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# CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG

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of Ministry  
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# CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG

**Fundamental orientation** by which formation, full human and Christian fulfillment and the happiness of children and young people constitute the core of our Mission.

## FOUNDATION IN THE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE OF CALASANZ

The contemporary philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) of Calasanz, expresses what most seventeenth-century society thought of childhood: *“As soon as children begin to be right, there is nothing but blindness and weakness in them: They have a closed spirit for spiritual things and cannot understand them. On the contrary, they have their eyes open for evil; his senses are susceptible to all corruption and have a natural weight that conducts them to it.”* Obviously, it is a very negative vision of the child that other thinkers of the time also shared: Montaigne, Luis Vives, Thomas Hobbes (Cubells: 65).

Calasanz acquires a very deep knowledge of the children through the direct experience he has with them and a full confidence in the potentialities that they have as children of God with a vocation of fullness. His experience of faith helped him discover in children, the image of God, the person of Christ in such a way that he writes: *“I like to serve poor children because in them I see Jesus Christ.” “If our people who have gone to that country (Germany) took into account what is done to a poor child, Jesus Christ receives it in his own person, I am sure that they would be more diligent.”*

Consider that in the poor children there is the living presence of Jesus Christ as I remembered in the Constitutions quoting the gospel: *“What you did with a brother of mine of those little ones, you did it with me.”* (CC n<sup>o</sup>. 4).

The veneration he had for the children expressed in gestures of deep respect such as entering the classes with the bonnet in their hands out of respect for the little ones, putting their hands on their heads and making them the sign of the cross or, on their knees, preparing calligraphy samples and cut bird feathers for the next day’s class. Also, when he found a student on the street, he came forward to greet him.

In the daily experience in the classrooms, he discovers that children are like *tender plants and easy to straighten and that if they are not cultivated (educated), they could harden and become difficult, if not impossible, to orient* (Memorial cardinal Tonti n<sup>o</sup>. 15). Therefore, the earlier the educational process begins, it will be easier to educate children because they have not yet been corrupted by sin that destroys the image of God.

Because of original sin, the child is easily inclined to evil and the good impulses of nature and grace received at baptism lose strength. Therefore, we must preserve children from evil and induce them towards good through letters and spirit, good customs and manners, the light of God and the world (Tonti No. 9). In this way, you can predict a happy course of their life.

1 CUBELLS, F (1992) “El niño en Calasanz”. *Manual de Cursillos Calasancios*. ICCE. Madrid.

Education is a way of collaborating with the divine work of “salvation of body and soul” and it is also very much appreciated by God, much more than the conversion of a sinner, although it gives joy to heaven; because not only many offenses against God are repented at school, but many others are kept daily in baptismal innocence, and consequently, most of those who, if they died in their youth, would be condemned for being condemned the faults perhaps committed unscrupulously and lightly, and confessed without contrition, if not silent (Tonti n<sup>o</sup>. 13)

On one occasion he writes to Cardinal Dietrichstein: “While he (Fr. Pelegrino) is religious of great zeal, however, he should not lead everyone to perfection in the same way, but according to the talent of each one” (EP 2441).

Children have natural and supernatural gifts (talents) that are a gift from God. It is up to the teacher to discover the “inner inclination” or impulse of the Holy Spirit to help them on their way to holiness. To educate would be to help discover the talents of each child to develop them to the maximum of their abilities.

In short: the person (the child) has been created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, it receives the same divine nature (original grace) that unfolds in the potentialities (talents). Sin damages the image of God in the person and prevents him from developing his original vocation. Only the help of grace can restore this damaged image and restore its splendor.

The transmission of culture (letters) and spiritual development (piety) is the means to achieve the first purpose of Calasanzian education: to achieve full life (holiness): *The goal that our Congregation intends with the exercise of the Pious Schools is the education of the child in Christian piety and in human science to, with this formation, reach eternal life* (CC 203). To educate in piety and letters would be to collaborate in the “salvation of body and soul.”

Father Cubells makes a brief study of how Calasanz understands the teacher’s relations with the child, taking as a basic reference the letters, he wrote<sup>2</sup>:

1. The child is deserving of great respect which implies that the teacher must treat him with delicacy and courtesy. Children should not be told insulting words or nicknames. The chronicles collect beautiful testimonies of the affection with which Calasanz treated them.
2. The child is worthy of being respected in his own identity. Everyone has a story and talents of their own. They should not lead everyone to Christian perfection in the same way, but according to each person’s way of being (EP 1910). A gesture of this attitude of respect is that Jewish children were exempted from acts of piety and catechesis.
3. The child receives the contents of the teaching adapted to the evolutionary age he has. Therefore, try to separate small students from older. He believes that these little ones, at least until 10 years old, need signs of tenderness, which are forbidden to the elderly, that is why their teachers must be priests or the elderly<sup>3</sup>. Consider that youthful age is the time of life most pleasing to God
4. The child has the capacity to pray, especially when he is younger. Calasanz encourages practicing continuous prayer in school because God hears children’s prayer (EP 1875).

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2 CUBELLS, F (1992) oc.

3 (Dichiarazioni alle Costituzioni, en Reg. Cal. XL5).

5. The child has the capacity to learn when it is done “with the love of the Father”. He believed students capable of proposing a goal or level of profit that the studies intended to achieve (Letter 1245), as he considered them fit to experience their own achievement (Letter 1 155). He believes that for a student to be educated he must be in grace of God, because he is convinced that frequent communion and confession illuminate understanding and strengthen the will (Letter 309 1 and Letter 2590), and that godliness helps them in the study, as well as this one should help them in godliness.
6. The child is more sensitive to positive stimuli than punishment. He had no doubt that children are able to capture and appreciate the love of their teachers (Letter 150 and Letter 782), especially when they love their school achievements (Letter 354) and that students do not overlook the diligence with which, eager to help them, their educators work (Letter 567).
7. The child is sensitive to justice. Students may be shocked at the teacher’s anger (Letter 723). On the contrary, they are attracted by their Christian exemplarity. They are also able to capture the kindness and mercy of the one who imposes a punishment on them, to the point of not feeling it when they see in that father’s love. even when they recognize that they deserve greater punishment.
8. The child is usually weak in will. Therefore, Calasanz prevents students from having opportunities to miss. Students should not be left alone without anyone taking care of them. It is necessary to monitor them, he also considered that the students are in danger of yielding to the mutual attractiveness until little exemplary extremes

## IN TODAY’S PIOUS SCHOOLS

In the document “Evangelize educating with calasanzian style”<sup>4</sup> the calasanzian school is described from the perspective of the student, the educator and the educational action taking as reference the long pedagogical tradition.

The student is (nº 25):

1. An active subject and protagonist of his educational process.
2. He must be responsible for his own talents.
3. It is the living presence of Christ whom the educator welcomes and serves.
4. He is a child of God with all his development potential.
5. It is preferably poor.

Where the following options are derived (nº 26):

1. Have a preference for poor children: students with special educational needs, school failure, social and family integration.
2. Welcome all students, regardless of their religious confession.
3. Awaken in the student the interest in learning and their ability to analyze.
4. Open the student to a progressive and explicit experience of faith.
5. Profess maximum respect, esteem and hope in the abilities of the students.
6. Encourage students to participate in the Christian community.

The document recalls that “*the search for the child’s happiness derives into a **pedagogy of holiness**. That is, that which is carried out through an educational-evangelizing process that leads him to discover his deepest identity and saves the entire person from the slavery of ignorance and sin, which takes him away from the project of Jesus*” (nº 29-3).

Precisely Pope Francis remembers in his letter “Gaudete et Exultate” the call that we all have to holiness: *The Lord asks for everything, and what he offers is true life, the happiness for which we were created. He loves us saints and does not expect us to settle for a mediocre,*

4 CGEP (1999) *Misión compartida en las Escuelas Pías*. ICCE. Madrid.

watery, liquefied existence. Actually, from the first pages of the Bible the call to holiness is present in various ways. Thus, the Lord proposed to Abraham: “Walk in my presence and be perfect” (Gen 17: 17).

## PROPOSALS TO INCLUDE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

One of the ways to promote “the centrality of children and young people in the Pious Schools” should be to evaluate the inclusion of some indicators in the educational project as proposed in the document “The identity of our ministry”:

1. Knowledge and analysis of the basic profiles of the reality of the children and youth of the school.
2. Reflection on the most relevant issues that affect children and youth.
3. Make organizational decisions from the centrality in children and youth: calendar, schedules, budget, infrastructure.
4. Design and implementation of reception plans at school taking into account the reality of children.
5. Design and application of educational and pastoral processes from the evolutionary reality of children and youth.
6. Knowledge and application of Child Protection protocols.
7. Publicize the opinion of the school on the best way to raise awareness about the situation of children and youth.
8. Apply the Child Protection protocols.
9. Networking is promoted as a means of expanding knowledge, experience and impact on the reality of children and youth. Both internal networks (Piarist), as external.

In addition, we collect other proposals that derive from the conviction of putting students at the center of the entire educational process:

1. Offer channels for students to actively participate in making decisions about the classroom school and the educational process.
2. Implement work methodologies, debate and decision mechanisms based on cooperation and agreement between stakeholders.

3. Implement processes for students to gradually assume the exclusive or shared areas of “power” and responsibility that correspond to them.
4. Develop training plans and programs to meet the peculiarities of each child.
5. Write a framework for child protection accepted and internalized by all members of the educational institution.
6. Promote active positions in the protection, regeneration and management of the environment. To promote an education about consumption, which develops a critical spirit in the face of the constant pressure that the consumer society is subject to.
7. Promote a “full-time school” where students have the widest possible educational offer where they develop their talents.
8. Develop a pastoral from “processes” in which students participate as active subjects on the road to the Piarist Christian community, where they will live their faith.
9. Welcome students in their cultural, racial and religious diversity.

## ATTITUDES OF THE CALASANZIAN EDUCATOR BEFORE THE STUDENTS

To realize the primary purpose of calasanzian education, educators with a “great spirit and called with a particular vocation” are needed (Tonti No. 24); “Men of apostolic life, very simple” (Tonti n° 26), “cooperators of the truth”. They must be people with a full life, a strong spirituality and horizons in life.

The deep respect and love for the students derives into a constant effort to adapt to the realities of the students: “Try YR to accredit that our Brother *Juan Bautista*, of the first class, not only to the students, but also to all those can and encourage him to be diligent and to accommodate the ability of the students not only to teach the common tongue but also to teach and treat all students with kindness, so that they know that he seeks his benefit from the heart and thus will encourage to the students to be diligent in the schools and then they will more easily attracted to the service of God, which is our great gain! (EP. 1488).

Calasanz encourages teachers to show (to students) a great love as a father and teaching them with such affection, that students know that they want to take advantage of it, because this will encourage them to be



diligent in class, and then they will more easily be attracted to the service of God, which is our gain. (EP 0354).

Love makes it possible for the relationship with students to be really educational. From there you can derive some attitudes of the teacher that help students to grow comprehensively<sup>5</sup>.

1. Address students by their name and with affection.
2. Adapt to students' capacity for understanding
3. Listen carefully to students' concerns.
4. Talk to students with delicacy and respect, without shouting or vulgarity
5. Identify the qualities and talents of the students.
6. Promote that students integrate socially in the group.
7. Know the students' family.
8. Make fair corrections avoiding corporal or psychological punishment.
9. Do not show special affections to some students over others.
10. Show interest in what the student lives also outside the classroom.
11. Engage in educational activities on a voluntary basis.
12. Be honest and authentic in personal relationships.
13. Guide students in their problems and concerns.
14. Show sympathy and humor in your relationship with students.
15. Be fair in the evaluation processes.

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<sup>5</sup> ALONSO, J (2017). *Santidad para el cambio social. El modelo educativo escolapio*. Madrid PPC.



## REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN GROUPS

- *Share your opinion about Calasanz's vision of children is.*
- *How do you understand the calasanzian expression: (The educational ministry) is very worthy, to deal with salvation, together, of the soul and body? (Tonti No. 7)*
- *What concrete proposals does the school make for educators to know and value the reality of students, their families and the environment? How do you value it?*
- *How is the educational and pastoral proposal of the school in relation to the evolutionary reality of children?*
- *Do you consider the school a safe environment where child protection protocols are applied?*
- *How is the proposal of psych pedagogical orientation of the school organized? Do you think that it responds to the needs of each particular child?*
- *How does the school's educational project offer opportunities to develop students' talents?*
- *Tell concrete experiences that you have had with the students where you have had to respond to their own particularity.*
- *Evaluate how your relationship with students is.*