



Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido
150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

Discernment in Mother Candida

By Melba del Pilar Neris Guzmán FI
Licey al Medio (Santiago de los Caballeros – República Dominicana)

The celebration of 150 years since the birth of the Congregation, as the Determination of the GC XVIII points out, is an invitation “to deepen on our identity so as to live in the midst of the world as true Hijas de Jesús”. This desire leads us to dedicate time and space. On this occasion we will dedicate ourselves to the reality of **discernment** in the life of Mother Candida to illuminate ours, as heirs of her charism.

Having the opportunity to peek into congregational writings from this aspect, provokes a feeling of confirmation, gratitude and commitment, due to the diachronic and synchronic consistency that it has in our Institute. We cannot doubt that it is a gift of the Spirit, an inherent part of our charism and vocation.

Both Mother Candida and St. Ignatius use the word discretion to express this very essential element of their charisms. Discretion speaks of “prudence and tact to judge and act” from God. That is to say, it implies the human and the spiritual, as the Dictionary of Ignatian Spirituality points out, “it responds to a deep longing and responds to a real problem” since the aspiration is to seek and find God's will for one's life, after putting in order what is ambiguous on the human level.

In the book of the Exercises this concept only appears twice, as *discretion*. Nevertheless, the proposal of the Spiritual Exercises is all a method and dynamic for discernment. It is this way in St. Cándida, in her letters the concept does not appear, and all of them are her experience in the search for God's will. The expression that seems to substitute for this discernment is “to see before God,” as that expression appears a dozen times. When it comes to invoking the will of God, be it asking for light for it or wanting to fulfill it or accept it, quotes abound. In other words, discerning is hyper-present in the life of Mother Candida, although the terms are not the ones we currently know and use.

Along these lines, there is a new coincidence in Cándida María with Saint Ignatius, the word discretion spreads and moves freely in her Constitutions. In them, discretion or discreet charity runs like a tightly held common thread of what the preamble manifests: what the Spirit puts in our hearts is the most important law and has to guide us, but we need help to guarantee the way of proceeding. In other words, as the vocabulary of the Constitutions points out, this conception makes our Constitutions “a manual of discernment” rather than a book of rules and customs.



Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido 150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

Mother Candida's proposal is a way of being and acting in discernment because, above all, she felt urged to live like this. Therefore, there is no doubt that it is a charismatic grace. In her spiritual journal we can see clear signs of this. Her expression is well known to everyone: "I belong entirely to Jesus, tell me, my God, what you want me to do, I am ready to obey you in everything". This belonging to God in Jesus is the fundamental drive to be attentive to God's will. Her life, from a very young age, when her call was just showing the first signs, clearly manifests a deep desire to distinguish, know and do God's will, that is why she was not afraid to affirm in a concise and firm way: "I am only for God". And at the end of her life, when her illness overcame her, her person was recognized and valued for being unified by that desire.

The signs of discernment as a lifestyle are very abundant and clear in Mother Candida. For example, her friendships were based on that prudence that is a gift and a response; evidence of a woman who has an "intense familiarity with God", which infects others. To cite just one: her relationship with Fr. Joaquin Pérez Pando OP. In the MF Letters there appear more than a dozen addressed to this religious; and in the Historical Archive, 34. This friendship that lasted a lifetime and was nourished by frequent communication, was based, in addition to mutual affection, on the veneration felt by the Dominican towards Mother Candida, to such an extent that "he linked the special inspiration he felt, when delivering his sermons, to M. Candida's presence" (Letters MF 15. Page 43, Volume I).

Discernment arises from the meeting of creator and creature, Lover and beloved, the one giving what he has and can and the other wanting to reciprocate, also with love. Except that because of its (human) condition, said love has to be discerned. We can then say that discernment is the fruit of love, of "the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts" as the Preamble (CFI 3) beautifully expresses.

I would like to end this brief exposition about discernment in the life of Mother Candida with the process that she carried out for the missionary sending to Brazil. María Cruz reflects very well the path made and the inner dynamism that accompanied it, in her book "A quien quieres que envíe" ["Whom do you want me to send"] (2009). She herself points out, at the beginning of the book, "that Mother Candida entered into a deep discernment". She points out that after asking for generosity from everyone and receiving many offers, Mother needed: 1) to free herself from any conditioning that she may have had with people; 2) to give a second chance, even if they were not the most suitable; 3) healthy realism, human prudence to distinguish the best conditions according to the mission; 4) to consider academics in the Sisters; 5) to take into account the psychological disposition; 6) to verify identification with the charism, life of prayer, discernment (Cf. pp 13-16).



Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido 150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

In each sister sent, Mother Candida's desire to be moved solely by God's will is revealed. In each one, she could find qualities or reasons in the Lord for such sending. When the difficulty appeared, she dealt with it according to her discernment: "Respectful, understanding, direct and, above all, a true mother" (p. 40) This is expressed by Cruz because of Mother Cándida's reaction to Juana Uranga's comments about her fears of being chosen for the first expedition. She did not send her at that time, but she was not conditioned by this fragility of the sister or by others; on the second expedition she accepted her offer and sent her. We see Mother Candida displaying that freedom that the Spirit gives.

Definitely, we are facing a deeply human woman who opened herself profoundly to God. From this encounter this way of life and proceeding that we call discernment arises in her. For the Mother Candida Family, as Pope Francis exhorted us at the opening of the jubilee year: this year is for us to reflect on the charism, that will do us good. Let us review the road map... the compass is the founding charism and it will lead us to stay with courage and joy on the borders, with others. Discernment is still current because love does not go out of style. From the love with which the spirit moves us, we can respond to the challenges of today's world so convulsed because of wars, poverty, the cry, sometimes terrifying, of the earth, only if we discern, if we take that wise and healthy distance to gain freedom and take action from God, not from our appetites or illusions. Only then can we say with Saint Cándida "Frequently or whenever I am going to do something, I will have Jesus present and I will say: will this please God? If it pleases him, whatever it takes, I will do it, and if does not please him, even if they kill me, I won't do it."

Bibliography:

1. Amorós FI, Celia y Linde FI, Pilar (1989). Vocabulario de las Constituciones. Roma: Hijas de Jesús.
2. Arzubialde SJ, Santiago (2007). Discretio, en Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana. GEI. Madrid: Mensajero/ Sal Terrae.
3. Buckley SJ, Michael J., (2007). Discernimiento, en Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana. GEI. Madrid: Mensajero/ Sal Terrae.
4. Francisco (8 diciembre 2020). Video mensaje a las Hijas de Jesús. Roma.
5. Hijas de Jesús (Mayo 2019). Determinación Congregación General XVIII. Roma.
6. Laso FI, Inés, (1978) De Juana Josefa Cipitria a Cándida María de Jesús. San Sebastián.
7. Lucía FI, Teresa (Ed.) (1983). Madre Cándida María de Jesús. Cartas I y II. Madrid: BAC.