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A New Vision for Education Towards Fraternal Humanism

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Abstract: This article considers three fundamental perspectives for Catholic education, all mentioned in the encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* of Paul VI, which have also been present in the teachings of successive pontiffs. The first perspective is the need to build a new civilization and the idea that "the world suffers due to lack of thought." The second perspective is the idea that "there is no true humanism but in the opening to the Absolute." The third perspective is the idea that at the origin of injustice there is a lack of fraternity. The second Vatican Council stated that "true education should promote the formation of the human person both in view of its ultimate purpose and for the good of different societies." This invitation of the Council Fathers is still very current and is directed especially to those who have positions of responsibility in the world of education. The article is adapted with minor modifications from an address at the closing session of the OIEC World Congress held in New York in June 2019.

The title of OIEC's World Congress, *Educatio Si*, is inspired by a document of our Congregation. It evokes the encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* in which St. Paul VI (1967), who visited the United Nations on October 4, 1965, suggested an alternative path for the realization of a new humanity that would avoid falling into the temptations of sterile oppositions between countries and barbaric warfare.

The Holy See, in its diplomatic activity at the service of reconciliation, peace and integral development, has ever since been inspired by that message. In the context of growing interdependence, the path of dialogue and subsidiarity is preferable to that of conflict. In the words of Paul VI,

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some activities of the Church and the State are, in a way, complementary, and the good of the individual and of the community of the peoples requires an open dialogue and a sincere understanding between the Church on the one hand and the states on the other, to establish, foster and strengthen the relations of mutual understanding, coordination and mutual collaboration and to prevent or to remedy any disagreement, in order to reach the realization of great human hopes, of peace between nations, of internal tranquility and of the progress of each country.¹

This approach extends to multilateral diplomacy and international cooperation, as discussed in the documents of the Social Doctrine of the Church, in particular following the Second Vatican Council. *Gravissimum Educationis* (Paul VI, 1965) emphasizes in its conclusion the need for collaboration of educational entities at the diocesan, national and international levels, including with international organizations.

There is a profound convergence between *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI, 1967), the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* of Benedict XVI (2009), and the magisterium of Pope Francis. Three fundamental perspectives, all mentioned in the encyclical of Paul VI (1967), have been present in successive pontiffs. The first perspective is the need to build a new civilization and the idea that "the world suffers due to lack of thought" (no. 85). The second perspective is the idea that "there is no true humanism but in the opening to the Absolute" (no. 42). The third perspective is the idea that at the origin of injustice there is a lack of fraternity (no. 66). These are the three topics that I would like to explore today.

Knowing How To Think

In today's world marked by globalization, we must ask questions about the future of humanity. Long-term planning is necessary, but not simply to promote efficiency. While science, technology and economics may increase the reach of man, they do not necessarily improve his humanity. There is a risk for humanity to be placed in a society governed by algorithms which tend to be guided only by artificial intelligence, with serious and real risks of man simply becoming like a superficial and trivial machine.² We must have the courage to impart to young generations the value of "knowing how to think" to help them become truly free and creative, and avoid the risks of a disintegrating society.

Today more than ever, we need people who know how to think correctly so that they can make decisions with prudence, moderation and justice. Immersed as we are in the Areopagus of cultures and in the market of technologies, rethinking education means, above all, promoting the unity of knowledge as an antidote to the fragmentation and the disintegration of the sociocultural landscape.

¹ Paolo VI, *Motu Proprio Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*, 24 giugno 1969. Proemio.

² Morin, E. Prefazione, in M. Ceruti. 2018. *Il tempo della complessità*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano.

In particular, there is a need for trans-disciplinarity in knowledge to help extract, assimilate and integrate realms of knowledge that, unfortunately, remain too separate, compartmentalized, fragmented.

We need a new approach, a complex and orderly thought, that is capable of linking and articulating knowledge and not simply juxtaposing its different forms. In contrast to scientific knowledge from the outside, we also need a unification of knowledge from within. For this, given the anthropological, existential and epistemic principle of the unity of the person, we need to achieve integral formation of all its dimensions. The acquisition of knowledge and skills cannot be evaluated solely through social and professional affirmation. Rather, knowledge needs to contribute to relationships and to making oneself available to others to build the common good.

Discovering the Absolute

A second perspective consists in the idea that "there is no true humanism if it is not open to the Absolute" (Paul VI, 1967, no. 42). What is it to be human? An exclusive humanism is an inhuman humanism, as Paul VI affirms it, because it does not respect freedom, human dignity, and the orientation of life towards its ultimate end. *Populorum Progressio* moves us towards a truly integral humanism for the development of the whole man, and all men. Beyond the sciences, it is on a broader horizon that planetary humanism must be thought and encounters between different cultures must take place. We need to develop an ability to think about unity and multiplicity, and have the courage to face challenges together, to plunge into reality without fear and, above all, from an opening to the Absolute.

Only a non-reductive conception of humanity, which is neither material nor finite but open to transcendence, can "accompany children and young people in the human values present in all reality," Pope Francis tells us. A vertical dimension for man crosses the horizontal dimension so that, together, they lead man along paths of encounters with respect, esteem and mutual acceptance. In this way, reason is extended and enriched to move from pure science to wisdom and from logos to love.

This opening of the horizons of rationality takes place on the basis of a correct vision of man, which Pope Benedict XVI defines as *concrete anthropology*.³ Restricted reason corresponds to an abstract vision of man, while extended reason corresponds to a concrete anthropology that is adequate for the totality of reality. The "concrete historical experience" touches the "man in the deepest truth of his existence."⁴ By breaking the rules imposed by a certain formal rigidity, Christian humanism proposes a holistic synthesis in that encounter that is always more fruitful between the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Closing à priori the call of transcendence is the basis of an

³ Ide, P. 2007. *Le Christ donne tout*, in Benoit XVI, *une théologie del l'amour*, Paris, L'Emmanuel.

⁴ Benedetto XVI, *Discorso ai partecipanti al VI simposio europeo dei docenti universitari*, Roma, June 7, 2008.

inverse process that blocks the path of humanism from the root, and where there is no humanism—says Pope Francis—Christ cannot enter! He has the doors closed! The closing drama begins at the roots of rigidity.⁵

In this context, education must be sufficiently flexible in nature to be capable of overcoming the barriers of positivist formalism. It must involve not only the mind but also the hands and the heart. The fundamental contribution that the teaching of religion can give to develop an openness of the human being to transcendence is connected to this dimension.⁶ But in this horizon, a third perspective is also needed, that concerning solidarity and fraternity, to which I now come.

Promoting Solidarity and Fraternity

Development is needed to escape hunger, misery, disease, ignorance, and participate in the fruits of civilization while achieving humane living conditions. Universal solidarity, to which we are called, is a benefit for all, but it is also a duty of all. Paul VI calls for charity, inviting people, especially those with political responsibilities, to work "with all their heart and with all their intelligence" (Paul VI, 1967, no. 82) and to build a "civilization of love."

It is essential for the human person to be fully realized. This can be achieved only with openness to "you" and "we," because the person has been created capable of relationship, of dialogue, of synchronous and diachronic communion. Everyone has received something from others. We have to overcome the false idea of the autonomy of man, because we cannot be complete with only "I." Rather, we constantly grow through fraternal and solidary relationships with others, with the "we."

Today, we must understand human complexity and place our existence in its cosmic, physical, biological, social, cultural, and spiritual contexts. The challenge for the future consists in knowing how to become aware of the "community of destiny" of all peoples of the earth and the earth itself. We must return to the fundamental idea that humanity is constitutively incomplete and its manifestations are multiple, individual and cultural.

Education must be transformed and, in turn, will transform the world, and the principles of universal fraternity and solidarity serve as the basis of its organization. In its commitment to act for this purpose, the Church, with its many schools, present on all continents, is in harmony with the United Nations. The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 notes for example the importance of quality education and the responsibility of promoting learning opportunities for all, in all contexts, and at all educational levels.⁷

⁵ Papa Francesco, Discorso ai partecipanti al Congresso Mondiale promosso dalla Congregazione per l'Educazione Cattolica, 21 novembre 2015.

⁶ Congregazione per l'Educazione Cattolica, Lettera Circolare N. 520/2009 sull'insegnamento della religione nella scuola (5 maggio 2005), n. 10.

⁷ UNESCO, Declaración de Incheon y Marco de Acción para la realización del Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 4, Unesco, Incheon 2015, pp.7-8.

Yet as noted in *Laudato si* by Pope Francis, "the notion of the common good also involves future generations." This is why today's citizens must be in solidarity with their contemporaries wherever they are and at the same time with future citizens of the planet. This leads to a social responsibility for education. We need leaders who know how to find the paths to take, who respond to the needs of current generations without compromising future ones, who build a culture of intergenerational ethics.

The 2030 Agenda for Education aims to not leave anyone behind. This is an imperative. In addition to access to education for all, we need adequate interventions throughout life. For this reason, it is stated that individuals of all ages, including adults, should have the opportunity to learn and continue learning. Open, quality and equitable education becomes the catalyst to achieve all the others Sustainable Development Goals⁸ and generate a society that truly knows how to be open and inclusive.

Rethinking education and knowledge in terms of otherness and solidarity requires going beyond traditional training models and instead build an anthropological re-foundation with a renewed vision of interpersonal relationships and the common good. Education should not be limited to providing training.

It should deal with personal, moral and social attitudes. Not only do we ask teachers to teach certain topics, but we also encourage them to mentor students to live, study and act towards solidarity humanism. Education should not lead to divisions, but instead promote openness to socio-cultural transformation in order to prepare citizens to immerse themselves in social processes, developing attitudes of listening and exchange of views, and promote service and social advancement.

Conclusion

Education must open the doors to fraternal and supportive humanism.⁹ Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato si* (2015) that "education will be ineffective and its efforts will be sterile if it does not also try to spread a new paradigm about the human being, life, society and the relationship with nature."¹⁰ Our common goal is for education to become "the ideal platform to tear down the walls of misunderstanding and pride."¹¹

To achieve these objectives, it is necessary to act not only according to a comprehensive development project, but above all to promote an educational community that proposes a model of

⁸ Si veda Unesco, Education 2030. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of SDG 4, UNESCO Paris, 2017.

⁹ Congregazione per l'Educazione Cattolica, Educare all'umanesimo solidale. Per costruire una "società dell'amore" a 50 anni dalla Populorum progressio, Tipografia Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2017.

¹⁰ Papa Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato Si'*, 24 maggio 2015, n. 215.

¹¹ Parolin, P. "L'Église Catholique et l'éducation", *Educatio Catholica*, Anno I-1/2015, 39.

alternative coexistence to that of a mass society and individualism.¹² Never before has such a shift been urgently needed so that patient listening and constructive dialogue makes unity prevail over conflict.¹³

Exchange and transformation must "allow future generations to build a future"¹⁴ of hope and peace. We need to educate students not only to possess knowledge, but also to better understand reasons, habits and values. We must expand the limits of reason, revealing them to wisdom and love.

"True education should promote the formation of the human person both in view of its ultimate purpose and for the good of different societies, of which man is a member and in which, becoming an adult, he will have duties to fulfill."¹⁵ This invitation of the Council Fathers is still very current and is directed especially to those who, like you, have positions of responsibility in the world of education.

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¹² Cf. *Educatio Catholica*, Anno I- 3-4/2015. L'intero numero è dedicato al tema della «Comunità educativa».

¹³ Cfr Papa Francesco, *Esortazione Apostolica Evangelii gaudium*, 24 novembre 2013, nn. 226-230.

¹⁴ Papa Francesco, *Discorso al Corpo Diplomatico accreditato presso la Santa Sede per la presentazione degli auguri per il nuovo anno*, January 7, 2019.

¹⁵ Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, *Dichiarazione sull'educazione cristiana Gravissimum educationis*, October 28, 1965, n. 1