

Educational priorities in the ambiguities of globalization

di Carlo Nanni¹

Human Rights are a relevant aspect of contemporary culture, both for good or for bad. They are a thread that links sixty years of history in which, in the midst of a thousand contradictions, we have searched and are still searching to affirm our desires for freedom, equality, brotherhood, justice and peace, equitable development for all, for individuals, groups, nations and the entire world. Even the Salesian congregation understands them better and better, and looks at them through the eyes of education.

However, in many instances, it is a matter of ``going against the tide``, ``navigating against the wind``.

In many countries, in the name of common civil rights, the rights of many citizens were stepped upon. In the name of equality or national security, entire populations are oppressed, citizens are persecuted, minorities and those who branded as being different are eliminated. Right under our eyes, we witness violence against minorities, child soldiers, minor prostitution, sexual abuse, violence against women, rape as a weapon, murder as ethnic cleansing, genocide as a political instrument, civil war as an internal way to resolve conflict, brain-washing and manipulations of consciences as a means to maintain or gain economical, social, political, and religious power. A lot depends on the general mentality and politics in respect to human rights.

1. The crisis of Western modernity.

Globalization has revealed the weaknesses and difficulties of the «modern» western culture. In other words, it has highlighted the «nakedness of the Western kingdom», that is the western claims of absolute and universal power of politics and citizenship, based on the scientific-technological reason and its anthropological vision, strongly man-centered (= l'«homo copernicanus») and its vision of the «all-powerful» man, builder of his own historical destiny (= «homo faber suae fortunae»).

From a sociological point of view, evidenced in many ways by Z. Bauman, globalization has provoked the crisis of «solid modernity» of the western world (based on its own socio-political liberal-democratic structures and its scientific-technological culture). The whole world is now situated in a condition of «liquid modernity» or «fluid modernity» (this means that it is a modernity that emphasizes networking, fluxes, but implies uncertainties, even high rates of unpredictability and uncontrollable attractive processes.) The promised liberation from the economic, social and cultural narrowness from the past is mixed with the introduction of fears, profound anxiety, emotional vulnerability, impulsive irritability and a lack of psychological tolerance whether it is found in individuals, in groups or in social parties and even within international relationships.

¹ Don Carlo Nanni, Salesian, Ordinary professor of Social Pedagogy. UPS Vice-Director, Director of the Institute of Pedagogical methodology.

2. The silent revolution of post-modernity.

Indeed, already during «the difficult seventies» and after the one called «the silent revolution» (Inglehart) of daily life-styles with its search for quality of life, for peace and ecology; for the defense of subjective and environmental human rights, and the fight for civil rights; for the awareness of personal dignity; for the greater political capacity of individuals and social groups; for human and civil development of the condition of women; for the protection of minorities and persons at risk; for the great world problems such as hunger, AIDS, oppressed minorities, etc. The negative impact, in the area of one's personal life as well as in the area of social life, has carried and still carries not only the risk to redefine what is common to all, but also to overshadow the perspective of the common good. In what we call a «complex society» par excellence, subjectivism has undoubtedly – of course as a reaction and final option if not as an impulsive proposal – reached rather high levels. The emphasis on personal freedoms in many cases has managed to make the individual and empirical «I», the first and last reference (not to say the unique reference) of what is true, of what is good, of what is beautiful, over who we are (meaning the famous transcendentals of being and of the person). The prospective of self-fulfillment has become so absolute that it subordinates everything else, becoming kind of a «religion of the I».

The other, the «we», the present and future humankind, are expelled from the personal vision and reduced to «objects» or rather as a complement of the «I». The projected ideals, values and motivations of the practical and ethical commitments are focusing more and more – for young people as well as for adults (even more so for the adults than for the young people) – on their bio-psychic health, on well-being and good living, on efficiency and productivity, on personal success at all cost, especially above all and most of all. At the most, one manages at projecting a «narrow society» while searching for friendships, a family or a clan network, accompanied by a general mistrust toward public institutions and politics.

In this general climate, one can understand how difficult it is to implement – even when one desires it – the invitation of J. F. Kennedy: «a little less of me, a little more of us».

3. The ambivalences of globalization.

In the beginning of the 21st century, we all have to face the winds of globalization. The changes not only affect the socio-economic structures (international companies or global market) and the values we refer to (efficiency, functionality, utility, productivity, personal well-being): life and culture are changing. Things are not simple.

In this complex beginnings of the 21st century, we can benefit from outstanding scientific and technological progress that lead us to speak about info-society, digital era, communication and knowledge, (and in the Western world of «second modernity» or re-modernity). Neuroscience and biotechnology are discovering possibilities concerning mental development, health care and promotion (and programming!) of human life that were unthinkable before. We all need to respond to the complexities of what, in some sense, we call globalization. Until very recently, the economy was in control of international finances and politics (provoking a sense of powerlessness and reducing the spaces of individual or social planning). Its crisis has given a renewed credibility to politics but the threat of recession and growing unemployment is generating great fears for the future. In the everyday reality, the family, the school, the parish, that is the prevailing «places» - as M. Augé would say – and one learns a lot in the «non-places», that is in the encounters, events, public squares, walls, at the stadium, navigating in internet, chatting, sending text messages: one can breathe freedom and spontaneity but also, uncertainties, insecurities, and the risk to lose one's self. The rapidity of the processes and innovations stimulate the subjective existence and personal creativity, but provokes as well the fragmentation of existence and exaltation of popular values at the expense of a sense of history and socio-communitarian sense of belonging, but also at the expense of «perennial values».

The growing possibilities of access to the advanced technological tools – and for many, but not for all, to the goods – allow a better quality of life, but can also encourage an insatiable desire

to possess or a constant obsession to be «up to date». The growth of «virtual» practices – made possible by the new computer technology – increase the flow of information, reduce distances and encourages communication «many-to-many», but do not always contribute to the quality of knowledge and relationships (leaving one is isolation and in the absence of «face to face» relational warmth. The fascinating practice of the digital «virtual world», permit a different common experience, but can also lead to the «dismissal» of reality, of the concrete experience, and the sense of reality and of its limits are lost.

The emphasis on subjective rights exalts personal talents and one's personal point of view, but also develops individualization in thinking and behaving. And even if we do not reach the pathological forms of narcissism, the objective dimension of reality and truth and the communitarian dimension of life and of existence are easily obscured.

In this context, it is very important to be able to discern in order to move within the ambivalences of reality and gather, as much as possible, truth and meaning (like a rose among thorns, to use the image mentioned by G. F. Hegel).

4. The anthropological question.

At the theoretical anthropological level, these «global» tendencies (apart from the lack of material and socio-economic means), question some of the most basic categories of human life: community, nation, and more radically the categories of good, truth, values, happiness, well-being, human intentionality and capacity to project, ethics, politics and the Welfare State, of common good!

One needs to ask the old and radical «question»: who is man, what does it mean to have «human dignity»?

Rather: before the globalization of life and of culture, that can redefine the cultural differences and the prospective of truth and human value (provoking personal fragmentation, cultural relativism, or fundamentalist-cultural domination); before what biotechnology project non only in terms of technical-genetic advancements, but also in terms of «post-humans» or «other humans» in such a way, to «produce», to «clone» man through technology (as it was already feared in the famous novel of M. Wollstonecraft Shelley of 1818 *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*); before the «simulated» horizons of the virtual world created by digital technology, we come to identify a clear «anthropological question» that shouts questions such as what is life, existence, history, development, the world, humanity and its destiny, its future. The three famous questions of I. Kant are coming back with great relevance: «What can we know, what can we do, and what can we hope for?»

5. Le «security escape» of globalization.

The recent financial crisis has shown the perverse effects of a development cut from the daily life of people and of nations, of ethics and the demands for an active, critical, responsible and concerted participation of all the actors of social life.

In a sense, it has brought to light the «dark» side of globalization. Globalization requires, in fact, some structural preconditions:

1) on the economic-political level: that in global interdependence, the demands of solidarity and of «sustainable development», respectful of human dignity for all and for each one, become clearer (and practiced). Otherwise, there is a growth of inequality, between populations, between nations, the different zones of the world, inequality regarding quantity (access to goods, use of means) and regarding quality (culture, quality of life, equality and social justice). As we say, even the new technologies reveal clearly that «digital divides»;

(2) on a cultural level: that we go beyond the western paradigm (= the western way of thinking is not «the», but «a» way of envisioning the world) and that we propose (and concretize) the necessary intercultural dialogue: avoid fundamentalism and confrontation between civilizations (S. Huntington). This should allow us to conjugate on the grounds of human rights, 1) the sharing of ideas and values 2) the operative convergence for the effective implementation 3) the legitimacy of the differentiation of the motivations and of fundamental justifications in the

ideal sharing as well as in the concrete convergence, 4) the debate, the confrontation, the democratic discussion for the search of the other, of the beyond, of the better, of the more;

(4) on a cognitive level: that we implement a way of knowing and thinking that would be able to understand the complexity, conjugating human culture and scientific-technological culture; tradition, science, wisdom; history, art and technology; reality, virtual world and value; technological possibilities, prospectives, and ethical choices. And, in particular, that we implement the hope of «glocal» way of thinking (global and local at the same time, because it is focused on the human being);

(4) on the level of civil co-existence: that we may live a «multiple citizenship» or as others would say «one and plural» (local, national, international, global, ... «heavenly») and in the meantime, different between “locals” and “guests”: to support with the international right, and with a legitimate and just law for all and for each one, the differences of origins, of belonging, of status and conditions of life, etc.

(5) and “last, but not least”: the need to educate and to be educated, which is becoming a real and unique «historical emergency».

6. Education and development.

The international humanitarian organizations, the churches, the non-government organizations, the humanitarian cultural movements (and in fact, many governments, even if amidst infinite contradictions), point to education as a strategy of equality and of integration in view of a sustainable development for all and for each one. A society that wants to be inclusive demands an education that is similarly inclusive; that is, that keeps in mind the necessities of each human being and, in particular, the necessities of the poor and most vulnerable, of people with disabilities, of young that live in rural areas and in impoverished city zones, of youth and adults without discrimination: that is, the way it is expected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: « Everyone has the right to education... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.» (Art. 26). These affirmations are re-echoed even in the Declaration on Christian Education from the Vatican II Council “Gravissimum educationis”, which affirms that: « All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. (art.1).

These «expectations» - as for all the other human rights – demand that we go beyond the ideal dialogue, including an effective implementation until we achieve the famous three «p» of human rights (prevent, protect, promote). And for this, we need coherent politics: in particular, in education.

If this is true in general, it is also true in particular for the various geographical areas in which, children, young boys and girls, men and women need specific political decisions and efficient planning to offer them equal opportunity and social integration. We are all aware of the millions of children at school age who, in various countries, do not yet go to school. In the whole world, in most of the refugee camps and in detention centers, the education of children and of youth is absolutely inadequate.

7. Educational strategies.

An integral approach to education does not limit culture to a position of merely promoting economical growth, but rather has the duty of overseeing the integral development of human beings, persons, groups, community, nations, humanity. It has to encourage the encounter with others, formation of citizens capable of contributing to the growth of larger and diverse communities, whether they are at the national, continental or international levels: valuing «diverse creativity», personal and gender differences, various identities and personal cultural roots, in various ages of life. Contemporary pedagogy speaks of learning and of permanent education, (that is *for* life, about *all* of life, in all situations), working with «synergy» (or as we would say today «networking») with social system of formation (informal, non formal, and formal), between families, schools, universities, environments and its different social configurations, and not least, with the religious and ecclesial entities. It focuses on the formation of attitudes of criticism, freedom, responsibility and solidarity. It aims at meeting the great aspirations of the human heart of every person under heaven.

As a proposal, I would like to recall that Benedict XVI has insinuated in his discourse to the new ambassadors on December 13, 2007. He has highlighted the fact that special attention must be given to the younger generations, they need to know that they are the first treasure of a country: their education is a priority... Education «will enable each young person to develop faith in themselves, to hope in the future, to be concerned with their own brothers and sisters and to want to participate in their growth of the country». For that, he wished that «in each country, the education of youth be a priority. It is a very important means to fight against the despair that can dwell in the heart of young people and be at the source of so many acts of individual and collective violence».

Besides, the educational and re-educational reality, demands, however without any further delay, the commitment for a new «paideia», that is a new educational culture, with human dignity (and not only functionally and material manner meaningful). From this point of view, the Declaration of Human Rights – that many consider a kind of «lay Bible» - can become a primary source of this operation.

8. The educative-preventive Salesian presence in the light of today's challenges.

In the experience of the Catholic Church, this integral approach became and is becoming a tradition of an inspired Christian education that set up thousands of schools, universities, and other educational institutions, present in every nation of the world. In this context, we consider the educational action of the family and of the Salesian congregation.

Today, within the Salesian Congregation, there is a big change in the members, whether we look at it numerically, or through a cultural or activity perspective. In Europe or in the Western world, not only there is a strong decrease and aging of the Congregation that require a proactive re-dimensioning of the works and future projections, but there is evident signs of this neo-liberal «fluidity» of the Western culture. Something similar is beginning in Latin America, and especially in post-communist European countries, after the «resurrection» and development time which happened at the end of Communism. Salesian Africa, Asia and Oceania are growing in number of Salesians and presences (which are new and creative). There is a need to re-think and deepen the traditional Salesian culture, regarding the cultural and religious dimensions that native Salesians carry or that are asked by the governments or emerging needs (sometimes very restrictive or fundamentalist) that the socio-political context imposes or proposes. In a certain sense, they propose a vision that goes beyond past traditional Salesian presence in the same areas (normally guided by a Western «missionary» way of thinking).

Regarding this, the CG 26 affirms: «The urgency to proclaim the Risen Christ obliges us to face situations that resound in us like a call and a concern: the nations not yet evangelized, the secularism that threatens nations traditionally of Christian faith, the immigration phenomena, new dramatic forms of poverty and violence, the spreading of movements and sects. We are challenged by some opportunities, such as ecumenical, interreligious and

intercultural dialogue, new sensitivity for peace, for the safeguarding of human rights and for the care of the environment, solidarity and the increase of volunteer work that spread more and more in the world. These aspects, affirmed in many Apostolic Exhortations that followed the continental Synods, are challenged for the entire Church and challenge us to find new ways to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ while respecting and valuing local cultures» (CG26 n. 26).

9. Re-think the key aspects of the Preventive System.

The CG 26 strongly emphasized the need to re-think the rapport between evangelization and education, overcoming the repetitive inertia of formulas attached to the Preventive System. In no. 25 one reads: «In the Salesian tradition, we have expressed this rapport in various ways: for example «honest citizens and good Christians» or «to evangelize while educating or to educate while evangelizing. We affirm the need to pursue the reflection on this delicate rapport».

I personally propose some areas to deepen: 1) What does «preventivity» mean with the «invisible generation», with the generation «without»? with the generation at risk, in the drug culture...? With the generation of the «virtual world», the generations of the cell phone, the generations that live globalization, and in particular the generations of the many wars, of famine, of underdevelopment...; 2) How can you practice «Salesian assistance», that is, a presence with the young people used as an basic educative strategy, with the Salesian communities that are getting older or where the presence of the Salesians is absolutely reduced to the minimum or monopolized by the administration of the work? How are we train «non salesians» to «assistance»? How can we give quality to the presence of the one and the other? 3) What does «reason» mean today, in this era of post-modern-relativism, of biological natural science (= neuroscience), of advanced technology and the age of new digital technologies? Of secularism and fundamentalism? 4) How do we establish an «loving» educative relationship in the era of the virtual world, of cellular phones, of chat, of non-places (= walls, public places, events, commercial centers...), of the great number of young people involved with war, with immigration, with hunger, with hectic city life? 5) Which «religion», which evangelization, which youth ministry, which human development can we advocate after Vatican II, in the era of wide-spread secularization and the re-emerging of the sacred or of the paranormal and religious fundamentalism? 6) What does it mean to be and to educate «honest citizens» in this post-industrial society, in a complex society? in the world of globalization and of world economy and finances? In this era of economic power that determines political power? nella politica degli interessi e della radicalizzazione ideologica? In anonymous urban life? In the consumer society ? 7) What does it mean to be and to educate «good citizens» in this age of pluralism, of post-modernity, of relativism, of self-fulfillment, of subjectivism? How can be «good Christians» and in this «New Age» era, of religious multiculturalism, of fragmentation of life and of relativized values? Or how do to «evangelize through education» in non-Christian countries or in those countries where Christian evangelization is forbidden? ...

We could continue, expand and add more details to all of the above.

10. Conclusion.

Anyway, the CG 26 has affirmed its conviction that «evangelization proposed a human model which is at its best, and that education, when it reaches the heart of young people and develops the religious meaning of life, encourages and accompanies the process of evangelization». Even Pope Benedict XVI has encouraged the Salesian Capitulars to value the contributions of education and to work in the various fields of education. In his letter to the Capitulars dated March 1, 2008, he has written: «without education, in fact, there cannot be a

lasting and deep evangelization, there is not growth and maturation, and there is no change of mentality and of culture».

Moreover, in the “Letter to the diocese and the city of Rome on the urgent challenge of education», dated January 21, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI has said: «The education that limits itself to give notions and information, but leaves aside the great questions of truth, especially the truth that can be a guide in life, would be a very poor education indeed». In the meantime, he expressed his deep conviction that «every educator knows that in order to educate he must know how to give something of himself and that by doing so, can he help his students to overcome selfishness and become, in turn, capable to love authentically».

Should it not be that way also for the one who wants to educate to the Human Rights according to the Preventive System?