept of secularism that exceeds the supposed state neutralism regarding the promotion from the religious dimension of social life. The normative analysis of the Chilean case explains the richness of possible connections between the right to education for all and freedom of education, and shows once more that religion is established as a dimension of cultural life that cannot be delimited like any other. The public educational space, both in state and private schools, must be open to consciousness, that is, to confessional or secular beliefs.

Alexandrine de La Taille presents the case of the integration of the Catholic religious female community called Sociedad del Sagrado Corazón [Sacred Heart Society] in the origins of teacher training in nineteenth century Chile. She outlines the institutional strategies and challenges, and makes a comparison with the training of male preceptors (teachers), showing in this context an effort to provide quality training. Then, among the upheavals of the secular policies of the 1870s and 1880s, the Chilean state dispensed with the nuns, who stopped governing the Escuela Normal de Preceptoras [Normal School of Teachers]. In these still-hybrid times in the origins of Latin American education systems, the possible links between religious education and the development of innovative institutions in light of the public challenges of education can thus be perceived in this case. The present time is also inclined towards mixed and innovative experiences that, in turn, strongly protect freedom of consciousness.

James Morin suggests the proposition of guidelines intended to develop a profile for the Catholic educator that discerns the correct methods in the dialogue to promote comprehensive development. To achieve that, he develops the prophetic, celebratory, community, and transformative functions that the Catholic teacher faces as part of a Church that wants to upgrade the mission of Jesus Christ. Based on a Magisterium view, he analyzes the Catholic School Religious Education Program, identifying its assets and its limitations specifically in relation to new forms of dialogue intended to present the integrity of the Church's message in interaction with contemporary culture. He thus goes back to the guidelines and strategies of the Church magisterium and the fruitful work of Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), focused on the development of different levels of intentional consciousness. The view presented and the guiding criteria that emerge from this original synthesis can become a valuable model to creatively facilitate the training of Catholic and religion teachers. The design of institutions, content, teaching strategies, spaces, and times in which such proposals can be created, still remains to be done.

Rodrigo Fuentealba and Patricia Imbarack also explore the challenges of Catholic teaching in connection with teacher professionalism. The case of Chile is interesting because Catholic religious education in state schools is an exception in Latin America (although it is repeated in certain places). The text presents a diagnosis of the situation of this type of teacher and the tensions arising due to their particular discipline and purpose, and their institutional framework; as well as the different professional profiles in play that are configured based on different positions regarding the view of the role, religion, and social contribution. Therefore, the challenges of professionalizing Catholic religion teachers are revealed, which can be grouped into strengthening collectivity and cooperation, as well as the reinforcement of their identity. This chapter provides an insight into a little-studied topic in these parts, although it is an issue shared with some northern provinces of Argentina. The text amply describes the conditions and tensions of this professional profile and their needs for future development in order to be consistent with their mission.

Rodolfo Nuñez displays a thesis that links the anthropological, epistemological, gnoseological, and cognitive dimensions in the construction of knowledge in the school context. This involves developing strategies to open up the rationalities of students to different forms of knowledge and experience so that

the rationales that are in vogue do not block religious knowledge, particularly in relation to the conceptual content of the faith, or rather the Creed. The chapter calls into question something that is specific to the invisible curriculum of the modern school: the ideological, epistemological, and gnoseological implications of the different scientific and social disciplines, and the restrictive effect they have on the development of religious and theological knowledge based on dogmatism and reductionism.

Jorge Baeza and Carlos Ábrigo coincide with previous chapters by describing the education challenges for faith in the context of current culture and looking at the situation of young Chileans in particular. To do this they describe the problems of the current discomfort in the culture and social perception in the country, and specify the existing tensions: between old and new epochal paradigms; the difficulties of teaching in the faith in the context of a multicultural and multi-confessional reality; the complexity of education in the faith that is also characterized by the communal and popular aspects in a culture marked by the individual and by personal satisfaction; the problems of the rule of a logical rationality versus a rationality of meaning associated with faith; and the requirement of teaching in the faith through testimony rather by discourse. These tensions emphasize the need for new pedagogical guidelines, which the authors address at the conclusion of the text. This chapter thus contributes with tensions and guidelines so that education in the faith is renewed within the framework of a culture of encounter.

Finally, Miguel Arce presents an experience of a Catholic school in a vulnerable context that develops a program of education in virtues that associates the school, parents, and children/students. This experience takes place through various pedagogical and organizational agencies and emphasizes integrated work that improves not only academic outcomes, but also the *ad intra* and *ad extra* school coexistence. These types of innovations in the school-family partnership and in the form of school work, demonstrate that it is possible to achieve positive impacts in various aspects of school and community life in complex contexts without having to wait for generations.

This second part offers a glimpse of the diversity of analytical perspectives and contexts from which the vital horizon of the Chilean Catholic school can be analyzed. However, the main theme of identity continuously emerges throughout the chapters, but always in connection with an inclusive openness of contemporary culture.

The balance

It was mentioned at the beginning that, in addition to the more universal view referring to the necessary dialogue between world and Church, both parts of this work could be read with a second perspective: this consists of assessing the challenges specific to the Chilean context. Indeed, in addition to demonstrating more universal concerns about Catholic culture in dialogue with contemporary culture, the thematic references also provide clear signs of the specific problems of Chilean universities and schools. Issues relating to the state assessment of the quality and validity of freedom of education (both for communities and for the Church, teachers, families, and students), externalize the paradoxical doubts that neoliberal-style educational policies produce in terms of the limitation of freedom of identity, adding to the more obvious problems related to educational justice (which leads to an issue that cannot be addressed here: the neostatist and neo-homogenist nature of educational neoliberalism).

On the other hand, the Chilean case also allows identification of the effects of regulatory policies on teacher training and activity, and on the curriculum regarding the forms of insertion of the catholic school in every local community. In this sense, due to the original aspects of Chilean education policy in the concert of Latin American nations, reading this compilation becomes essential to understanding how state policies and civil society culture become linked and outline the scenario of possibilities of the Catholic school and how it creatively interprets challenges and designs strategies.

By way of a final summary, for all these reasons and many more that are difficult to include in a brief synthesis, this compilation stands alongside those that are considered to be obligatory references to learn about Catholic education in Chile and in the region. It will be difficult for a field researcher to avoid referring to its contents if they aim to support their work with consistent background information. Because of its variety of perspectives, the book joins the ranks of the *International Handbook of Catholic Education* (2007), compiled by two pioneers in this field, Gerald Grace and Joseph O'Keefe. At the same

time, it could be a contribution to the various English language academic journals, such as *International Studies in Catholic Education*, and we hope that research is subsequently undertaken in Spanish on Catholic education in the region. This is possibly the most pressing challenge that remains: the work which is commented upon herein outlines a statement of position and reflection. It addresses certain specific studies that enhance the work. Given the magnitude of Catholic education in Chile and in Latin America as a whole, it therefore remains to conduct research of a varied nature with different approaches, methods, and topics to understand the peculiarities and challenges of Catholic education in the diversity of contexts in which it is situated.

This academic task will be an incentive to resolve a second debt looming over the entire work: a new model of Catholic education is required that creates bridges between the mission and the theory about the identity of institutions and contemporary culture. If this does not take place, then confusion will remain and there will be reiteration of general ideas and disjointed critical diagnosis. The Gospel and the educational reality require the development of new approaches and cultural, institutional, and pedagogical models that display a comprehensive Catholic education with originality and effectiveness in all social sectors, and which is all-inclusive and simultaneously critical, evangelical, and excellent at the same time.

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