

The educational charism Assumption: a creative dynamism between the past, today and tomorrow

Introduction

Reflecting on our **educational Assumption identity**, which we recognize in the rich expression "**transformative education Assumption**" and the way it inspires us to find responses to the challenges of today, I became convinced that Marie Eugénie, Thérèse Emmanuel and our first sisters, by their receptive and creative listening, gave birth to something new, a new note, `word`, concerning person, society and education.

I am convinced that at the heart of our charism there is a dynamic principle, a creative force that leads us to do the same: recreate, reinvent Transformative Education for today. It is by having the same experience that we already do this in the different contexts where we are present.

Today our world seems tired, tired, thirsty for a new word. So, faithful to this charism we have received, we are called to recreate this gift, to offer a *new music*, with the same inspirational spark that was present at our foundation, with the first religious of the Assumption.

I was able to notice seven notes (like the 7 basic notes of music) that were fundamental to the birth and development of our charism (spirituality and mission).

These elements are not chronological but, like the notes of a music, mingle to offer us a melody. For this, the sisters have brought into play their personal and community treasures, which have been combined with great patience sustained through the years. They have thus woven, little by little, the fabric of our charism.

Levels of listening

Before addressing these elements, I would like to stop on the verb `to listen` as a fundamental attitude of our first sisters.

Régine du Charlat thinks, with the question "For you, who am I? Jesus invites Peter and the disciples to give a word of faith, a personal response, born of their experience of companionship with Him.

Too often today, it seems to me, the experience of faith does not create its own `word`. Too often Christians express their faith in an abstract language that is not theirs but that of the liturgy or theological tradition ... not a word created but repeated.

If we borrow ready-made formulas we will run less risk of deceiving ourselves, but we will also run the risk of not inhabiting our `word`, of remaining estranged from our `word`.

Faced with the immense cultural breaks and changes that are affecting our time, religious indifference and atheism, there is a great challenge: to express a new echo of the Gospel in its fundamental tonality of life, salvation, resurrection from death and misfortune, an audible word of faith: capable of being valued, believed in...

This requires a work of elaboration that integrates these mutations in the light of the Gospel.

A long and patient work, paying attention to the Word (availability, presence, to be able to see and hear, and formulate that speech which arises from attention) but also sympathy for our times (to love one's time): research, discernment, conversion.

The true 'word' is a birth ... it is not surprising that it needs gestation.

This means that there is something which belongs to us uniquely, which no one can realize in our place: that we need to recognize for ourselves as the echo of the Gospel in us. Dogmas do not suffice, neither theology nor the word of the most learned and most gifted. ...this proves that the Word of God in us is not a dead letter but a source of life.

This can only find its source in a listening discipleship: we know that the meaning and the truth of all things come from a source further and greater than ourselves... Listening has the same root as obeying: the obedience of faith.

The word of faith is an echo of the Word of God, the echo is like a key in a music score. The root of the word catechesis is echo: "to make resound, to make resonate". This listening has three levels:

- The listening to the Word of God and in the Tradition (Church and Assumption)
- The listening to the world we inhabit in all its complexity...
- Listening to the resonance of the Word of God, or in our language, "re-reading"

The disciple is "echoed" from the Word received not as a "repetition", but by making the life of each one an interpretation and creation. Then, by our consent, it gives rise to unique harmonics, not yet perceived. God confides in us, entrusts us with his Word today.

We recognize this triple listening in Marie Eugenie and our first sisters. They have created the Assumption charism as a new music, in harmony with its time: No one, more than us, was founded in view of this society of the future....

Our spirituality, our lifestyle and education were the fruit of this triple listening, of this experience, of this profound internal and communal work, which gave rise to the Assumption as a new harmonic in the Church and in the world.

Almost 50 years after its origins Marie Eugénie reflected again how no one could have foreseen what this work would be, how God had done something so great from such small beginnings, how it had been possible thanks to the commitment of each sister: her fidelity, faith, obedience, her creativity bringing her own talents to the construction of the Assumption.




So today, after 178 years, we are called to continue this work, to reinvent the educational charism ... *"the last word of love and truth is never said"*, writes Marie Eugénie, in amazement.

I do not mean to invent another charism or to found another Assumption. Simply, I believe that the experience they have made, challenges us to do the same: do not "repeat" the

word of faith or their ready-made formulas, but, as the RV says, have the same spiritual experience, which will then make the Assumption live today and tomorrow, in a creative dynamism, faithful to the spark of inspiration and consonant with our time ...

We acknowledge that we have received a gift. It is destined to become flesh within us and we become word and gesture of the Word of God and of the charism; in order as disciples, to make known the source and not to express ourselves.

As in art, the word of faith welcomes, creates, interprets ... makes us vibrate, like a musical instrument, to sing, very modestly but very freely, our own song.

-  How do I become a disciple, by this triple listening?
-  What word has "taken flesh", made itself "echo" / conviction and emerged as "proper word" in me?
-  What means help me to make / re-read the word and thus, recreate the charism?

"Intelligence discovers every day something new to admire, in the heart, something new to contemplate. The last word of love and truth is never said ... "(MME)

The 7 "striking elements" or "notes" that produced Assumption music

- Rooted in reality

"... I could understand and feel – speaking as a Christian - the profound misfortune of the society to which I belonged ..."

"I was brought up in an unbelieving family that belonged to the liberal opposition to the Restoration. My mother, however, wished to see me a Christian, and her great and energetic character led her to imprint upon my education a character of renunciation which always seemed to me more Christian than many religious educations "

"Up to this day, the education of girls in the family, in the houses of education, in the convents themselves, have been nothing but the theory of selfishness in action. Educational progress has been in the vanity of success, praise and pleasure in the rewards ..."

"... instruction, ordinarily superficial, and therefore of no use to their children, and without connection with their faith.... They have false ideas of their dignity and with their endless piety, they are ignorant of the nature of their religion, their truths, their history, and what would make them understand the Christian social spirit. "

"... the members of this Church I did not know them ... I dreamed of finding in them apostles, I found only men ..."

"... I believe that the will of God is a social situation in which no one suffers any other misfortune than the disasters of nature, that is to say, where Christian principles work in each one so that they no longer become the oppressor of others ..."

- Re-reading

"I felt overwhelmed under the weight of immense graces ..."

- Intuition

"I believed that the will of God consists in a social state in which no one has to suffer the oppression of others ..."

- Spiritual and mystical experience (Prayer, prayer, liturgy)

"He is the new Man and wants to make us new people ..."

- Meetings, relationship, friendship...

"She thinks like me that Jesus Christ is our bond (link)..."





- Study

"To radiate light we must be filled with light ... our freedom is when we are immersed in the light and in the good"

- Creative practice

"... I felt urged to contribute my grain of sand to the building, the drop of blood of my sacrifice in combat..."

"...our position was not to issue doctrines, but to do them..."

-  Share how you live some of these elements (or others that you would add), personally, and in your mission
-  What aspect of the Assumption Educational Charism (a word of MME, TR or other documents) is dynamic for you, in your work, and how we live it...?
-  What aspects of our context do we recognize as a challenge?
-  How am I /we, creating and giving birth to our "own word", the new melody for today...?

Transformative education in the Assumption, with its five characteristic marks, `axes`

The Assumption pedagogy is a very rich reality, with its own characteristics. Its objective is to transform the person and so transform society.

I want to propose five characteristic marks, `axes`:

1. A philosophy of life that inspires action: "A guiding philosophy, a passion that encourages a balanced character ...

It is about offering a philosophy (convictions), of awakening a passion, of forming character. It is to impress on all learning a broad, deep intention, a purpose: to discover the great issues of the world, the great causes of humanity, opening up to a broad vision, awakening passion and commitment

"Assumption education inculcates convictions which have proper roots, so that, sooner or later, they bear fruit."

"The intelligence must be formed in such a way that it animates and gives direction to the will." Affectivity is an energy which needs to be directed and which should be used: "at the time of awakening feelings (in pupils) one should not wish to repress them but give direction to them."

The JPIC priority is an expression of the "philosophy and passion" that we want to promote: it is the commitment to a more just, more peaceful, more human world, respectful of the environment. As a Congregation, we express this conviction in "**Towards an eco-Assumption**", a collaborative document that collects the richness lived by the Assumption, from this perspective, in the four Continents.

2. A pedagogy of interiority

"Assumption pedagogy aims at the formation of habits, rather than the decision to do such and such as an isolated act. It is a continual process of conversion to the Gospel. It is the 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". (2006 Doc pre capitular Transformative Education)

This attitude invites us to go beyond pious practices: to cultivate the spiritual life, to allow God to configure us with Jesus, to find our own word of faith, and thus continue to be good news in our contexts.

3. The vocational accompaniment of each one

As educators, we aim to be an attentive presence offering a personalized or group accompaniment as an essential way to support young people in their vocational growth:

The education proposed by Marie Eugenie is one that aims at the transformation of the whole human person. She favours a widening freedom which allows each individual to develop "in the particular way that is the will of God for them" and allows them to discover their vocation in order to commit themselves to the transformation of society. (TR)

"Each one has a mission on earth."

"Hidden, even in the worst natures, there is always something good. That is what we believe in, what we persevere in seeking out, and if we do not find it, we blame the idea of our own excellence which is blinding us."

4. The pedagogy of proximity

"These is a great freedom of spirit in the Assumption. The essential freedom for each person is to have the capacity to actualize his or her potential; it is the possibility of constructing one's own destiny. That means it is my responsibility to become what I am (meant to be) and this freedom gives me the capacity to be myself, to achieve my identity. The freedom of spirit that we experience in the Assumption is based on a climate that encourages and even pushes people to be themselves, to build themselves, without constraints or useless rules which can break a person's élan". (TR)




"Do you know what it is that is the most important thing, the most difficult, acquired neither by study nor intelligence...? It is a perfect unity in our way of treating the pupils." (TR)

5. Pedagogy of social commitment

To form the social conscience of the young women, Marie Eugenie and the first sisters privileged a very specific tool that they had at their disposal: the visit to the poor. They made this educational strategy an important space for young women to engage their talents and take responsibility for small projects:

"We see the importance of enabling young people to be capable of thinking, of drawing up, bringing to completion their personal or community (collective) projects so that they become responsible (for themselves and for others). This way of proceeding encourages the spirit of initiative in the young people and challenges us, their educators, to seek how to help bring them to fruition." (Doc pre-capitular Transformative Education 2006)

There are many spaces which allow young people to commit themselves in a timely or prolonged manner. The rereading of important experiences, developed talents, joys and difficulties, deep desires that have been awakened ... these are some of the many elements that contribute to a vocational pedagogy, as we evoked before.

-  How do we express the essentials of the Assumption educational charism in our context?
-  Which of these axes is a force in our work and how we live it?
-  What do we feel called to cultivate more, how can we do it?

The Assumption Educational Charism today: to live in communion and let life flow

In 1998, an International Educational Congress allowed us to share experiences, ways of understanding Assumption Pedagogy, etc. This Congress gave us the Reference Text, which is a "summary" of our Assumption Education.

The **2006 GENERAL CHAPTER** had the title: *"Let us receive again our mission of education ... A Philosophy, a passion, a hope", calling us to "share more our mission with our lay collaborators and guide them boldly towards transformation"* The pre-capitular text and the record of this Chapter redefine for the first time our educational charism as "




TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION IN THE ASSUMPTION" ...this focus is also present in the other parts of the General Chapter.

In **2010 the Congregation created an International Commission of Education**, in 2013 it became a **Secretariat**. Its mission has been "to make known and circulate the educational life of the Assumption". This body has animated sessions, it has published more than 100 experiences, available at: <http://www.assumpta.org/-Experiences> and has made available to the sisters a **Data Bank** with Assumption tools that the different Provinces have wanted share and that the Secretariat itself has elaborated.

All of them highlight the different aspects of our pedagogy, with different accents depending on the contexts and situations.

We can reread in them the creative and original way that the educational and transforming Assumption Charism is alive and continues to be recreated today, with all the dynamism of our founders.

An international meeting in 2018 will bring together different actors in the world of the Assumption; it will continue discovering transformative education in the Assumption which continues to be recreated; it is **rooted** in our origins, **passionate** about recreating a new word in each place, and boldly opens paths of **hope** for the future.

-  Reread the reflections of each part ...
-  How do those axes, or accents, help us to define the way we are reinventing the Assumption's transformative education where we are?
-  What activities, methodologies, etc. seem to reflect our own way of living the charism, which is our own particular contribution, as Assumption, to the world ...?

Sister Ana Senties ra
Secretary of Assumption Education
Compiègne 2017