

PASSION, DESIRE AND KINGDOM

A journey with Marie Eugénie on pedagogy of desire

-I-

Pedagogy of desire according to the texts of 2006

I am a sister from the Province of France and I have been a teacher for 15 years. Two years ago, I was called to be responsible for the formation of the teachers in all the schools of Assumption in France. It was a challenge for me: I had to “formalize” all which, before, was only intuitions and personal competences. I had to go deep and see what the center of Assumption pedagogy was.

During this time, the congregation was working on the texts given by the general chapter of 2006. In these texts, there was a reflection about education in Assumption.

- 1- First of all, this text was reminding what the central passion of an educator in Assumption should be : *“We are not well enough established for me to dare to express our aim as I understand it, in a contemplative life enlightened by religious studies and source of an active life of faith, of zeal, of liberty of spirit (...)I believe that we are called to **honour the mystery of the Incarnation** and the sacred person of Jesus Christ, also the adherence of the Blessed Virgin to Jesus Christ: it is the same for our views on education. »*, wrote Marie Eugénie to Father d’Alzon. Here was the passion : to honour the mystery of the Incarnation.

- 2- In the same text, it was clear that « *In the Assumption, our passion for education is rooted in **God’s project of love and passion** for his creation :*
 - *A passion for humanity, created in his image, a passion revealed in the Incarnation of the Word, who has walked the path with us.*
 - *A passion to give to humanity the fullness of life: the flourishing of each, communion between persons and union with Him. »*

- 3- The urgency was underlined in these texts: a lot of people are suffering in the world. God's project is justice and charity, sharing and fullness of life. He has the right for his project to be respected and we are responsible for this project, today, where we are, with whom we are.
- 4- Finally the text gave some characteristics of Assumption pedagogy. One characteristic called my attention: "*the pedagogy of desire*".

« Assumption pedagogy aims at the formation of habits, rather than the decision to do such and such an isolated act. It is a continual process of conversion to the Gospel. It is question of a style of life, a way of seeing, of reflecting, of acting, made up of curiosity, respect and humility, a habit of reflecting and asking questions, and of reflecting on situations, in a wide context. "Give them convictions". It is a pedagogy which aims at a formation starting from within, which gives reasons for living and acting. »

The educators are in front of a great challenge:

- *To help the students in order that they can find "a way of seeing, of reflecting, of acting"
- *To "give them convictions"
- *To use a pedagogy which gives them reasons for living and acting

The link between passion, desire and kingdom was here: **our passion for Christ (and for the mystery of the Incarnation) had to transform our desire so that we can act to make truth the project of God on the world, the Kingdom.**

Even so, it was, for me, like a utopia, an unrealistic vision. Why? Perhaps because I was experiencing in my own life the contrast between my desire and God's desire, the difficulty to know exactly what both of them were. Perhaps also because I had crossed the path of many students who couldn't find their own desire, or, having a desire, couldn't realize it because of many factors... For me, as a teacher and as a formator of teachers, this **pedagogy of desire** was a challenge: Who was the owner of this desire? The Lord? Me? Where was its source? How could I make of this desire a way of life, of seeing, of thinking?

I had one desire: the desire to do a research, in the university, about education and I decided to search and to write around this topic on the **pedagogy of desire**.

-II-

What is desire according to anthropological sciences?

1- Desire and passion, rhythm, dynamism

« The desire is linked to humanity. It is what, in us, has something to see with the violence of the passion and its mysterious source » says Denis Vasse, a French Jesuit, priest and psychoanalyst.

« *Desire is like the heart and the colour of the man, of the woman, it is beating the rhythm of his life...* » He says also: « *Passion rises in desire... Desire is the spirit which helps the man to assume his life...* »

2- Desire and personal story

Our deep desire is affected, formed by our own story. What our infancy was made our desire... What our first relationships were made our desire... We have to respect who we are. To listen to our desire is a way to respect God's presence in us. Because he created us, with a heart, a mind, a spirit, with will, thoughts and desires... Our desire is part of our identity and God wants for us fullness of life. You remember? Marie Eugénie used to speak of the special gift of each person, particular and unique gift of the grace in her. Our desire can be our gift and a gift for God.

3- We never enclose our desire definitively in some words or some definition

Our desire is the deeper expression of what is in our heart and for that, it is really difficult to say it, to use human words to define it. We must always look for a better expression, a fuller definition knowing that we won't be able to reach a complete definition. Desire has something to see with mystery, with human limit, impossible to capture... In our desire, there is always a part of surprise, of a gift from another, from an Other, from God.

4- Desire emerges from differences and emptiness

We must recognize that our desires are different from the desires of our brothers and sisters. I show my personal ID when I dare to express my desire and when I assume the difference. And above all, I find my desire and let it grow when I accept emptiness, silence, distance. Desire proceeds from lack, from gap. It arises from the emptiness of ourselves. Desire needs space to exist and to show its face.

5- Desire, meaning and project

Desire (which is in the present) is always linked to a meaning (which is in the past, as a story and a source) and to a project (which is a future plan).

The meaning: why should I do that? What is the source of my identity? Why this and not that? It is like the reason given to justify our actions, the motivation of our actions.

The desire: what am I aiming for? What is moving me? What do I want to reach? What am I missing and what do I want to find at the end of the journey? What makes me love and breathe? When a person assumes his/her desire, he/she assumes his/her life, the responsibility of his/her life.

The project: there is no desire without a project. If you desire and that desire doesn't transform your actions, your programs, you didn't find yet your real and deep desire! If the desire motivates/inspires/moves us, it must act on us and become truth through our actions.

Conclusion:

Thus to watch for our desire is always a way to take a risk... We are confronted with our identity, with our limit, with our inconsistency. To accept the desire in us is to accept not to be the only owner of

ourselves, because desire comes from faraway. It is a gift for us. To receive it, we have to give it space, to empty ourselves, to widen and to expand. Why? Because the desire makes us look to what we have not, in the present moment, to go ahead to find it, and to root ourselves in interiority. If we accept it, we cannot act like before. Desire transforms what we are doing.

-III-

What about the desire according to Marie-Eugénie?

We have considered **the desire** according to the characteristics of anthropology. Every human being carries his own desire. What about the desire according to Marie Eugénie? Does she speak about it? To say the truth, it is a word that she employs so many times! A hard work to study what she is saying about it! In the chapters that she gave to the sisters between 1845 and 1878 (I shall not go after), she uses... 319 times the word “desire” or words of the same family!

1- Definition of desire

For MME, God inspires the desire in everybody. The desire attracts with strength and has an effect on us. Fears, joys and pains also have this power. For her, to desire is not enough: we must act according to our desire ! It’s good to feel fervour and enthusiasm but that’s not enough. God won’t judge us on what we have felt but on what we have done.

10 décembre 1871

« Je sais que vous êtes toutes dans les meilleures dispositions, plusieurs même d’entre vous désirent offrir, donner leur vie pour Dieu. C’est très bien de sentir cet élan, d’avoir cette ardeur de coeur pour le service de Notre-Seigneur. Mais ce n’est pas assez et probablement Notre-Seigneur ne nous jugera pas sur ce que nous aurons éprouvé, mais sur ce que nous aurons fait. »

According to her, the formation of our desire is a personal work, in partnership with God. WE must form in ourselves the “good desires”. To form the desire in us and let it go to the light is an effort, an attention, **an interior work**.

2- What should we desire?

So many things, or better, big things... but at the end, it is always **to desire God**.

MME says that we have to desire God, his love, goodness for our brothers and sisters, justice, charity.

Many times, she underlines the spiritual desire: to receive the Lord in our soul like in his home, to have God’s thoughts about anything, to desire spiritual milk (referred to Isaiah), to see God and follow him, to desire Heaven, to desire the Gospel... At the end, to desire what God desires.

She often speaks about the desire of perfection or holiness. In that sense, she encourages the sisters not to desire honour and power but humility and poverty, hidden life. We can see the link between the desire of God and our way of being, of acting.

Mary Magdalene, in the garden of the resurrection, is for her a model of desire.

3- The Desire and the desires

She makes a difference between the “unique desire” and the “vain desires”. The unique desire, the great desire, is the most important. It must guide us and empower us, energize and enable us. The many vain desires, as she calls them, are, for example, to build a big house, to succeed in our life, to be healed when we are sick or to be loved, to be well known for what we are doing. We desire to be considered and to be rich. The pleasure, the power, the authority and all those are unreasonable desires.

In fact, MME shows the difference between the desire which unifies our life and enlarges our hearts, expands us: a desire centered in God, which looks to highest purpose... and the various desires, self-centered desires, which withdraw us into ourselves and shrink us. To build our like with God, she invites us not to lose our strengths fighting against the vain desires but to look to the Lord of our life, with all our energy.

23 février 1845

« Or de quoi notre âme est-elle émue, qu'est-ce qui l'attire si violemment à certaines choses et l'éloigne si fortement d'autres si ce n'est la crainte, le désir, la joie ou la douleur ? Usage du désir. Ne désirer que Dieu, son amour, le bien du prochain et l'accomplissement de la justice. Je trouve plusieurs désirs de Notre-Seigneur dans l'Évangile (...) Pour nous, notre vie s'use en désirs vains, les plus fervents désirent avec ardeur avoir terminé ce travail, avoir une maison arrangée et commode, réussir en ceci, guérir d'une maladie, sortir d'un état pénible. Nous ne gardons pas pour Dieu cette puissance du désir qui l'attire si invinciblement puisqu'il écoute les désirs du cœur et que « le reste de nos pensées lui est une fête », qu'il envoie l'ange à Daniel parce qu'il est « un homme de désirs (Daniel 9, 23). »

We must be in a continuous discernment, to choose the Desire against the desires. Here is the link between the desire and the passion: **Marie Eugénie invites us to be centered, at any moment of our life, in the Lord.**

We must put God in our life because without him there is no more desire:

9 octobre 1870

« Et dans le monde, voyez comme Dieu est méconnu ! C'est au point que parler aux gens du monde du Ciel, de cette présence de Dieu sans fin, de Dieu aimé, adoré, glorifié en nous, Dieu enfin *tout* et nous abîmés, anéantis devant sa face, à peine s'ils vous comprendront. Dieu est tellement mis de côté qu'il n'existe en eux aucun désir. »

4- How to journey with God ?

We have to take care of our interior life. What does it mean?

*We have to look at Him, to root our own life in His Gospel, and to take the time to look for Christ's desire. And we can find it in the Gospel! We can watch the world and ask: how would God see this world? What is his project for the world?

*We have also to listen to our own desire, look for it and to dare to express it. Without fear because God knows that we need time, that we have complicated stories and that we have to purify our heart. Just listen to what is happening, now, in myself and why...

*Then we will be able to confront our desire and God's desire and see if our desire is desire for the Kingdom. Perhaps let God change your desire, detach you of the vain desires...

*Finally we can focus ourselves on **the big desire** that God puts in us. Then we can live for this passion and by this passion.

Conclusion:

23 février 1845

« 'Toute la beauté de la fille du Roi est à l'intérieur.' Que je ne vois pas le cœur mais que Jésus-Christ n'habite que là et que **c'est mon devoir d'aider leur désir** de l'y attirer en leur apprenant de mon mieux ce qu'il faut faire pour cela. »

Marie Eugenie placed a big importance to this desire. She understood her own mission like being at the service of her sisters' desire. She wanted to "help their desire, to teach them what they had to do to make their desire alive". We can find many links between the two parts of my talk: the anthropological vision and Marie Eugenie's vision. She was rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation and her spiritual life is ruled by common sense and realism. Certainly, like all the men and women, she desired happiness. And it's a good desire. She reminds us that God doesn't want us to be sad and unhappy. That's why, she says, if you feel that you have a desire to present to God, He will listen to you.

-IV-

Pedagogy of desire and teaching

1- During the interviews for the research, what did the students say about their desires?

I did my research in France, and it is interesting to root my reflections on real life! That's why I will share some of the answers that the learners gave during the interviews. First of all, I have to underline that they were happy after the discussion with me. Most of them told their teacher that they found a moment to reflect and to stop in this dialogue.

a- A difficulty to say the desire

To underline the complex definition of the desire, Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, says: “Human being doesn’t ask for what he desires, he doesn’t desire what he wants and he doesn’t want what he desires”! When we listen to Lacan, we can understand that the young people feel difficult to share about their desire! During the discussion they didn’t know how to say their desire. Their first reaction was: “oh... what about my desire? It is the first time that someone asks me for my desire...”

b- A desire of relationship

But they always finished expressing something which is deep and authentic: they mixed “desire”, “meaning” and “project”. Most of their desires were directed to the others: friendship, relationship, sharing. Many of them wanted to succeed in life and have a good job. They linked their desire with the job they wanted to find. But the principal desire or meaning for them was to help others, to build a solid family and to live in harmonious relationship with their parents and friends.

c- School and desire

They expressed that school is not always the place where they can express their desire because of the pressure exerted by the examinations, the necessity to succeed, and also because of the lack of time, because of the complex relationship with the teachers who don’t always know them very well. They dream of free time, not to do whatever they want but to express themselves and to create by themselves. They like experiences and learning. And they would like to have time to explore by themselves and to attain their identity, their personality. In general, they feel alone when they have to go deep inside and they cannot express their desire because they are not trained to do it.

In that sense, they are waiting for teachers who listen to them, who go with them on the path of learning, to be beside them, for teachers who can offer them perspectives and meanings, and help them to reach a better knowledge of themselves. Teachers are here to sustain, to motivate, to encourage, to orient, to explain, to go ahead with them. Also they need someone when they have the opportunity to stand far from the family, the desire of the family.

The learners come and go between their family, the school and their friends. To help them, the teachers have to take time and to provide free meetings in order that they can know better their students, and each student in particular. The learners need a close relationship, and they dream of teachers who don’t cut their wings when they try to give the best, even if they make mistakes.

2- What is the challenge for the teacher?

a- Pedagogy of desire and detachment

When he stands in front of the desire of his student, the teacher must accept a change of perspective. As a teacher, he could think that he is the “master of the knowledge”, because he knows what the learner doesn’t know. Here could be the place of his power. But he cannot command the desire of the student, he cannot say it and enclose it. The teacher has to give up knowing in this area of the desire. The learner can exist and have desire without his teacher! The desire comes from far away! The learner cannot be only the one who receives and returns, reproduces the learning exactly

like it has been given. He has to express his originality, his unique grace, his creativity and the teacher has to live a sort of mourning. Because he loses forever what he has given to the student. He makes the experience of the detachment: “Your desire is not my desire, says the student, and your path is not always my path...”

b- Pedagogy of desire and surprise

The pedagogy of desire doesn't give a choice: so that the teacher must be open to the surprise. He must be able to catch the desire of the student when it appears and to lead it further, to give it space. Capacity of marvelling and being surprised is one of the most important capacities for a teacher. But also his own capacity to surprise and amaze the learner, to question him... in order that the learner can go deep. The teacher is always a tightrope walker: he is walking on the top between his own desire (that he must express and show in order to motivate the student) and the desire of the student which must find place to expand itself.

c- Pedagogy of desire and empty spaces

The teacher, because he is a teacher, often fills the empty spaces with his speeches! In the pedagogy of desire, the teacher should discern and decide when he has to speak and when he has to keep silent. Because his silence is as important as his words when it is question of desire...

Or when a student cannot give quickly the answer, most of the time, he has no time to look for it! And just see: how many times does a teacher say to the students: “Today, what do you want to do?” To give them “free time”, not to do anything or bad things, but just to show to the students that they can have good desires, and to teach them how to discern between many desires.

To help the learner go deep inside, the pedagogy of desire needs silence, and space for interior life.

Thus, for the intellectual knowledge as well as for the spiritual life, the pedagogy of desire is the pedagogy of empty spaces offered to the learner and it is a pedagogy of interiority. When we are tempted to fill with words and acts what is empty, when we are tempted to fill the schedules, when we are tempted to give the answer to the questions, the pedagogy of desire says: “Wait! Feel the lack, the gap... Go deeper... “

These empty spaces have something to do with liberty and creativity. If they don't exist, the liberty and the creativity of the learner cannot succeed. He cannot discover himself if he cannot dare to create by himself, if he has no space to do it. And remember fear and pain are fighting against joy and desire. As a teacher, how can we give the opportunity to our student to try new experiences, to go deep inside, to express their originality, without fear...?

d- Pedagogy of desire and passion of the teacher

During this time, the teacher is a model for the learner. He is the first beneficiary of such pedagogy since God himself employs it with us, with everyone. Desire and passion of the teacher is a model for the student. The work of the teacher is always to give testimony that we are made to desire, and to desire the best and to desire God. His way of teaching, of speaking, of acting must

reveal that to the student and lead him to highest desires, as an example, without burdening him with a desire which is not his desire. He can also give other examples to the learners, always to encourage them to desire what is good and what is deep, always to recognize in them the roots of the unique desire that God gave to them.

Conclusion

The teacher who implements the pedagogy of desire is creating spaces:

- *Space of time*
- *Human space and space of listening*
- *Space of creativity*
- *Interior space to be with oneself, with God and to review the experience of life and learning*
- *Space for the surprise*
- *Space for the risk*

This pedagogy of desire is rooted on the mystery of the Incarnation: it depends on the way of looking to the learner, to the person. It depends on the capacity to consider the whole person, in all her dimensions... Given that the desire doesn't speak only by words but also by acts and skills, the challenge is not to force the student to express his desire but to give him space in order that he can implement all what is in his hands to lead his humanity to fullness and happiness.

Conclusion

God uses with us this pedagogy of desire. And if we accept, there will be some effects in our life, as a human being and as a teacher:

*We will have to accept not to be the masters of our life, because the desire comes from deep within and faraway...

*We will have to assume the surprise because the desire which focuses our life and our heart, empowering us, will come when we are not waiting for it.

*We need empty spaces in our life and interior life... solitude and silence...

*Desire cannot be without risk and creativity. Will we assume this risk?

The pedagogy of desire is a pedagogy of empty space: an empty space which means even putting space in my schedule, a space to listen (to me and to God), a space to create and to act (with all the parts of our being involved), an interior space to review and to pray, a space to be surprised and to risk my life. If I receive this pedagogy from God who uses it with me, I will use it in my relationships and in my way of teaching: it will my part of responsibility for God's project, in the present moment and I will serve humanity.