



EDUCATING FOR CONTEMPLATION AND INTERIORITY FROM THE SACRED HEART : A theoretical-experiential exposition

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First Part

(Thank for the invitation, for the internationality... for seeking together to be an “international community” of support, discoveries and inspiration).

They say greeting is giving health, greeting the other making him feel we are pleased of his presence, that we see him; that it is good that he is there... That is how our sisters and organizers have greeted us in these days, in this dear Mexico City... that is how our children and youth expect to be greeted. Cultivating a way of greeting that starts the light there is in the other: “Blessed is your life”, said Elizabeth – with journey of her existence well advanced – to a young Mary who started to open to God (Lk 1, 42). Trees and flowers are also greeting us constantly, but the majority of times we are distracted for appreciating it.

I am invited to share with you about educating in contemplation and interiority from the Sacred Heart; thinking about what I could bring to you a desire, a petition flared up: that whatever it was it could be able to touch our lives. Because I am convinced that only that which we experiment, which is good for us, which matters to us...is what we achieve to transmit, and we know that our presence becomes a catalyzer before the look of the children.

Learning to contemplate and learning to live together are two of the challenges of our twenty-first century. In the midst of a fragmented, unequal, violent world; a world hurt in its relations...we need to contemplate reality from the other side: from the side of the small gestures of love, of hope in the middle of poverty, from the side of the Heart of God, where life inexplicable finds its beauty and its sense, even in the midst of sorrow.

A few weeks ago, I was in a cafeteria, watching a couple with two kids; it was a strong scene because all four of them were with their mobiles and tablets, each one vigilant of their screen. This hyper connectivity, which also is present in the youngest, is an icon of this absence that sneaks in our days; of the incapacity to be attentive, presents for the gift of the other. We see ourselves submerged in a life without a pause. We are required to be connected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the consequences are evident in multiple orders, there is no space for calm we are constantly busy and claimed by the outside.

We have never had so many interaction possibilities and so many possibilities to be informed about what happens in our world; but this increased information does not imply an increase in sustainability; on the contrary, it causes saturation. Children also live surpassed. The consumerism we now face is the most lethal and direct way of killing the surprise of a kid, because when we saturate his senses with everything he wants, we prevent him from

desiring¹. We have to be aware that we cannot educate them in a contemplative, empathic sensitivity; a sensitivity capable of being admired and be moved...if we are dispersed, anxious and overwhelmed.

A Zen history tells us about a horseman riding a horse at full gallop. At a crossroad, one of his friends asks him: “¿Where are you going?” The horseman answers: “I don’t know; ask my horse”. This is our situation, our horse is the Internet and we do not know how to control it.

We live in the era of screens and we cannot avoid the technological impact on our lives and in the lives of children; but we do need to learn how to train ourselves in a way of living with technology that does not isolate us, that does not makes us ill and dehumanize us. Pope Francis alerts us in his encyclical *Laudato Sí* about “rapidification” (a term developed by Latin-American sociologists). In a “technified” society everything happens so fast, there is so much immediacy in the virtual, that processes are aborted; we go to fast as to accompany the slow paces of real life². Sophie indicated in a letter to Mother Goetz in 1862: “even for the attractive of the good we act hastily, everything suffers in this impulsive acting”³.

Before this hasty today, being present entails an election that is, in itself, a loving statement. The election of being attentive to the other tells him: “you are worthy, you are precious”. Many times kids, before family imbalances lived by them, especially demand presence above all, someone to look closely at their lives, someone to greet them calmly, to ask them (we need this too...). It is interesting to see how the youngest go in their way to school: mothers pull children and only grandmothers walk next to them.

Our 2008 Chapter said: “We are called to stop, to choose silence and to open and let ourselves be opened to our inner depths”... I want this morning to be for us a quiet time to stop, to “stop the horse”, to find ourselves in that Deep dimension of life.

□ Let us stop for a few minutes, let us make a brief pause... I invite you to close your eyes, and be able to open our inner look and we will simply make ourselves present to ourselves, to breath... to let the movement of breathing bring us home, to expose ourselves before that loving Presence that inhabits us. We breathe slowly and deeply, we like this feeling of rest, of amplitude, of luminosity this Presence opens in us... A compassionate opening, the capacity of being with oneself and with the people around us...

I want to share with you a story that hit me. It is the story of a French teacher who lived in the US: Jacques Lusseyran (1934-1977)⁴, he had been a member of the Resistance during the Second World War, writer and educator; he died in a traffic accident when he was only 47 years old. Lusseyran narrates in a beautiful book the history of his life from his childhood years to his youth, and he describes that when he was a boy, on day, when he was leaving school, an older boy involuntarily crashed into him and hit one of the corners of the teacher’s table; he describes: “I lost consciousness and when regained it, the first idea that came to my

¹ Cf. Catherine L’ECUYER, *Educating for astonishment*, Plataforma Actual 2015.

² When media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Sí, On Care for Our Common Home*, Saint Paul 2015, 45.

³ Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat talks us about interior life (All texts taken from its correspondence in French, English and Spanish), Lucy GALVAN, rscj, (ed.), Madrid 2015, 45.

⁴ Jacques LUSSEYRAN, *And there was light*, Ed. Rudolf Steiner, Madrid 2001.

mind was ‘my eyes, where are my eyes?’. The retina of both eyes was torn, after several attempts, doctors were not able to do anything, and He was completely blind when he was 8 years old.

In the days immediately after the operation, I still wanted to use my eyes. I followed their usual path. And there was anguish, a lack, something like a void which filled me with what grownups call despair... Finally, one day, I realized that I was looking in the wrong way. I was looking too far off, and too much on the surface of things. This was much more than a simple discovery, it was a revelation. I was at a par when an instinct made me change course. I began to look more closely, not at things but at a world closer to myself. Looking from an inner place to one further within; instead of clinging to the movement of sight towards the world outside”.

In his experience being a child, Lusseyran discovers that it is possible to look from closer to ourselves, from a place within which, to this moment, was unknown to him, and that will remain ignores and unexplored for many people.

“Suddenly – he continues – everything was there. No one had talked to me about this appointment with the Universe within me!... I saw the kindness of God and that nothing ever abandons us under His power... In that same instant I discovered the light of joy... Until I was almost fourteen, I remember calling the experience, which kept renewing inside me, “my secret”... I did not know yet (slow discovery never concluded) that our inner life is “one life” ad that our inner world in a “world”... The outer world exists, the inner world exists. Who knows how to reconcile these two realities?”

As years go by in school, he asks himself why no one has talked to him about this ever:

“I couldn’t understand why the teachers never talked about the life going on inside them or inside us. They talked in great detail about the origin of mountains, the assassination of Julius Caesar, the properties of triangles... Sometimes they even talked about men, but only as personages of ancient history, those of the Renaissance... There was never any talk of real people like the teacher or ourselves.

As for the subject of all subjects, the fact that the world is not just outside us but also within, this was entirely lacking. I understood that the teacher could not or did not wish to talk about what was going on inside him. That was his affair, and after all I was not anxious myself to talk about what went on inside me. But the inner life was so much more than a personal thing”.

A secret within

I think that young Jacques claimed what Madeleine Sophie tried to tell us during her lifetime, she had also made this discovery and wants to share “her secret” of an inner life with her sisters and with the girls, with all those who enter into a relationship with her.

The same meaning encompassed in her name, *Madeleine Sophie*, represents an active reality for us, carrier of imagination. In earlier days, in the way of Santa Teresa, her sisters spoke about her as the *Holy Mother*. Highlighting the maternal feature of her which had accompanied them with the look and the efforts of a mother; with that permanent love offered which, with welcoming firmness, activates and accompanies growth. And she instills these

same values to educators, in the Constitutions of 1815 she tells them referring to the girls: “You will be mothers to them – today we would add ‘and fathers’ – and you will have towards them a truly maternal love”⁵.

Afterwards, we have named her *St. Madeleine Sophie*, highlighting the inherent qualities in her two names: Madeleine, the love, the passion for life in all its dimensions, the apostolic zeal and impulse, the desire for this love to light and spread... and *Sophie*, that desire to be in continuous learning, of letting experiences resound within and leave us a well of wisdom.

Currently, we call her *Sophie*. That was how she signed her letters: *Sophie*. It evokes a very human woman, who invites us to place ourselves before life in a wise way, with practical wisdom; and this means not only cultivating intelligence, but fineness inside, delicacy, the development of the most inner dimensions of personality: intuition, emotions, affections, the spirit... *Sophie* evokes an archetype of feminine wisdom and this is something education needs to strengthen: the spirit of the feminine. In some globalized cultures where efficiency, goals and results are a priority, it makes it technical...we need another way to focus our vision and accompany processes that sprout from a more feminine dimension of life, more receptive, gratuitous and symbolic.

It is evident that Sophie taught by contagion. When I have gone searching in our roots inspiration for the time we are living, I have realized something that is evident, but which acknowledgment can give us light: Sophie was not directly with the girls for a long time. It is possible that she dedicated herself to education teaching classes since the fall of 1801 until November 1804 when she leaves for Grenoble. Once she was elected Superior General in 1806, she could no longer devote herself to teaching directly, and she had to give up this continuous contact but she always tried to keep close: “I have hunger for girls”, she used to tell her companions. She enjoyed contemplating them and talking with them, and she placed special emphasis on the way of managing schools, to the education and attitudes of the teachers. She was 26 years old and the rest of her life, until she was 86, she spent modelling the heart of her sisters so they would be good educators, guiding her lives towards an integrating spiritual path, simple and profound, at the same time; weaving of daily gestures, and constantly reminded them: “the more contemplative, the more apostolic we can be...”. It is there where we will take a look, so we will also let ourselves be driven by her. Sophie has a textbook on this internal teaching: the Gospel and she will combine it with her own experience and prayer.

In a letter to Mother Audé (1852) she tells her: “In these times, it is necessary to substantiate... insist on the value of life and things for these to lead us to God”. Substantiating has to do with supporting, enabling the ground, offering a soil where we can deploy life without fears, value this life and educate so that things lead us to God. It is a wonderful statement, it means learning to place ourselves in the daily matters in a blessing key, learning to bless things so these open as a path towards God.

In our origins, the education of the girls included the assiduous study of the Gospel, in it, girls discovered “the thoughts and desires of the Heart of Jesus” and learned to follow it “as someone who met them and managed to conquer them”⁶. With a series of practices, typical of the times, a life of prayer and presence was gradually inserted into the girls. It was the atmosphere and what they saw vibrating in their educators. This initiation to a life of prayer

⁵ *Constitutions 1815, n. 349*

⁶ *Life at the Sacred Heart Schools, Madrid 1954.*

had as its goal “to initiate students capable of it in the secrets of the inner life...” We remember the expression of little Jacques: “I remember calling the experience, which kept renewing inside me, “my secret”... This secret is offered to each one of us; it is our deepest truth, this gratuitous love which inhabits us permanently, and we require new practices in line with our time that may guide us and take us to this experience, this is the purpose of these days.

Sophie Barat and later, Janet Stuart and other women throughout history, turn into women who inspire us, in the liberal sense of the verb inspire: they instill in us a wider life. What are the features of this life? How do we express them in our times? How do we need to interpret these maps that our in our origin in order for them to keep guiding us to the Source?

A path of humanization

Sophie and Janet understand education as a path of humanization. They designed a preparation for the journey of life, where nothing of the person was left out: the intelligence of the girls, their spirit, their artistic ability, their corporeity... They tried to see what was what moved them the most and exploit in them what was more trained⁷ and, above all, shaping their heart well, waking and channeling this integrating center where life gathers and expands; prepare them for sound relations and start them on the road of this *First relation* which makes all the other capable of being woven with honesty and beauty. Sophie remembered one of her companions: “without neglecting occupations, teach them to situate Jesus in the first place, get the used to take Him everywhere...at least by a trend of the heart”⁸.

They wanted to tell each girl what Naomi told young Ruth when both were headed to an unknown future: “*My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for*” (Ruth 3, 5). This is what we would like to tell our students, this is what God whispers through the creation of each one of its creatures. And we know that this is not an exterior place, we construct it within.

Janet Stuart tells us that, from our beginnings, we have the marking of something that belongs to both worlds: the visible and the invisible. Both trends, the contemplative towards Transcendence and the active towards the others, require continuous attention and intensity, and it is the inner life the one that keeps the key to both⁹. This life is understood as a treasure to discover, as a seed that germinates with dedication, as a wealth received that must be communicated¹⁰.

The Jesuit, Javier Melloni, beautifully expresses that the contrary of interiority is not exteriority, but superficiality. Interiority and superficiality are the opposite in what they correspond to two incompatible dispositions before God, before the environment and before oneself: superficiality lives from the quantity; interiority lives from quality; one from compulsivity, the other from gratuity; one from security, the other from trust; one from immediacy, the other from slow processes that take shape in the depth of the human heart.

⁷ *La interioridad en la pedagogía de Sofía Barat*, Josefina ESCARTÍN, rscj, Madrid 1997, 62.

⁸ *Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat talks to us about inner life*, 57.

⁹ Janet Erskine STUART, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, Madrid 19152, 109.

¹⁰ *Life at the Sacred Heart Schools*, 17.

On the other hand, exteriority, does not conflict with inner life, it supplements it. It is the place of its verification¹¹.

The cultivation of interiority is the source that enables us to invigorate our presence in the world and make it clearer. In order to take care of this inner dimension as educators, and this is a growing responsibility, we need to protect certain daily spaces of silence and incorporate them to our ordinariness. In our centers, we would have to be able to offer training to teachers for them to be initiated in a path of contemplation in the everyday, just as they are offered language courses, we would have to provide them with times and spaces during the school day wherein they can learn the language of the heart.

Silence enriches life

We daily observe that in our times, silence is devalued, more in the occidental culture than in the oriental one. Let's hope we do not discover too late that without moments of silence life is blocked, it gets sick. Silence is the matrix from where we learn to receive, as a kid in the womb of her mother when it is forming. These are required for life to fructify those times when we have nothing to do, nothing to achieve, only to remain in a loving silence.

Janet Stuart, being Superior General, was impacted by the silence before starting class when she visited a class for girls at a school in Japan. When she went back to Europe, she stated the need for this silence, for these spaces of pacifying loneliness children need to mature, she says: "It is very advantageous to not always be under the tightness of competition...but to have intermediates of relative loneliness, in silence and complete freedom, even if you are not completely alone...with the possibility of not doing, for a few minutes, a thing other than living and breathing, enjoying the outside and the light of the sun. Without these times of rest, current life conditions and nervous constitutions will produce temperaments incapable of rest and solitude"¹².

How prophetic and actual her words turn over one hundred years after. Many times we find ourselves incapable of this solitude and this repairing rest that enables us to contemplate and receive things from the gentle side of life. That is why nature is therapeutic for us; it heals us from our eagerness when we contemplate it offered in the patient pace of its seasons, without asking us for anything, surrendering to us gratuitously and silently.

We need to include in our actions a contemplative rest, which will heal us from activism and the compulsivity in tasks, and which will return us serenity in action and a community sense of existence. Pope Francis indicates this: "Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others"¹³.

There is a story about an elementary-school teacher who started class with a moment of inner calm each morning. Children became aware of their breathing for a while; they called it "their moment of quiet". One day she tells them as class was about to begin: "I want to apologize because yesterday I was a little rough on you; I was not so patient as I should have, I am very sorry". One kid stood up and said: "Well miss, can that be because yesterday we did not have a moment of quiet?"

¹¹ Javier MELLONI (Col.), *Interiority, an emerging paradigm*, PPC, Madrid 2004, 87-104.

¹² Janet Erskine STUART, *The Education of Catholic Girls*. Barcelona 1921, 129.

¹³ *Laudato Si*, 209.

Kids are eager to learn how to go within, how to quite this site in their interior, and we need to go down there each day to be able to lead them. Silence does not take anything away from us, it returns us everything but enriched, with another look, with another quality of presence.

Closing the eyes in order to see

In these times, at least regarding European reality from which I come, the paradigm of interiority strongly bursts in education, through editorials, course, meditation proposals in schools...each time it is addressed more naturally, and spiritual competence enters into the classrooms. For us, it is a confirmation and a joy to observe how factors, which already were present in our tradition with a lot of energy, are now reappraised. The leafs of the trees of the Sacred Heart are changing, from age to age, but the sap circulating through its centennial roots keeps nurturing us today.

Sophie writes in the study plan for 1806: “The goal...is to adorn the spirit of the young girls with the study of literature and all useful subjects of knowledge, shaping their heart for virtue and, above all, inspire them with respect and love for Christian religion, as well as simplicity in their behavior, modesty, sense of economy and work”.

It is exciting, bridging the gap between words, the great resonance this wish currently achieves in our educational mission: the sense of harmonizing the multiple dimensions of the person, without one unbalancing before others, because only a harmonized life can be a life that irradiates. Sophie wants to educate complete, upright women, and the learning she proposes goes from within to the outside¹⁴. She participates from this view of the wisdom dimension that links contemplation and sense of work because, as Pope Francis states, “Once our human capacity for contemplation and reverence is impaired, it becomes easy for the meaning of work to be misunderstood”¹⁵.

Sophie does not understand religion as the lesson of a system of values or ideas which needed to be instilled; for her it means “re-bonding”, placing each girl in connection with Jesus. And, for this, it was necessary that her teachers also lived this experience. Inasmuch as it becomes for us something desirable, as it nurtures our everyday, to that extent, as by osmosis, it will also be for the children. Sophie said: “nothing acts as powerfully in the spirit as example”¹⁶.

Janet Stuart, years later, will not cease reminding us that we educate with what we are and that when what we transmit is something imposed children perceive it. She states: “if we sincerely believe in God, we will talk broadly, confidently and blessedly fine...Children understand, when they are carefully taught, that god loves each of them intimately and passionately, and that He asks for their love in return”¹⁷. The soul of the world flares up from the impulse of this love and the soul of children senses it.

Our spirituality implies a *mysticism of open eyes*, of commitment, of passion for concretizing our place as mediators of the love of God in history, but in order to look at the world from

¹⁴ In a certain way, she wanted her lives to extend towards, as the Pope tells us, the several levels of ecological balance: “the internal with oneself, the solidary with all the others, the natural with all living beings and the spiritual with God”. Cf. *Laudato sí*, 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 186-187.

¹⁶ *Constitutions of 1815*, 8-12.

¹⁷ *Catholic education*, 8-12.

Him, we need to look within, on a daily basis, with Him. Paul Gaugin said, when he was about to start a new work of art: “I close my eyes in order to see”.

Second Part

In order to start this second part I want to ask you once more to close our eyes, to breath, to place ourselves before the Presence...Let us receive over us, as a gentle rain, this music, a current vocalized version of “Jesus joy of men”, the last part of the cantata composed by Johan Sebastian Bach for Advent of 1723, specifically to be interpreted for the feast of Visitation, inspired on the light of the look of those two women, Elizabeth and Mary, when they mutually share the joy inside them:

“Jesus is my joy,
the happiness and comfort to my heart.
Jesus is the balm for every suffering,
the strength in my life,
the jubilation and light of my eyes,
the treasure and delight of my soul,
this is why I will never let Jesus
(I will never let life)
get away from my heart and my eyes”.

Educating for astonishment

Janet Stuart was a great lover and observer of nature, her way of contemplating it with astonishment and drawing learning from it about human condition, made me remember the story of Jane Goodall, the woman who spent many years of her life researching chimpanzees from Gombe, in Tanzania. She says: “the long hours I spent with them have enriched by life beyond imaginable”. When she was a four year old girl, Jane had worried her parents when she disappeared for several hours; she was at the stable waiting for a hen to lay an egg. This had been her first “zoological observation”. Afterwards, in her work, she was criticized for naming the chimpanzees instead of giving numbers to them and, nevertheless, her research method was exactly based on her ability to feel empathy and joy. She called the first chimpanzee that came near her “David”, she was sitting beside him when she saw a dried fruit on the ground; she picked it up and offered it to him on the palm of his hand. She shares that, at first, David looked away but, then, he looked at her in the eye, grabbed the fruit, threw it on the ground and gently squeezed her hand...From the origins of life, what we desire the most are not “things” but company.

Children claim this company in a time where most of the parents spend so many hours outside the home. We need to offer them presence and look, sustained attention to their development. Sophia encouraged her sisters: “Look after the girls at all times. Be always there to help them and encourage them. Let your presence resemble the presence of God”¹⁸.

In order to teach us how to sculpt the heart of children, Sophie and Janet, want to provide us with that look capable of recognizing and encouraging anything incipient. That way of looking entails an artisans’ work, of patient modelling, over the precious and fragile clay of

¹⁸ *Constitutions 1815*, n. 199.

children. In the way God looks at us, educating is co-creating; help them to continue being illuminated by new potentialities.

Educating for astonishment is educating the child in appreciation for life, for the beauty and mystery that surrounds him.¹⁹ In the Bible, when God saw for the first time his creation, He looks at it astonished, He sees good and precious all He has created (Gn 1, 31). We are born with that look, with that *original blessing*, we lose it along the way and the entire journey of our life is to experience it again over us to be able to offer it. That *primordial look* that justifies existence, which tells a child: “You are welcome to this world”. A look that transmits confidence as an experience of safety; and confidence as audacity for facing the world and taking risks.

Our educational mission requires prayer and astonishment, because we need to receive daily that look that sees us as *good and precious* in order to be able to provide it to the children. Sometimes we are blinded by rush and self-centering, and we experience other kinds of looks, also in the passages from the Gospel, looks from those who murmur, from those who look with distrust, from those who do not expect anything new, from those who keep their eyes in what is missing, looks that darken and hurt. These are *arrow looks* that stab anywhere they see or which ignore and do not see. Once someone told me about another person: “for years, he has been looking at me without seeing me”. We can look at children without really seeing them. Before those looks of disprove, give volume to the looks that make us good, the glass look that , that lets us be, that offers trust...that instead of underlying the limit makes us realize the gift. Children constantly need to receive these *glass looks* in order to grow, they claim these looks.

The Cuban Dulce María Loínez was a consecrated poet when she remembers the unforgettable look of her mother when saying goodbye to her at the door of their home: “She looked at me for an instant, with her look capable of embellishing me and told me goodbye...Touched with this seraphic sign, with that confidence in her eyes, suddenly all constriction and slouching disappeared from me”²⁰. Children need looks which do not disfigure their image, but that light the best they have: “offering the powerful relief of knowing something is expected from them”²¹.

Looking at children’s eyes today is a pedagogic urgency. Return the shine and the light to their look would have to be a basic competence, a curricular content and a methodologic tool. Lighting their eyes is bringing them back home, their home; their heart²²; wakening their ability to be astonished before the beauty of life, and helping them heal whatever has been wounded, so that no wound imposes a destiny to them²³. This way of looking is, in itself, a way of loving.

Mother Stuart reminds us that children do not trust their secrets but to the ones they love²⁴, and Sophie insists on conquering the heart of the girls: “You all should have a sincere and tender affection for them...It will be love without weakness, without excessive familiarities,

¹⁹ Catherine L’ECUYER, *Educating for astonishment*, Plataforma Actual 2015.

²⁰ Cited in B. GONZÁLEZ BUELTA, “*See or perish*”, *Mysticism of open eyes*, Sal Terrae 2006, 39.

²¹ *Catholic education*, 61-62.

²² José María TORO, *Educating with “co-reason”*, in Spanish it is “co-heart”, Desclée de Brower 2005.

²³ Boris CYRULINK, *Ugly ducklings. Resilience: an unhappy childhood does not determine a destiny*, Gedisa 2009.

²⁴ *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 79.

without preferences or attention to appearances and exterior qualities. It will be a tender a delicate love, but noble, pure and disinterested”²⁵. This love is essential in our educating task, Aristotle said about some who approached him: “I cannot teach them anything, they do not love me”...Sophie insists on conquering and modeling the heart, in shaping the most intimate and hidden of each one, because she knows it also is, paradoxically, the door through which the world enters in us. The destiny of the heart is to be given away.

Offered to the world

Janet Stuart was 13 years old when her brother Douglas told her that every live being had a goal and a purpose in life, and asked her “What is yours?” Her search started there. Afterwards, Janet would tell her sisters: “We have to remember that each one of the girls is destined to a mission in life. Neither we nor they know what that is, but we have to help them discover their own mission and value it”. She wanted to lead other to discover how to live the journey of their lives, how to put their gift to circulate.

In a way this experience was tried to be transmitted through the prizes given to the girls, which were at the same time acknowledgment and responsibility, gift and task. They wanted to make them feel that they belonged in a broader family and that the world did not end with them. The purpose of education was for them to learn to progressively broaden their interests, in the way of concentric circles, going from the school environment to the family environment, from their immediate relations to the least and more extensive relations of their city, country, until they reached the entire world, as place of God, as the space where He requires us, until they could understand that “every need, suffering or disgrace is for the students of the Sacred Heart, a call”²⁶.

Sophie uses an expression with a heavy compassionate load in our times: *Edifying the world without hurting it*²⁷, building it without damaging it...that children and young people may discover their place in the world as instruments of the proximity and the love of God with all the beings of the earth²⁸. As Pope Francis indicates, when he speaks about education and ecological spirituality, we need educators capable of reformulating the pedagogic itineraries of an ethics of ecology, “in a way they can effectively help to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care”²⁹. It is exciting for this petition of the Pope, for a spirituality that nourishes the passion for the care of the world, of the common home, is in the origins of our educating mission. Sophie also shared her view that it is not possible to be committed to big things only with doctrines, without a mysticism that encourages us³⁰. Educators need to be men and women with a contemplative disposition.

A nourishing educational framework

There is a history in the Gospel that shows the need for inner life of children to be supported jointly. It is in chapter 5 of the Gospel of Marcos. I want us to look together the scene when

²⁵ *Constitutions 1815*, n. 201.

²⁶ *Life at the Sacred Heart Schools*, 16.

²⁷ *Constitutions 1815*, n. 176.

²⁸ *Laudato si*, 217.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 187.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 192.

Jesus arrives to the house of Jairo and He is told that his presence is no longer required, that the girl has died. Jesus, without giving way to these words, invites them not to fear and to trust, and states with conviction: *“the girl is not dead, she is sleeping”* (Mk 5, 39). He introduces the father and the mother, the two sources of our existence; and the disciples with whom he lived in greater intimacy into the girl’s room, as if he wanted to indicate us that everyone is needed in order to wake her. Jesus came close to her and grabbing her hand He said: *“Thalita kum, little one, I am telling you this, stand up!”* In that moment the girl stood up and started walking. She was twelve years old” (Mk 5, 41). Then he told those who were home to feed her.

Like Jesus in this history, we need to invert our look, our contact, the voice...to jointly nurture the interiority of children: educators, school’s personnel, families, nuns...We all need each other; we are all part of this network of relationships, of this educational framework which will enable their lives to deploy with health, solidarity and beauty. Educate in a corporative manner as to enable their affections, their intelligence, and their heart to wake up...that all their corporality may stand up and recover its movement towards a life in love.

The links we weave each day are more important than yields. These links created within institutions, when healthy, are the emotional weaving which protects and accompanies the life of children. School becomes a living community offering grounds, food and encouragement for them to grow. That is how Jacques Lusseyran expresses it when he remembers his childhood: *“Even today, when I think about my childhood, I experience that feeling over me, behind me, around me. That wonderful impression of not yet living on my own behalf; but completely leaning, in heart and soul, on other lives which accept me”*³¹. We need to be able to offer children acceptance, emotional strength, networks of love and understanding, capable of nurturing their ambitions.

Inasmuch as we accompany one another to inhabit this profound dimension of life we will be able to transmit the quiet and warmth children and youth need. This desire is encompassed for us in the icon of Mater who governs our schools. She shows us an interiorized way of being in this life and shows us to see the ordinary of school weave, with its lights and shadows, as the privileged place wherein to make the experience of the loving passage of God.

Strengthening joy

Two women have accompanied us to this moment, and two others are going to guide us in our final stretch. Rose Philippine and Ana du Rousier, the latter received the blessing of Philippine before she died so she could take the Society of the Sacred Heart to South America. These are women of light feet, adventurers, who dared to transit roads for which there were no maps yet, who built bridges towards us and landscapes quite different from those they were used to; touched by the world they discovered and eager to make it more human, more for God.

They talk to us about audacity, loyalty to dreams, generosity and risk to face unexpected situations. The certainty that the Spirit guides history, took them to overcome difficulties and fears, and to dare to embark in novel itineraries. Their own biographies prefigure what

³¹ J. LUSSEYRAN, 10.

Pope Francis tells us: “how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace”³².

Each one, in its own way, teaches us that only from a contemplative look we can open to the world without fearing it, recognize its sorrows without avoiding them, and train to overcome everything that prevents us from empathy and proximity. They invite us to choose cooperation instead of competition, generosity instead of greed, life together with others instead of individualism³³. They also show us how to increase confidence, particularly in difficult situations.

Like them, we, in our times, need *creative presences* that help us turn things around, to look things from another perspective, to live them from a favorable view and disposition. Creativity for appreciating instead of complaining; creativity for transcending.

There is a story about two friends that are on a bridge, one of them says: “Contemplate the joy of the fish in the river!” But the other one replies: “How do you know about the joy of fish if you are not a fish?” The first one answers: “because of my joy on the bridge”³⁴.

Children need this joy in order to learn and it is urgent to strengthen it. Educators are not only responsible for the work; we are also responsible for the happiness. We cannot manufacture it, but we can favor the conditions in which it is produced; it sprouts from the positive assessment of things and from gratitude. Etymologically, *humor* comes from *humus*, soil, as does *humility*. It means we can accept with love our own soil and laugh at ourselves, sometimes. Certain dose of humor is like a medicine for ordinary circumstances and conflicts. Joy lightens us; it takes heaviness away from us.

When I have taught in school, sometimes I saw *overloaded* companions: they had to complete many reports, learn to manage new internet programs, grade tests, catch up in all subjects...Their vitality and optimism decreased, as if they lost light. Today, it is essential for our mission; more primary than any other competence, recover the quiet and joy of educators. It would be quite desirable that, from directive teams of the centers, proposals are implemented for said purpose. Because only before presences that release *well-being* and *good-being*, may children grow trusting and surrender to life.

Philippine and Ana show us, on their own vital journeys, that “effort and joy are distinctive features” in our way of educating³⁵, that the spirit of the corporation strengthens with a “joyful discipline”³⁶, and that it is a challenge to cultivate in classes an atmosphere of “comforting joy”³⁷.

The small book about *Life at the Sacred Heart Schools* closes with these words: “The great work for which the *joyful years* of their education prepares them is making known to the world the immense love of the Heart of Jesus”. Ultimately, it is to initiate them along with others; from serious work and shared joy; for this journey of love that constitutes existence.

³² *Ibid*, 15.

³³ Sofia BARANDA, rscj. *Women who build the world without hurting it*, Chile 2001.

³⁴ José María TORO, *Mi alegría sobre el puente. Mirando la vida con los ojos del corazón*, (Translation: My joy over the bridge. Looking at life with the eyes of the heart). Desclée de Brower, Bilbao 2015.

³⁵ *Life at Sacred Heart Schools*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

Interiority is the pantry of the heart in this journey, the inhabited space from where to cluster the strengths of life and begin the path, each time, with a new sense.

Youth need faces that live what they say; that show them trust in life, despite being fully conscious of the sorrows of our times; and which give them reasons for loving and caring for it. A contemplative sensitivity is, first of all, receptivity, loving empathy, opening to the God who shows himself in his creatures and courage to walk in accordance with what is seen and experienced.

As Jacques Lusseyran – the child from our story – grew; this inner world he had discovered after going blind started spreading within him an impressive relational and social life that took him to commit himself to healing the wounds of his times. Maybe he went further and deeper than his exterior eyes could have taken him; he writes: “I discover the light of joy...and then I only withheld this lesson: God exists, but God does not show himself to us directly; you have to guess Him, meet Him in our happiest dreams, in all the secrets nature tells us. He never interrupts his presence...”

What good fortune if children and youth at our schools could experience in their daily realities the immeasurable closeness, the irresistible love of a God who never interrupts his presence. What a gift for us it would be if they finished school feeling their lives blessed and with the assignment of being carriers of gifts exactly where they are: in their families, in their jobs, in their countries...in any setting where they write their stories. Having been able to give them the internal resources required for living in this world, not with anguish and arrogance; but with humbleness, generosity and trust.

Thinking about this treasure of our roots, I wish I had been a student at the Sacred Heart. Maybe most of you were not students at our centers either; but once we come across the education of the Sacred Heart, we do have the opportunity for Sophie, Janet, Philippine, Ana...and all the women of light who have lived before us to “visit us”, greet us in the way Elizabeth and Mary do; accompanying us in the task of modeling our heart and growing in this profound dimension of life: the more contemplative, the more human; the more interior, the more compassionate... And, to the extent that this is a vital experience in us; children and young people will receive in an overflow. A Sufi saying, with which I want to conclude, expresses this in a beautiful way: “Your teacher is not that from whom you hear speeches; but that whose presence transforms you”.

Thank you very much for your attention!

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