

Domingo Lázaro and Educators

Pope Francis says, speaking of the saints: " *There are some testimonies that may prove helpful and inspiring, but that we are not meant to copy, for that could even lead us astray from the one specific path that the Lord has in mind for us.* " (*Gaudete et exsultate* 11).

Though we must discern our own calling, there are many who may stimulate and motivate us. This is much easier when we find the witness of holiness in a person with whom we have something in common. With this article, we want to offer to all Marianist educators the encouragement that comes to us from Domingo Lázaro, a great educator who was recently declared venerable by the Church. He was a "hands-on" educator, teacher and school principal. However, he was also an intellectual who reflected on education in dialogue with the cultural currents of his time. In addition, he was also a great promoter of an appropriate institutional and collective positioning of Catholic education in society.

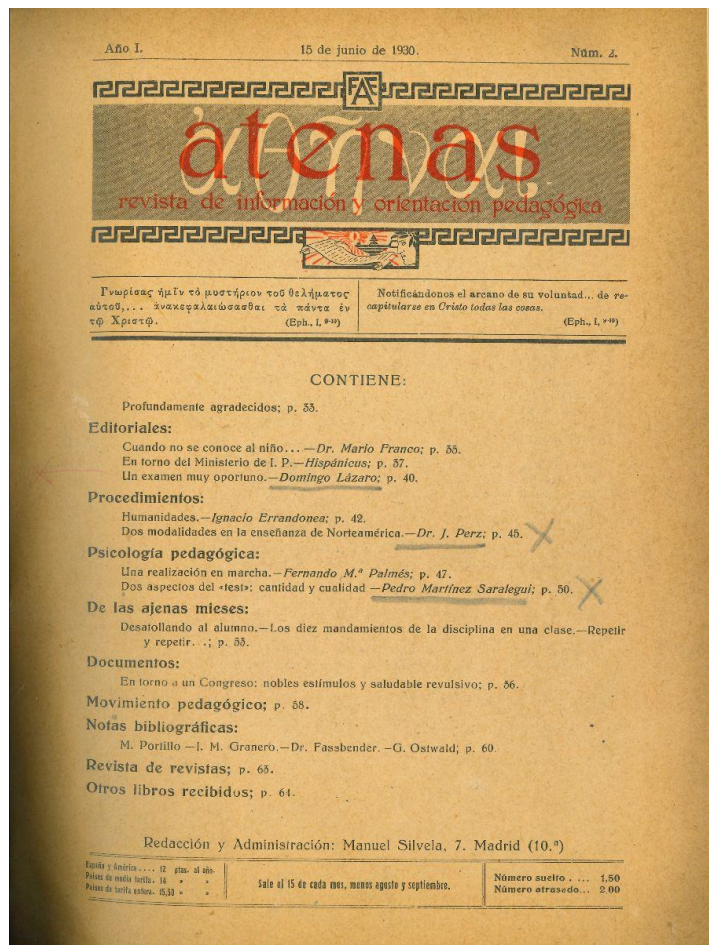


Domingo was born in San Adrián de Juarros, a small town in the province of Burgos (Spain), in 1877. He professed his first vows in the Society of Mary in 1893 and was ordained a priest in 1906. For ten years (1906-1916), he was a teacher and director of the Colegio Santa María in San Sebastián. In 1916, he was appointed Provincial Superior of the Province of Spain, the first Spaniard to occupy this position, which he held until 1924. That year he became a teacher and director of the school Ntra. Sra. del Pilar in Madrid.

He was one of the main promoters of the foundation of the Federación de Amigos de la Enseñanza (FAE), which came into existence in 1930, bringing together the Spanish Catholic Schools of the time. He wrote numerous articles on education in the magazine *Atenas*, the official publication of this association. He died in Madrid on February 22, 1935. Pope Francis recognized the heroicity of his virtues and the Congregation for the Cause of Saints declared him venerable by the decree of May 13, 2019. **In what way does Domingo Lázaro encourage us as educators today?** We present here some paragraphs written by him as a small sample of his thinking. Among many other things, this Marianist educator invites us to:

- **An attitude of dialogue and sincere search for truth**, even in the midst of strong cultural confrontations. He said in a conference given at the Catholic Circle of San Sebastian in 1909: *"I have noticed, in many cases, how difficult it is for us to understand one another, and it is not infrequent that we understand the opposite, perhaps in the best good faith, of what the other person is saying... We form a mistaken concept, they of us and we of them. Do not think that evil is always outside of us, we also have it in us... We must know how to explain the truth to the adversary and know how to channel the good qualities that he has, qualities that I am not able to deny"*
- **To live the task of educator as a great mission:** *"Teaching and education constitute a profession. If I am a Christian... it is a sublime mission, as collaborators of God in one of the most exalted missions... The subject of education is the child, the adolescent and the young person, highly respectable beings because they carry in themselves a mysterious potential... They are a person with all attributes and rights... My authority over them can never be arbitrary or tyrannical. Am I convinced that intellectual education does not consist in filling brains with other people's thoughts, but rather in forming the intelligence, teaching how to think...? Do I not miss many opportunities to raise my students to the clearer vision of the ideal? ... Are my efforts aimed at forming Christ in the souls of my dear students?"* (Atenas, June 1930)

• **An integral education that includes the depth of transcendence:** *"The real man carries other hidden, but very vivid realities. Realities are, in fact, undeniable, the proposals and needs that impel man and orient him towards a beyond, and authoritatively claim the existence of an absolute that attracts him."* (Atenas, June 1932)



- **Educate by recognizing and stimulating the positive.** He wrote the following in a 1919 letter to a Marianist religious: *"My son, the least possible use of prohibitions... Let us try to be positive... Know how to discover in a person a good trait, a germ of goodness... and help this mustard seed to germinate, to develop... Let us discover, stimulate, support what is good, and God, who is good and wants good, will support our action."*
- **Pay attention to the uniqueness of each person:** *"My class is not a herd, nor are my students anonymous numbers. All of them have their individual personalities, their good qualities and defects, their unique possibilities and their own providential destinies. Therefore, during this course, I have to discover, study and respect the personality of each one... All this with a view to achieving the greatest good for each of my students and the greatest possible performance in my delicate mission"* (Atenas, October 1930)
- **To develop a pedagogy that renews itself sensibly:** *"In pedagogy, as in everything else, we Catholics must avoid two equally reprehensible attitudes: on the one hand that of the unconscious person who thoughtlessly and recklessly throw themselves into everything new, embrace it and, losing themselves, compromise the cause they unduly represent. On the other hand*

there is the opposite attitude of those who are shy, who bow down at the slightest hint of novelty... and take refuge, shocked and aloof, in what they call "tradition". Neither inconsiderate recklessness, nor ridiculous foolishness... Our attitude as Catholics must be a noble, sincere, serene and courageous attitude." (Atenas, April 1934)

- **Practice a educational approach that favors the student's importance.** In one of his letters, this time from 1918, we can read: *"The essential thing is not to fill the head, but to form it... It is easier to swallow thoughts than to think: to stuff brains than to help them in the work of assimilation. It costs less to prepare a class with a view to erudition, than with a view to training; easier to inject knowledge than to make them acquire it... If they themselves are not their first and most active educators, no one will educate them."*

We know that a good educator is appreciated by the long-term mark he or she leaves on his or her students. We bring here the testimony of Javier Zubiri (1898-1983), a great Spanish philosopher, who was a student of Father Domingo in San Sebastian and who later had recourse to his guidance and accompaniment in difficult moments of his adult life: *"Rarely does one have the good fortune to meet such a person in life. However, when God puts them in your path, and at the precise moment when you need it, when you have a Father Domingo to mold your spirit, then you really have had the living experience of grace. Because that was what Father Domingo was for many, as it was for me, a singular grace of God."* May we, Marianist educators, be small or large graces of God in the lives of the people entrusted to us!