

Encuentro de Educadores



THE SCHOOL THAT M. CANDIDA WANTED

M. Candida, like most of the women of her time in Spain, **was a woman without training**. Being a woman, she had even fewer possibilities of access to learning. Generally, when they were very young, they had to go to work as housekeepers to be able to help their own family.

September 2021: *"almost half of the world's schoolchildren are still affected by the total or partial closure of classrooms and the consequences of the health crisis on children are becoming devastating. Many of them are at risk of not going back to school and it is estimated that more than 100 million will not reach the minimum level in reading ... Child labor is increasing"*.¹

Educating, as we know, is "guiding from the outside" and "drawing from the inside." Sisters who studied the pedagogy of the Mother saw these three axes in it: the greater glory of God, the love of schoolgirls and the Christian education of virtue.²

Today we hardly speak of virtue. Virtues are **"the qualities that the individual must acquire to become a good person."**³ And the Catechism says that it is not only doing good deeds, but **"giving the best of oneself."**⁴ Christian virtue: perhaps it would be worth saying that, for her, it is a matter of accompanying a path of growth, of progressively discovering our dignity as "children", like Jesus, the one who shows us the Father, in order to live and act accordingly.

We have all heard of Our Characteristic Way of Educating (OCWE), a document that at the time was understood as "open": to the diversity of peoples and cultures and to the novelty of the times. To share with you today about the School that M. Candida wanted, I did not focus on it. I went to the **Counsels for Christian Education**, counsels that she gives to the Teachers and that is reflected in our Constitutions (CFI).

It seems that these Counsels are not original to her. She takes them and gives them her own style. Some Sisters think that Fr. Herranz and the Ratio Studiorum of the Society of Jesus would also have had their influence.

Perceiving what the School of M. Candida is like in the Counsels is complicated because it is a set of orientations without a precise order. On the other hand, a true translation must be made: we do not share their world, or their society, or that school. Its language is not ours. I have ventured to let the Counsels resonate in me, to make some interpretation and share it with you, people from very different cultural universes. **Would there be something valid for us, what echo would its reading leave us?** I propose to make this reflection:

- From your experience, what accent of the School of M. Cándida do you feel we are called to contribute to respond to the challenges of our world?
- Look for a means to create the universal network that may help us to respond to these challenges.

1. We all know that advice: "They will use the most joyful method." But does M. Candida say something else about the way of educating?

¹ Entreculturas, 21 septiembre, 2021. InfoSJ

² Cfr.: La FI educadora según nuestra Madre. Aurora Iglesias, en Un camino entre dos fechas.

³ Entrevista a Victoria Camps. En La Vanguardia. 03/01/2016.

⁴ Catecismo de la Iglesia católica, art 7, nº 1803.

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"She will bear in mind the general good of the children and will be very prudent before acting."

Mother says very curious things for her time: flexible schedules due to the change of climate, combining the most opportune times for subjects, keeping silence and teaching students to communicate by signs so as not to disturb.

The joyful method has to do with facilitating: "*simplicity must reign in the lessons.*" It is to enjoy learning, ... with images, sayings, songs, examples; always leaning towards gentleness rather than severity.

She speaks of rewarding and encouraging rather than reprimanding: "*with discretion, rarely, ... making the students feel all their merit in the way of giving the prizes.*" Above all, she rewards attitude, although she also takes into account the diversity of subjects and personal gifts.

But she is not naive, she is careful about the damage that all of us as persons can do. Therefore, to correct: "*... be prudent and firm; wise so as not to accustom them to punishment nor lose authority.*" "*She will not touch the students, she will educate their self-love and sensitivity.*" "*If, using all possible [means], someone should be incorrigible ..., especially in matters of customs, she will act before [that person] does harm to others.*"

2. What does she say about the students, about the parents? And of the teachers? What does she say about leadership? And about teaching teams?

She cares about the **student** [the author uses "alumno", so I will use the masculine] from the first moment. She places him where he can best be cared for according to his characteristics, character, qualities ... "*for greater charity*" and to give or ask for more according to his capacity. **How is he to be cared for?**

- ... with zeal-care and tender charity-love, patience and constant firmness. ...
 - without words of anger or contempt ...
 - with the simplicity and meekness of our God Jesus, daughter of charity. And it should be noticed in all their behavior, particularly when they have to excuse or forgive each other ...
 - ... with kindness, inspiring confidence in conversations; instructing with tenderness.
- Isn't there some "emotional intelligence" in all of this?

Consideration of each person is essential. If there is any difference, it is **for taking better care of those who are in greatest need**, the poor, the poor girls. This "special" assignment she gives to the highest authority of the school: "*direct them with the (appropriate) Educators.*" And to each Educator, "*esteem those who are entrusted to him, because by serving the poor they serve and honor Jesus more particularly.*"

These children "*have greater need to be strengthened in the practical study of our religion; ... they will take particular care to direct all their lessons to this end, delicately, without fatigue, ...*"

It is an empathic attention, it does not create dependency. The poor becomes an exponent of what must be done with everyone to "*grow in virtue and piety.*" I would say that she seeks to make poverty a vital strength.

There are many allusions that Mother makes in her letters to family relationships. The mention of **the parents** is not lacking in her Counsels: "*The Directress will sometimes speak with the parents, to see if she can do good, asking Jesus for sweetness, prudence and discretion to inspire frankness and gain trust.*" The



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Constitutions
say "so that he
may go home

edified even if his demands were not granted."⁵

The spiritual and intellectual preparation of **the Educators** (the Teachers) was necessary, to keep up with qualifications and knowledge, the most complete training that could be conceived: technical, theoretical and practical.

But also, when virtue is educated, **example⁶ is the best method**. The Constitutions insist on this. We transmit what we carry inside and one learns by contagion. If it is a question of virtue, we are never fully formed, let us be humble: "*The Teachers will avoid among [themselves] and with people and the community the imperious and haughty tone that is sometimes acquired with the custom of teaching ...*"

Humble, it is about "reproducing the features" of Jesus: "She will try to have before her Christ our Lord when he was teaching the children". "To achieve this they will ask God in prayer for a spirit of zeal, meekness and humility, ..." The CFI repeat⁷

The leadership was exercised by the First Teacher, together with the Superior. Authority "descends" and responsibility is assumed, they are not diluted, because whoever holds them does not look at himself. He knows the status of the classes, the conduct of Teachers and Professors, the character and progress of students. His objective is "*to direct everything to the greater glory of God and salvation of souls.*" "*He will make sure that everything is done according to the Constitutions: that doctrine and religion is the main thing*" and "*[will not neglect] the advancement of the poor ...*"

- "*He will take care of the Educators, having all the kindness and attention possible*"; "*He will never allow himself to disapprove [of the Teachers] in public.*"
- "*He will see the hours that are most convenient for classes, always looking to the good of the children and the Educators ...*"

Authority is a "service" to the community, there is a community, it is not given on its own merits but because God uses each and every one for the good of others. This creates a climate of union that must be cared for and is of immense educational value.

Unity of message and **coordination**: Educators' meetings are scheduled frequently, so that the student's process is known and consistently monitored. Means have to be provided for what is essential. The education of the whole person has to do with multiple aspects and needs this communication.

- "*Every week they will report on their students' behavior, progress, faults and everything that they may notice for their spiritual and temporal benefit.*"
- "*If there is a custom in the country, there can be an afternoon in the middle of the vacation week; but this has to be thought out well before God ... and on this afternoon the meetings of the Teachers could be held*".

"The greater glory of God", her motto, becomes, in the school of Mother Candida, the maturation of the person according to God. The Educators accompany, help to make an inclusive growth process that enables one to put oneself at the service of others. The referent of this relationship, of its way and of its end is Jesus of Nazareth. Everything converges on the student. Although each person matters, the student is the *raison d'être* of the school. The school is supported by educators and the family has its place in it.

⁵ CFI 222: "They will talk with the parents of the students... in order to help them with discretion and prudence."

⁶ CFI 208, 217.

⁷ CFI 211: "The Sisters should take great care of the cleanness of their souls and of the right intention..., desiring nothing else except the glory of God and the good of souls... this they should frequently ask for in their prayers, that with the help of divine grace, they may progress spiritually and be useful to others."

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3. What about faith in your Christian school? What place does religion have in it with respect to other matters?

The Mass, to pray, when, what ... the books and catechism that must be used ... Let's translate it into our cultural and faith contexts. Everything speaks of a practical faith, which is expressed, celebrated, which affects life and is integrated with other disciplines.

Regarding different issues, she insists that "*religion is the main thing*", and expresses it clearly to the Head of the School.

"However, the Teachers should not neglect to give the necessary knowledge to their states and their future, such as: reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling ...". With "examples that are instructive and uplifting."

The educator accompanies them to have an experience of trust, of receiving oneself as a gift, of knowing and receiving so many gifts from God-Father, He himself who gives himself in them: goods of nature, of history, of Jesus ... and other individuals ... the gift that each one of us is, a gift for others. This, which reminds us of Spiritual Exercises⁸, is it not a profound humanism?

As it is a teaching-learning process for life, in order to be "useful members of society and the Church", it attends to character and virtue, what touches faith has the main role, but it does not neglect other arts and subjects.

Sincerely, I read those Counsels and I feel it throbbing: the person at the center, to listen to the children, to promote the woman, to make the family responsible, to open ourselves to the most vulnerable, to serve the community, integral ecology. It seems that M. Cándida was not far from the Global Education Compact!

I share A TESTIMONY: a letter from Father Herranz to his family⁹. He dissuades them from sending their niece Vicentina to study in France:

"French, you will tell me, nowhere with more perfection. I answer: sad French if I lose my girl! ... You will see in embroidery (said by the Bishop), few houses are keeping up; in education, as good as in the best place or school. Caring, nothing to speak of; music, drawing and whatever you want; Well, French they will have as those who have to be teachers learn it ... Salamanca (the School of M. Cándida) suits us, for everything, everything, but the main thing is embroidery and true, solid and Christian education, without missing a good teacher of music ,, etc., that they have to teach and they teach those that have to be teachers, whose cost for you will be less than in another point, the most economical ... and do not think that I am partial, because if the advances they make in Salamanca were not real and true, I myself would tell you it would not be suitable, because for one pupil they would not be richer nor would they have less honor."

I see the Counsels as a fabric that is sustained in people, in what we transmit out of conviction simply with our being. Let us take care of and offer the gift that we are and let us prepare to be, in a "human" way, in a globalized and changing world that welcomes many different worlds and cultures. "The great challenges that our students are going to face in the coming decades are going to be fundamentally ethical." ¹⁰

⁸ EE 234

⁹ Letter of Fr. Herranz on March 2, 1877

¹⁰ Identidad, tradición e innovación en la Escuela católica. Javier Cortés. En Ciudadanía global. Ed SM.

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The main Matter¹¹ that we educators

transmit is what we live from within, and the students grasp that without any effort.

Thank you!



María Teresa Pinto Terradillos, FI.

¹¹ Matter that we carry within: call it faith in Jesus, meaning of life, the deepest convictions, the knowledge given by experience well assumed, etc.