

## THE PEDAGOGY OF THE HEART

### IN THE LIGHT OF GENERAL CONGREGATION XIX

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It gives me great joy to be among you. I had the opportunity of participating in the First Latin American meeting on Education when I was an Assistant, and it was a beautiful experience that I remember with great affection. When I received the news about this Third Meeting, I thought, "How I would like to be there!" My wish is now a reality. I am here today with the entire General Team.

#### **1. Introduction**

I want to offer you this reflection from the reading of the Documents of General Congregation XIX, with the desire that it will shed light upon your mission as Christian educators.

As you know, the General Congregation is the assembly which represents the universality of the Institute in its places, apostolic works and persons. It is the organ of greatest authority. It is held every five years, and its objective is to open a dialogue between the charism and the world in order to listen to the Word that God wants to speak to us today, through Saint Raphaela Mary, for our world. I have great faith in the General Congregations, because really they are significant milestones on the path of the Institute, and they direct us to where the Lord wants to lead us.

General Congregation XIX, held in February of 2012, was an assembly in which we experienced powerfully the passage of the Spirit among us. With the theme: "The Lord is changing the Institute. Let us rise to the challenge and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him," we contemplate the world in change, innovations in the technological field, changes in the mentalities and attitudes of the different societies on a global scale. This made us see that we are not only in an era of change but rather in a change of era.<sup>1</sup> We are facing the emergence of a new paradigm, of a new cultural model, of a new society.

The Institute, immersed in this world, is affected by the changes that make it suffer, that disorientate it, and others that energize it, that open it to new possibilities. However, in all of these it finds the Presence of God, who works in all His creatures, who acts in our history, who transforms us and calls us to respond to Him. Our response to these calls is made concrete in the options that we have called Commitments.

We feel that the Lord is changing the Institute, and we want to second this process of transformation to which God invites us, so that our life may be a sign of His Presence. We affirm that "entering into the dynamic of a God who reaches out beyond Himself to save humanity leads us to commit ourselves to that humanity and offer it Jesus, the Word of Hope."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, we commit ourselves to education as a privileged space where we can pronounce and live this Word of Hope that is Jesus for each person. The relationship of "educate evangelizing and evangelize educating" sums up for us the meaning of our school and your evangelizing vocation.

## **2. The mission of educating within the Missio Dei**

In the General Congregation we are aware also of the mission as MISSIO DEI, that is, the action of God, and that which characterizes God Himself as a missionary God. The mission cannot be conceived primarily or essentially as an activity of the Church, but as one that resides in God, that is born of the very heart of God. His great love for His creation overflows in His desire to save and goes forth from itself, sending the Son by means of the Holy Spirit. With this missionary activity of God the Church is formed, and this new community is called to participate in the mission of God. Participating in the mission is much more than working on great pastoral projects; it involves the capacity to assimilate what is in the Heart of God and to be moved by the passion which springs from His love. Only in the encounter with Jesus can we enter into the Heart of God, to know what He feels and to make His interests our own.

The mission is of God; we are not the protagonists. That is how the first Handmaids felt when they spoke of the Institute as “the Work of the Heart of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the only way to serve is that of humility; the work is of God.

Pope Emeritus Benedict in his encyclical “God is Love” speaks of the collaborator in the mission of the Church with these words;

“There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work.”<sup>4</sup>

We are convoked by this God, the friend of life, in order to collaborate with Him in making possible His dream for each person and for our world. We have responded affirmatively, and as Church we are incorporated into the Missio Dei. We feel that we have received our mission of educating. We do not own it; we receive it and humbly place ourselves at its service, shoulder to shoulder with our companions. We are called through our identity, with the characteristics of our reparative pedagogy, in order to work with all those who have a heart that is universal and available for the mission of God, as Saint Raphaela Mary desired.

Conscious of our collaboration in the Missio Dei, we speak of the pedagogy of the heart.

## **3. The Pedagogy of the heart, our characteristic style of education**

General Congregation XIX states in one of its Documents: “We feel the need to go more deeply into the style of education that springs from reparation, ‘the pedagogy of the heart,’ as our way of accompanying individuals in their process of personal growth. Engaging in this form of education

involves searching for what each one needs, combining firmness and tenderness, and giving preference to the small and the weak.”<sup>5</sup>

It is a pedagogy of the affect, which addresses the heart of our students as the center of being.

In biblical theology the term “heart” defines one’s personal interiority; it is the seat of knowledge and of unifying integration. With the heart one knows oneself. It is also the source from which desires emerge. Thanks to the heart one listens and discerns.<sup>6</sup>

Reaching the heart of our students and forming them can be done only by combining firmness with tenderness, as is seen in the first writings of the Institute about education.

Mafalda expresses it this way: “The ideal would be... to have the heart in the head and the brain in the chest, that way... We would think with love and we would love with wisdom.”

That is the way of the pedagogy of the heart: teach students to think with love and to love with wisdom.

The pedagogy of the heart, which is our educational style, is not summed up in any treatise on education, but that precious intuition which inspired the first Handmaids was inscribed from the beginning on their hearts and has been transmitted from generation to generation.<sup>7</sup> Therefore it is an open concept, which was further developed through our educational practice and continues to be elucidated through reflection and the living of the charism.

In this sense the Commitments of General Congregation XIX as a response to what God wants of us today can shed new light upon this pedagogy.

The first Commitment about the charism states: “**Let the CHARISM be a passion in us which becomes a compassionate embrace, reaching out to all pain and nurturing life**”<sup>8</sup> I can say that this is one of the calls of the General Congregation which has touched our hearts most profoundly.

The charism is not a possession of the Congregation; it is a shared gift, a gift for us and a gift for you. All of us are invited to receive it and to allow it to transform us compassionately, so that we may be sent as an embrace to all situations of suffering in our world. We are called to make the suffering of God our own.

I am bringing you a picture (project picture) which has been on the internet during these recent months. It is a photo of a three year old Syrian child who was mortally wounded in the fratricidal war in that country. The photo is accompanied by the testimony of those who had listened to his last words: “When I die, I am going to tell God all about it.” How does this make you feel? Do you think that God will listen to this child?

God suffers from the pain of His children, especially of the smallest, and we also feel this, don’t we? We are called to enter into this compassion, to involve ourselves with Him in the reparative transformation of reality, with boldness and concrete options. It is for us to do this in the context of the field of education.

### **3.1 From the perspective of our charism, to educate means to embrace compassionately**

#### **3.1.1 A compassionate embrace for our students**

This first embrace is directed to our students, in order to accept everything that they are and to facilitate their growth as persons, helping them to discover their aptitudes and limitations, in such a way that they may grow in autonomy and responsibility.

This attention is directed to all and to each one, in their uniqueness, but with a special concern for the weakest, who can be the most intellectually or socially fragile, the most difficult or those who are hardest for us to accept.

This embrace is shown in gestures that:

- Accept those who are slower
- Pay attention to those who have problems
- Support those who suffer
- Facilitate processes of inclusion

I recall here the words of Saint Raphaela Mary:

“Look at children especially with the interest that one looks at something very precious; for each one has cost the blood of God himself.”<sup>9</sup>

These words remind me of an experience that I have shared on other occasions. I am a graduate of the Handmaids’ school in Japan. A few years ago, on the occasion of an alumnae meeting, the conversation turned to our school days. There were more than twenty of us, classmates from the same grade, and we were very enthusiastically reminiscing about those times. Then one said, “Really we felt loved in school.” We fell silent. This was the experience of all of us. Some were more serious, others more mischievous, some were more studious and others less so; some more rebellious, others more docile, but all of us experienced the “compassionate embrace” of the Sisters and the teachers. By means of various words and gestures, they had communicated the friendliness, affection, interest for each one of us that Saint Raphaela Mary recommended to her Sisters. We felt regarded as something “of great worth,” and that education was the foundation upon which we continued to build our lives and to become who we were at that moment.

With what words, with what gestures do we “embrace” our students? When we feel difficulty in expressing this compassionate embrace to someone in particular, what can we do?

### **3.1.2 Compassionate embrace for Humanity**

We are called to see our world through the heart of God, to feel His compassionate gaze upon His creatures, to experience the pain of God in the presence of the dehumanization of His children. God suffers in the presence of all misery, injustice, weakness, poverty, sin...

The eyes of God have a dynamic gaze, and it is decided, “it is determined...”<sup>10</sup> He displaces Himself, He empties Himself, He comes to us. In Jesus, God and man meet; in Jesus, God has embraced the pain of humanity.

God send us to the world as an embrace and shows us the deepest breaches so that with Jesus, the Savior and the only One who can repair, we can heal wounds, open spaces of reconciliation, work for communion, build peace. .. offer Jesus to the world as the meaning of life.

Pope Francis expresses it this way in *EvangeliiGaudium*:

“The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”<sup>11</sup>

What do you think of having the school foster, from its classrooms, this revolution of tenderness? What guidelines appear in its educational documents to make this revolution possible?

### 3.1.3 Compassionate embrace for the earth

In Number 2 of our Constitutions, in which our mission is defined, it says, “In the Heart of Him whom they have pierced,” (Jn. 19:37) we contemplate the Mercy that gives us hope for the world. Christ has freed us from sin and reconciled us with God (2 Cor. 5:18). Once we have experienced ourselves as members of sinful humanity, and as recipients of the gift of redemption, we want to labor with him, through him and in him to reconcile all people among themselves and with God (2 Cor. 5:20). We strive so that creation, placed at the service of all, might truly reflect God’s glory.”

From this gaze that desires to go forth, to act, to commit itself, General Congregation XIX calls us to a reparative transformation of reality, uniting us to the self-giving of Jesus. It calls us to collaborate with Him in this reconciliation of all creation, so that it may be a reflection of His love and goodness. Thus our educative action should integrate suffering for the earth and commit itself to repair our relationship with it. This involves:

- Incorporating into our educative proposal the “ecological concern”<sup>12</sup> which will help us to change our consumeristic style of life and make us aware of its impact on the environment, in such a way that “we will go from being part of the problem to being part of the solution.”<sup>13</sup>
- Allowing ourselves to be touched by this cry: “the poor and the earth can wait no longer.”<sup>14</sup>
- “Educating those around us about the causes and the consequences which generate these situations of poverty and exploitation”<sup>15</sup>

Reparative pedagogy takes this cry to heart, “the poor and the earth can wait no longer,” and moves us to act.

How do we feel in the presence of this cry of pain? Is it present and does it mobilize our educative action?

### 3.2 From the perspective of our charism: to educate for communion, as a way of being in the world

Another commitment of General Congregation XIX is “**Be women who generate COMMUNION in the Institute, in the Church, and in the world.**”<sup>16</sup> Communion is our way of being in the world, which springs from the Eucharist. It incorporates us into the self-gift of Jesus, and on receiving it we enter into the dynamic of His self-gift.

In communion with Him we receive the gift of communion with all those to whom He gives Himself. Our commitment is to live and make it a reality on the concrete as well as on the universal scale. In the Eucharist we are sent to build this communion as the mandate of Jesus: Do this in memory of me. As artisans of communion, we can achieve it only through humility, as a way of relating and of working for:

- A communion that heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds
- An intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to “bear one another’s burdens”<sup>17</sup>

- “The willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process.”<sup>18</sup>

Saint Raphaela Mary expressed it this way: “All united in everything like the fingers of the hand.”<sup>19</sup> We all know this phrase very well, don’t we? It is a part of our identity.

Through communion we encounter these three great tasks that always challenge us to advance: shared mission, educative community and collaboration with the family.

### 3.2.1. Shared Mission

A mission shared between religious and laity involves living the “we” as the subject of the mission, where the professional commitment is united to the concrete expression of the Christian faith and to the living of the spirituality of the charism. Each one being and contributing according to his or her identity, recognizing the specific contributions of the religious life and the lay state. General Congregation XIX, in one of its Commitments about our identity as Consecrated Women, expresses it this way: **Live our CONSECRATION with greater radicality, by concerning ourselves with the things that matter to the heart of Jesus and renewing in daily life our “yes, I want it no matter what it costs.”** This call to a greater radicality and authenticity in the living out of our vocation is addressed to us, and also to the laity. In the measure in which each one, from his or her own vocation, vigorously lives the following of Jesus and the passion for his Kingdom, we will be enhancing the shared mission and making it a reality

So that this presence of the laity in complementarity, rather than in substitution, may be understood, there must be a true reciprocity, and for this it is necessary to share faith, prayer, and searching, and to form ourselves together in this changing world.

The shared mission of laity and religious is a sign that the ecclesiology of Vatican II is becoming a reality, and perhaps it is in the field of education where the Church has made more headway. We have to continue to take steps in the mutual recognition of our identity and in true equality.

### 3.2.2. The Educative Community

A true educative community is the prerequisite for educating from a Christian vision. Our model of person is a being in relationship, capable of authentic relationships and of creating in his or her environment spaces of humanity. Therefore, our educative task must bear the seal of the Eucharist.

In our educational centers we are called to build communities where students, teachers and parents work in common in order to accomplish the educational project. The educational community is called to be a Christian community, where day by day the joy of the Gospel is lived and proclaimed. It is this community which educates and evangelizes with its testimony.<sup>20</sup>

An educational community expresses itself in real teamwork; it believes in and commits to persons. The great potential where its educational quality is upheld demands ongoing learning and humble collaboration, without rivalry for the limelight.

### 3.2.3 The Family

“The education of children is a task that is shared by parents and teachers. The more respectful and friendly the relationship is among them, the more positive will be their involvement in the children’s learning and the development.”<sup>21</sup>

This collaboration between the family and the school is becoming ever more necessary; both must proceed in the same direction and be consistent in what is taught in each scenario. The school can never substitute for the family or fill its void. School and family become allies in the common project of education. It is important for the parents to feel identified with the values and the Christian vision offered by the school so that the collaboration between the two may be effective and consistent.

It is vital to take care of the ongoing formation of young families, offering them inter-family formative spaces, accompanying and supporting them in the formation of their children. Moreover, it is important that they be aware of their responsibility to initiate their children in the faith.

The Christian family is not only the recipient of formation but a protagonist in the same, and it is capable of transmitting to other family groups the strength and enthusiasm to face great challenges and to make the great human family more habitable.

A recent study in Europe, analyzing the social structure and its unravelling in the crisis, has shown that the family is the great social capital upon which society can count in order to confront the crisis. It is one of the foundations upon which to build a new society with more solidarity. It is a call to us, educators, to take advantage of this potentiality of values which continue to be present in the family.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4. Pedagogy which forms for discernment**

General Congregation XIX situates us before the world with a gaze that questions, that seeks, that discerns, that chooses. Today, as we have said, we find ourselves in a change of era that is giving place to important social, political, economic and cultural transformations. In this very complex reality our discernment is necessary in whatever task, but especially in our mission as educators which demands that we ask ourselves: How to educate in this changing world? What tools, what skills, what values? What is going to help our students to face life and act as free citizens?

In this new scenario, the first challenge which we encounter is the very truth of the human person, and here we touch the heart of education.

There arises, with some trepidation, a concept of education that tends simply to “teach information management,” neglecting many essential elements of human existence. According to your schools’ vision statements, you are committed to an education that discerns what is truly human and what forms the person, an integral education which encompasses all the dimensions of the human being.

In this sense the words of Pope Francis are enlightening:

“We are living in an information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance – and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values.”<sup>23</sup>

This challenge of providing a Christian education for the society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is met through an education that integrates the practice of discernment. It involves making our students the protagonists of their

growth, harmonizing responsibility and freedom, placing them in situations of choosing and deciding responsibly. Education should be able to raise questions, to open horizons, to generate creativity. An education should make them capable of seeking their own answers, of discovering the needs of others, of listening to the pain of those who suffer, of not tolerating injustice.

To accomplish this education we need educators who seek, who face reality critically, who choose how they wish to educate. For us the criterion of discernment is Jesus and His kingdom; therefore we have to turn our eyes toward Him, and it is in the encounter with Him that we find the reparative response to the challenges of the world and of history.

“Jesus’ whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life. Whenever we encounter this anew, we become convinced that it is exactly what others need...Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people’s hearts...”<sup>24</sup>

The message of the Gospel will be expressed through the educators who carry Jesus -- the Way, the Truth and the Life -- in their hearts, disciples of the only Master, called to make Him present in the school, new men and women capable of finding God in all things and of dreaming the Kingdom.

##### **5. Look toward Saint Raphaela Mary, the source of inspiration**

We cannot speak of reparative mission without turning our gaze again and again toward Saint Raphaela Mary. She is the source from which we continue to go deeper into the pedagogy of the heart.

The documents of General Congregation XIX are not only full of her words but also filled with her spirit. Humility vibrates strongly within us, humility which she lived totally and which has become for us her testament.

General Congregation XIX speaks to us with new insights about humility: “A humility that needs to pervade all our choices and translate itself into a new way of being present, of seeing, of relating and of working. A humility that makes us strip ourselves of our securities, and in simplicity share our search with others. A humility that is a conversion to the faithful following of Jesus, poor and humble.”<sup>25</sup>

To educate from the perspective of the spirit of Raphaela Mary is to situate ourselves beside others in the truth of what we are, overcoming the dynamics of power and self-seeking, breaking with self-sufficiency in order to put ourselves simply at the service of others, like Jesus our Master. If we were able to live this spirit of humility and transmit it to our students, how much we would help them in their growth as persons!

Gazing at St. Raphaela Mary brings us to Him, entering into that relationship of Love, “standing before him with open hearts, letting him look at us.”<sup>26</sup> Eucharistic adoration is the privileged space where we are embraced compassionately, and with us all of humanity. In the Eucharist we are overcome by His love to the utmost, and no one or nothing is left out. In Him has been accomplished the reconciliation of all creation

Our challenge is to draw our students to Jesus so that they may experience in their lives the embrace of God, to cultivate in our students interiority and silence, contemplation and gratitude, so that they can live this relationship with God.

As our Constitutions say, “the Eucharist brings about the merciful and saving transformation of the world in the heart of each person.”<sup>27</sup> In the Eucharist we are transformed by Him and sent as educators to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

I thank the Lord and each one of you for your dedication to the mission of educating day after day, in the classroom, in the corridors, in work meetings, in meetings with the families. I know that among you there is great enthusiasm and generosity; you are already living what I have been saying to you. You can say a great deal about pedagogy of the heart experienced in the relationship with your students and recreated in the challenges involved in educating these new generations. Thank you for what we learn and receive from you in this shared mission. We will continue reflecting in depth upon the charism of reparation from which the pedagogy of the heart flows. Together we will immerse ourselves in our educational style.

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<sup>1</sup> Final document of the V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and of the Caribbean, Aparecida 2007, n. 44.

<sup>2</sup> GC XIX Document, “The Lord is changing the Institute. Let us rise to the challenge and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him” p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> From the letter of M. Pilar to M. Purísima, June 12, 1895. “.. this work is solely and exclusively of the Heart of Jesus...”

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> GC XIX Document “the Lord is changing the Institute. Let us rise to the challenge and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him,” p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Dolores Alexandre: “Interioridad y Biblia” in Varios “La interioridad: unaparadigmaemergente’ Madrid, PPC 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://fundacioneducativaaci.com/content/estilo-pedag%C3%B3gico#sthash.h0PFtBaa.dpuf>

<sup>8</sup> GC XIX Document “The Lord is changing the Institute. Let us rise to the challenge and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him,” p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Letter of St. Raphaela Mary to M. Felisa de Jesús, June 12, 1887.

<sup>10</sup> Spiritual Exercises, 102 Contemplation of the Trinity.

<sup>11</sup> EG 88.

<sup>12</sup> GC XIX Decree 1, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Document of the Order of Friars Minor: “Care of creation in daily life,” p. 6, Rome 2011.

<sup>14</sup> GC XIX Decree 1, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> GC XIX “Decree 1: Justice, Peace and the integrity of creation”, p. 44.

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<sup>16</sup>GC XIX Document, “The Lord is changing the Institute, let us rise to the challenge and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him,” p. 67.

<sup>17</sup>EG 67.

<sup>18</sup>EG 227.

<sup>19</sup>Letter of St. Raphaela Mary to the community of Cordoba, January 1884.

<sup>20</sup>EG 106.

<sup>21</sup> Neva Milicic, psychologist, columnist for the magazine *Ya*, and author of the book *Cuánto y cómo los quiero*.

<sup>22</sup> Report of 2014 of the Foundation FOESSA: “Precariedad y cohesión social.”

<sup>23</sup>EG 64.

<sup>24</sup>EG 265.

<sup>25</sup> GC XIX Document, p.62.

<sup>26</sup>EG 264.

<sup>27</sup>Constitutions, 4.