Education as the Art of Becoming Oneself
in a Globalized World: An Educational Emergency
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«Si autem modus entis accipiatur… secundum convenientiam unius entis ad aliud, hoc quidem non potest esse nisi accipiatur aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omni ente: hoc autem est anima, quae ‘quodammodo est omnia’ (De An. 431 b 31). In anima autem est vis cognitiva et appetitiva. Convenientiam ergo entis ad appetitum exprimit bonum;... ad intellectum exprimit verum.

If the mode of being is taken...the division is based on the correspondence one being has with another. This is possible only if there is something which is such that it agrees with every being. Such a being is the soul, which, as is said in (De An. 431 b 31) “in some ways is all things”. The soul, however, has both knowing and appetitive powers. Good expresses the correspondence of being to the appetitive potency; ... True expresses the correspondence of being to the knowing capability» (St Thomas, De Ver. I, 1)

Introduction

I would like to thank Saint Mary’s College of California, and in particular Bishop John Cummings, President Ronald Gallagher, FSC and Brother Charles Hilkens for their kind invitation to this prestigious institute. It’s a great honour and pleasure to be here with you today.

A human community that constantly rethinks its educational role has the healthiest circulation of ideas and energies for the good of its people. Each generation should consider how to convey its culture to the next, if the most important thing that a living being must do is generate another being who is the same or better. It is through education that the human being becomes fully what it is, i.e. a conscious, free and responsible person, a citizen of the world and, if he is a Christian, he also becomes a citizen of God’s kingdom through the grace of Christ, the theological virtue and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thinking of education means preparing for the future, thinking about future generations. It is a thought that originates in hope and requires generosity. Education, however, cannot ignore the past. It must take into account the millenarian experience it has accumulated in the suffered course of history, particularly in the West. This experience is born and articulated in the human being’s natural craving for knowledge, to recognize the truth, to aspire to the good and the beautiful, which made Aristotle write at the beginning of his masterpiece that “All men naturally desire knowledge – πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει”.

A positive sign of this is that many international organizations, above all the UNESCO and State governments, nowadays promote everyone’s right to education, even higher education, in accordance with a person’s abilities. This activity doesn’t just build a better society; it also helps parents and educators who are concerned about the future performance of their children and their students. Extending it also involves the no less important issue of defining how this education should be.

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1 “Est enim rei iam perfectae facere alteram qualis ipsa est” (St Thomas, S. Th., I, 78, 2 cor.).
2 “You are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19).
3 Metaphy., I, 1, 980 a 21.
Like any human subject, education first and foremost presupposes an idea of human being, because it is men and women who must be educated, because it is men and women who educate, because education mostly deals with men and women. Therefore, education must answer the central question: what is a human being, man and woman? What is our real knowledge of the human being in a dialogue with science, culture and religion?

The West was configured by educational concepts first developed in ancient Greece and Rome. The Greek paideia, explained by Plato in *The Republic* and in his famous *Seventh Letter*, meant consciously educing man as a whole, on the basis of his possibilities, first modelling his body and using passions to develop his mind, i.e. what man can make of himself according to his human nature. This “work of art” appeared necessary in order for man to accomplish life in society, since he could not achieve complete fulfilment except within a community, the *polis*. *The Republic* is the highest expression of the close link that the Greeks had between the training of individuals and community life. Aristotle’s statement in his *Politics* that man is *by nature* a “political animal” (ζῶον πολιτικόν) has a similar meaning. The education of children and young people in the *polis* was directly related to the formation of virtues, both individual and social, and to ethics and politics, and had to be crowned with the contemplative life that he saw in the “theoretical life”, entirely dedicated to the pursuit of the highest wisdom, the ultimate goal in life. Education as he intended it was in view of good living and well being in a fair *polis* (which Plato did not identify with the democracy that condemned Socrates), thus opposed to the pure *tēchnē* of the Sophists, i.e. to a purely formal and methodical education.

In Rome *paideia* became *humanitas*, which in Cicero’s texts clearly means the culture, education and pedagogy of a free Roman citizen, which then enter into a relationship with all the other disciplines. *Humanitas* came to indicate the development of the qualities that turned a Roman citizen, *civis romanus*, into someone who developed the human in man, endowed with knowledge that set him apart from a barbarian. The concept thus implied the training of a law-abiding civil citizen who lived and worked in a humanized society understood as the Roman world.

Today we should suggest the implementation of an educational project for citizens of our increasingly globalized and cosmopolitan world. Such a project has to be based on the current bio-anthropological knowledge of the human being according to scientific data in the context of the diversity and interdependence of cultures and the universality of religious, anthropological and ethical values, which are increasingly interconnected by the new methods of communication at the speed of light and new types of human migration, in a habitat that is the physical and human environment that must be safeguarded.

**Educational skill as a characteristic of the human being**

Know yourself, be yourself (γνῶθι σεαυτόν) is the Delphic maxim indicating the birth of this anthropological reflection carried out in Greece for the first time in the history of mankind. Already at the dawn of Greek thought Heraclitus states: “I have searched myself – ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωυτόν”. Thanks to his absolutely original affirmation related to becoming oneself as a plexus of active potency – perfect act,

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starting from this radical capacity for education that human beings have, Aristotle can be considered a teacher for all seasons.

Aristotle’s strategy in this determination of education as the life of the spirit is very penetrating, metaphysical and phenomenological at the same time. Metaphysical because it deals with the foundation that is the principle of being and knowing, and phenomenological because it deals with the analysis of becoming, of the becoming of the spirit, the self of ourselves, that is, the expansion of our human life. Perhaps this is why St. Thomas among the medievals, Hegel among the moderns, and Ricoeur among the contemporaries considered Aristotle’s *De Anima* not just a fundamental anthropological work but also the most important speculative work of all time, especially on the subject of the becoming of the spirit, i.e. educability.

We can assert that human beings, male and female, in the reality of the world and of their own bodies, have this ability to fulfil themselves through themselves, with the light of their intelligence and the strength of their desires, which stem from their souls, or selfhood or egos. This focal point, the soul, the ego, the self, myself, selfhood, is something given or received as foundational and at the same time is an ontological status of perfection, let’s say, a launch pad, which may well be defined as active potentiality or first act, precisely in the sense of the effective ability to fulfil one’s body and one’s spirit. Such a radical capacity of becoming oneself starting from oneself is the foundation of educability and hence is the raw material or subject of education. In other words, education is possible because human beings can be taught since they possess this capacity of being and becoming themselves in body and spirit, within the world, towards society, in the presence of God. Therefore, educability is precisely the most proper characteristic of the human being that differentiates it from other higher animals, which participate of it very little.

Besides, human beings are profoundly indigent because they are born with these unlimited capabilities but lack the ability to implement them alone. They must learn from others how to develop their skills, even having to learn how to eat, walk, talk, read, write, play, work, think, love and pray. While higher animals have in their genetic heritage the skills they need to provide for themselves, human beings, who are penetrated by reason, nevertheless require many years of experience and other people’s help before they are able to provide for themselves.

The potential of the human being and his ways

The human being’s capacity for realization becomes an act through the body and the spirit in different ways and at different times: but body and spirit are at once independent of and connected to one’s will. Thus man is conceived and develops into an organism starting from the embryonic cell thanks to a decision taken by his parents, and each of his organs gradually achieves its full structure and functional capability. Similarly, the human being is awakened to the life of the spirit through the gradual but incessant acquisition of knowledge, of the truth of being and its principles, and likewise necessarily aspires to happiness through the clear light of truth and an irresistible impulse towards the infinite good that the creator has instilled in his spirit. The educator’s task is to enhance this inner capability encouraging it, elevating it, directing it, and correcting it.

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6 Cfr. the well-known text of *Enz. d. Phil. Wiss.*, § 378. See also the important references to the idea of knowing oneself in the Introduction to the *Fides et Ratio*.
7 St Thomas, ScG., III, 122.
Education as growth of the subject in himself

It is here, in this higher sphere of life that is knowledge, that Aristotle distinguishes two acts and two potencies: the dormant act, so to speak, which is acquired knowledge, and the operating act which is the exercise of knowledge by its possessor: “Thinks he who has a science” (θεωροῦν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τὸ ἐὰν πήν εἶπεστήμην). The latter is a unique passage and very different from the first, i.e. the one that goes from ignorance to knowledge that Aristotle calls, in some sense, alteration, and appears as a development of oneself and of one’s act, “For what possesses knowledge becomes an actual knower by a transition which is … not an alteration of it at all (being in reality a development into its self and into its perfection – εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ γάρ ὁ λόγος καὶ εἰς τελέχειαν)”. This alteration is a μεταβολὴ εἰς ἄλλο, a passage towards the other, an alignment, while thinking or teaching is literally the opposite, ἐπὶ δοσὶς εἰς αὐτὸ, it is a passage towards oneself, a becoming oneself. And this must be another type of act and therefore another type of passage, certainly not a passage from potency to potency – the passage involves a term that is perhaps the expected and requested result of potency, but not yet present, i.e. non-operating – according to the rigor of Aristotelian semantics. Aristotle here is so taken by the spiritual moment that he is trying to explain that he confesses that language still does not have a proper term to indicate the creative passage, so to speak, that the wise man makes when he passes to the current act of knowing by means of the exercise of contemplation, research or teaching.

Here the dynamics of the act express the intertwining of the life of the spirit. Hence Aristotle goes on to say that it is wrong – not good form – to speak of (διὸ οὐ καλῶς ἔχει λέγειν) a wise man (τὸ φρονοῦν) as being altered (ἄλλοιοῦ σθαι) when he uses his wisdom (ὅταν φρονῇ), just as it would be absurd to speak of a builder as being altered when he is using his skill in building a house.

Hence the act, as position and affirmation of reality, as the possession (ἐξίς) of reality and perfection, “saves” with it the reality and truth of potency that can pass to the act from itself, like knowledge which enables the teacher to teach and the student to learn. It is Aristotle himself who speaks of salvation: τὸ δὲ σωματίκα μᾶλλον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελεχεῖ ἂ δ ντο or “the salvation of what is in potency by what is in act”.

It was Ortega y Gasset who rehabilitated this central point of Aristotle’s philosophy in his Preface to Emile Bréhier’s History of Philosophy. According to Ortega this “progress towards the same and entelechy” shows that for Aristotle there is a certain way of becoming that is not simply a passage from one state (principle) to another state (end) but is a ceaseless change “towards the same”. The most notable examples of this are teaching and thinking which have their end in themselves, but nevertheless do not cease to progress. Now, “change or movement that is a goal or an end in itself, which although it is a march or transit or passage does not march but to march and not to reach anything else, nor transits but to transit, or passes but for its own passing, is precisely what Aristotle called act – energēia – which is the being in the fullness of its meaning. Thus we see that Aristotle transcends the static idea of being, since it is not movement sensu stricto, but the being itself who appeared to be still that is revealed as consisting of an action and, therefore, of a movement sui

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8 De Anima, II, 5, 417 b 6 s. Online at http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Aristotle/De-anima/de-anima2.htm
9 Loc. cit.
10 De Anima, II, 5, 417 b 3.
Aristotle in fact dissociates the perfect act of thinking and teaching from acts of movement proper, such as walking or losing weight, because the former have all the perfection of movement that is precisely act, without the imperfection of the latter that is potency.

**The reality of the person as the subject of education**

To the human being’s potency-act plexus Christianity adds the reality of the person and of freedom, i.e. the highest achievements of Christian philosophy and, from a specifically Christian perspective, the reality of grace as new creation or participation of the divine nature. In these, education finds its most authentic sense and the most favourable basis for the prospect of actuating all the potentialities of each person’s being. Thus today the person turns out to be the best candidate to claim a foundation for human rights, and especially for the urgent need for education.

Until Jesus Christ’s arrival there was no word either in Greek or in Latin or in other known cultures to express the reality of the person and his freedom. As is well known, according to Hegel the concept of universal freedom in the sense of the original nucleus of the human person’s dignity entered the world only with Christianity. This nucleus is ignored in the East, which reserves freedom to the “boss” or tyrant, and went unnoticed in the Greco-Roman world which had the awareness of freedom but understood that only “certain men” were free (such as the Athenians, the Spartans, the Romans...) and not man as such by virtue of his personal dignity.  

Classical culture did not recognize absolute value to the individual as such: “But the fact that man is in and for himself free, in his essence and as man, free born, was known neither by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, nor the Roman legislators, even though it is this conception alone which forms the source of law. In Christianity the individual, personal mind for the first time becomes of real, infinite and absolute value; God wills that all men shall be saved”.

The fundamental characteristic of man is that of being a free person and the course of human history is the laborious search to be fully in act what one is in potency and that quest is not over, and it is the first challenge of education not to lose sight of this high purpose. Hegel continues: “It was in the Christian religion that the doctrine was advanced that all men are equal before God, because Christ has set them free with the freedom of Christianity”. He adds: “These principles make freedom independent of any such things as birth, standing or culture [...]. The sense of this existent principle has been an active force for centuries and centuries, and an impelling power which has brought about the most tremendous revolutions; but the conception and the knowledge of the natural freedom of man is a knowledge of himself which is not old”.

In the philosophical meaning belonging to the tradition of the West, “Person signifies that which is most perfect in all of nature, viz., that which subsists in a

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12 “It was through Christianity that this Idea (of freedom) came into the world. According to Christianity, the individual as such has an infinite value as the object and aim of divine love, destined as mind to live in absolute relationship with God himself, and have God's mind dwelling in him: i.e. man is implicitly destined to supreme freedom” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklop. d. philos. Wiss.*, § 482, ed Nicolin-Poeggeler, Hamburg 1959, p. 387 f.) Online at http://www.hegel.net/en/ez3.htm
13 Online at http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/hegel%20-%20hist%20phil/Intro%20-%20A.htm
rational nature”. 15 In a strict sense, therefore, person adds the title of honour and dignity of the spiritual nature that makes human beings belong to the species of the subsistent forms. This means that the human being, male and female, endowed with a spiritual soul that is its substantial form adhering to its own act of being (like roundness to a circle) is necessary and belongs to the divine species by participation: “God Himself, who is only being, is in a certain way the species of all subsistent forms that participate in being and are not being itself”. 16 This dignity in the being, which belongs to subsistent forms, manifests itself in spiritual operations, namely in the absolute emergency of understanding and wanting and thus in being agent and master of one’s acts, i.e. in being free: “Further still, in a more special and perfect way, the particular and the individual are found in the rational substances which have dominion over their own actions; and which are not only made to act, like others; but which can act of themselves; for actions belong to singulars. Therefore also the individuals of the rational nature have a special name even among other substances; and this name is ‘person’”.17 And we may add, not just with the common term of person but with names for each of them, such as Marcelo, Peter, Paul, John, Susan, Mary.

This special uniqueness belonging to each person is given the evocative name of incommunicability: “the word person formally signifies incommunicability”.18 For this reason St. Thomas also defines the human person as “something subsistent and distinct in human nature”.19 So the uniqueness that each human person can deploy in the double order of his nature, corporeal and spiritual, is thereby different from the others because it is always unique, undefeatable, irreplaceable, not eliminable. Therefore the being of each person is the most intimate thing he owns,20 being the original source of his own selfhood, but at the same time the source of his relationality and communicability. The person is thus the incommunicable who communicates, and the highest dignity he or she can achieve is communion with another person so that each gives his or her best in their friendship, which saves one and the other in their earthly adventure. For Aristotle one cannot live without friends.

**Challenging the dignity and personal abilities of the learner**

Education is immersed in this relational dynamism that begins with one’s personal dignity and enters into a relation with another in a mutual ebb and flow of goods and grace, like the waves of the sea. It begins with the dignity of the student, who, being a person, demands above all respect and understanding of his own corporeal, mental and spiritual skills, of his thoughts and desires. It may be useful to know the main circumstances in his life, according to Ortega y Gasset’s assertion that “I am myself and my circumstances”. It also presupposes knowing the corporeal,

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15 “persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura” (St. Thomas Aquinas, S. Th., I, 29, 3).
16 “Ipse Deus, qui est esse tantum, est quoddammodo species omnium formarum subsistentium quae esse participant et non sunt suum esse” (De Potentia, q. 6, a. 6, ad 5).
17 “Adhuc quodam specialiori et perfeccioni modo inventur particulare et individuum in substantiis rationalibus, quae habent dominium sui actus, et non solum aguntur, sicut alia, sed per se agunt, actiones autem in singularibus sunt. Et ideo etiam inter ceteras substantias quoddam speciale nomen habent singularia rationalis naturae. Et hoc nomen est persona” (S.Th., I, 29, 1).
18 “Nomine personae significatur formaliter incommunicabilitas, sive individualitas subsistentis in natura” (De Potentia, q. 9, a. 6 cor). Also: “nomen personae non designat hoc solum quod est subsistere, quod videtur ad essentiam pertainere, sed etiam hoc quod est distinctum esse et incommunicabile” (Ib., ad 3).
19 “Persona humana significat subsistens distinctum in natura humana” (Ib., q. 9, a. 4 cor). Online at http://josephkenny.joyeurs.com/CDtexts/QDdePotentia9.htm
20 “Esse rei sit intimum in qualibet re” (Super Ioan., ch. 1, bk 5). Also: “Quia ergo Deus est prima causa simpliciter, ideo eius operatione producitur illud quod est intimius ipsi rei, scilicet esse eius” (Super Heb., ch. 4, bk 2).
mental and intellectual age of the student; if every age has its own needs and possibilities, each year of life has them too. Today we talk about “chronoeducation” because the neurosciences are discovering constants and variables in the learners’ brains themselves. This means examining the learner and trusting that he will know, on his own, how to gradually progress on the path to truth, beauty and good that is reserved only for him in order to become what he is. On the other hand, distrust a priori never generated any real education. Those who are not willing to recognize the student’s ability to develop the good skills rooted inside of him, those who are not prepared to take any risks, do not have what it takes to be educators.

In this regard, it is worth recalling Aristotle’s doctrine that we have discussed, which St. Thomas makes his own arguing that the principal agent in learning is not the teacher but the disciple. The teacher’s role is to be the instrument that helps his student not only to develop his own abilities, but to develop knowledge as well, of which the student possesses the first principles and the light of the agent intellect. “We must give a similar explanation of the acquisition of knowledge. For certain seeds of knowledge pre-exist in us, namely, the first concepts of understanding, which by the light of the agent intellect are immediately known […]. Knowledge, therefore, pre-exists in the learner potentially […] in the active sense. Otherwise, man would not be able to acquire knowledge independently”.21 The teacher causes knowledge instrumentally in the educational process since under his guidance the disciple acquires “knowledge of things he does not know in the same way that one directs himself through the process of discovering something he does not know”.22 For this reason despite receiving outside help the student remains the principal agent in the learning process because “Therefore, when something pre-exists in active completed potency, the external agent acts only by helping the internal agent”.23

We must also acknowledge and recognize the pupil’s personal freedom as active potency, which is not the freedom of whim or arbitrariness, nor its opposite, pusillanimity or a small spirit. St. Paul, one of the greatest educational geniuses of all time, advises parents not to “provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged”.24 This respect for the learner’s freedom is central to St. Thomas, “because adults keep the impressions they have had as children. And it is natural for those raised in slavery to be always faint-hearted. This is the reason why some say that the children of Israel were not immediately led into the promised land: they had been raised in slavery, and would not have had the courage to fight against their enemies”.25 Therefore if the person is free by essence, he should be educated in inner and outer freedom to prevent him from becoming pusillanimous, fickle or servile. This is a basic dialectic that no one can suppress. Rudeness, bullying, intransigent parents, domineering teachers mean that this difficult task has not been accepted and

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21 “Dicendum est de scientiae acquisitione; quod praexsistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina, scilicet primae conceptiones intellectus, quae statim lumine intellectus agentis cognoscuntur […]. Scientia ergo praexsistit in addisce in potentia non pure passiva, sed activa; alias homo non posset per seipsum acquirere scientiam” (De Veritate, q. 11, a. 1 cor). Online at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/QDdeVer11.htm
22 “Docens alium ad scientiam ignotorum deducit sicuti aliquis inveniendo deducit seipsum in cognitionem ignoti” (Ib.).
23 “Quando igitur praexsistit aliquid in potentia activa completa, tunc agens extrinsecum non agit nisi adiuvando agens intrinsecum” (Ib.)
24 Col. 3:21. See also: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).
the effect is that the student becomes rebellious or timid and the educator becomes a caricature.

In this regard it may be convenient that the fact of opening up to the other and recognizing the need for help starts from the student himself. Thus his participation will be more active and accompanied by a specific enthusiasm. The educator must always keep in his mind and in his heart all these aspects related to the student’s dignity: one educates a person in order to make him fully a person. It is worth keeping in mind the always current value of Kant’s imperative, especially in this field of educational work: “Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means”.26 For Kant it is freedom that imposes on man to transcend the limits of his simple humanity. Only in that high and final “predisposition to personality” is man capable of rising to that peak of the “divine in him” which constitutes his innermost spiritual essence. In this it is perhaps possible to find an echo of the Stoic-Pauline maxim: “For we too are his offspring (γένος)”.27

Any experienced educator knows that in the teaching practice the temptation to lose oneself in the “dark forest” of theories and techniques, consequently losing sight of the individual learner, is not unusual. The structure of the educational system, the oftentimes unnecessarily long meetings, the increasingly modern audio-visual and digital tools, the new social networks that put people in touch almost at lightning speed, the books themselves and even the topics to teach may be tricky labyrinths in which some teachers prefer to linger, perhaps unconsciously, instead of addressing their students directly and devoting their time to them. The greatest teachers, such as Socrates and Jesus Christ, preferred to leave us their books, to write directly to the hearts of their disciples. The fundamental premise of an educational practice is first of all to keep a watchful eye over those who need to grow as persons. The words to describe this are not adequate or sufficient. If it were not too improper one could say that each student should be considered in a personalized way. Not as a part of the human whole, but for what he is, a unique and unrepeatable person. His mind, his freedom, his personal responsibility must be directly challenged and involved. Clearly this requires enough time to follow each student personally. Ideally, one should get to know all one’s students by name and have of them a personal and appropriate view. This can be achieved even when the audience is large. There is a way to address everyone at the same time that invites one to a personal meeting, at least implicitly, if the teacher does not lose sight of the fact that each student is an end in himself.

The educational practice

The integral actuation of the person’s ability to grow, one of the key principles of the philosophy of education, is that which underlies all the other requirements of the educational practice. Thus, for example, the training of a person can never be fragmented, reducing it to the merely intellectual, or obscuring its religious

27 Actus, 17, 28. With greater speculative precision than Kant, the Christian philosophers had already tried to explain this unique belonging of the human being to God, i.e. of God’s active presence in man. St. Augustine addresses the Creator with the famous expression: “Tu autem eras interior intimo meo, et superior summo meo” (Conf. III, 6, 11). St. Thomas affirms that: “Deus essentialiter est in anima”, because “nihil potest in ea esse nisi quod ei dat esse” (In Ioan. XII, 27, lect. 7, Turin 1951, n. 1810, p. 338). Hence, because of the actus essendi or act of participated being in the spiritual soul: “nulla autem substantia illabitur menti nisi solus Deus, qui est in omnibus per essentiam, praesentiam et potentiam” (S.c.Gent. II, 98).
dimension, or leaving passions aside, or even concealing, because of a utopian ecological balance, the presence of suffering (physical and moral) and the devastating force of evil in the world. The human being is a complex reality – even saints always have a dark side – hence education should not be the unilateral development of aptitudes or the ability to meet people and the world, but above all the educator should help the learner distinguish by himself between good and evil, between good and best, between bad and worse, to see the internal contradictions and find his own path to take.

Since maturity of conscience and the just dynamisms of love both reconnect to the progressive actuation of the ability to think and love, what matters, in the educational hierarchy, is the development of this capacity in each person before the precision and profusion of its transmission. It is the actuation of this capacity to think and to love that founds and qualifies the mode of transmission, that influences in the sense of professionalism, that requires proper and gradual times, that initiates the person to the maturity of operating in complex specific situations. Something very high, namely formation, pertains to education in a broad sense. As they used to say in my student days: educating does not mean informing but forming, providing a comprehensive education. Many of those who call themselves educators are really just coaches, because they provide information or techniques only. Hence the big challenge of education is not to lose sight of this primary purpose. Nevertheless we must recognize that we have failed and increasingly continue to fail.

An important criterion to monitor the achievement of the educational goal is to check whether the student is increasingly capable to walk on his own two feet, because it is always a case of helping him mature, not of the teacher replacing or “cloning” him, or worse, making choices for him. The state of inner freedom is what turns a child into a young man, according a superb text by St. Thomas: “As soon, however, as it begins to have the use of its free-will, it begins to belong to itself, and is able to look after itself, in matters concerning the Divine or the natural law”. This transition is threatened by some typical risks. It may happen that the young man does not make the transition towards this autonomy of “provider of himself – providere sibi ipsi” and perhaps remains in a state of dependency. Or that he reacts with rebelliousness without accepting that which is a freedom carried out in an order. Therefore the teacher has to use refinement of spirit to strengthen, in the developing person, what he already is, allowing him time to experience it and assume it as his own. But he also has to guide him towards the future, encouraging him to branch out and project from himself.

Here comes a delicate point that Hegel introduces in his Anthropology under the title of “natural changes”, the first one being the shift caused by the course of the ages of life. Each stage of life has a certain consistency in itself and, in turn, is part of the overall figure of the totality of life. So the young man is he “who is still short of independence and not fully equipped for the part he has to play”, while man is he who “in his true relation to his environment, recognizing the objective necessity and reasonableness of the world as he finds it – a world no longer incomplete, but able in the work which it collectively achieves to afford the individual a place and a security

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28 “Semper enim aliquid tenebrosum est in sanctis” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Super Philip., ch. 2, bk 4).
29 “Homo est perfectus quando discernit inter bonum et malum, inter bonum et melius, inter malum et peius” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Super Heb., ch. 6, bk 1).
30 “Postquam autem incipit habere usum liberi arbitrii, iam incipit esse suus, et potest, quantum ad ea quae sunt iuris divini vel naturalis, sibi ipsi providere” (S. Th., II-II, 10, 12 cor.).
for his performance. By his share in this collective work he first is really somebody, gaining an effective existence and an objective value”.31 If I am not mistaken the young man’s fundamental character is defined here by two elements. A positive one which is his upward thrust and implies a personality that tries to assert itself. Another is negative: his lack of full independence and especially his immaturity when faced with the world, which we might call lack of experience of reality. The knowledge of the real structures is missing. The criteria are missing to know to what one is capable of doing and to recognize objective reality, which the adult man has. Young people lack discernment vis-à-vis the enormous hardships of existence and the obstacles they will have to overcome to find the basis for their activity and recognize and cooperate with it. Seen in the light of the adult, the young man’s challenge is to become someone, to accept himself, to take responsibility for himself, to be recognized, and at the same time to find his place as a responsible person in the real world which already exists all around him.

Without considering all the positive aspects of modern communications, I would like to point out that, in today’s globalized world, there are some special threats that undermine the very sense of reality. I’m referring to the negative potential of the old and new media, especially television and the Internet. I’m referring not only to K. Popper’s critical note accusing television of bombarding the minds of the youngest with images and programs that are too violent, full of pornography, and have a low moral content.32 What we call junk television. I think there might be something more serious, especially from the point of view of the mind of the young person on the way to adulthood. I’m reminded of Nietzsche’s prophecy according to which the real world becomes fiction whereas the virtual world becomes real. The idea of the world that young people develop through the global media cannot be understood as the objective real world which is, so to speak, below, outside or parallel to the virtual world of the images transmitted by the mass media. For today’s youth, reality is the result of the intertwining and contamination (in the Latin sense) of the many images, interpretations and reconstructions, in competition with one another and in a disorderly manner, that the media distributes undeterred, oftentimes with exclusively utilitarian and commercial purposes. In short, youngsters are not always capable of distinguishing between the virtual world and the real one, or in any case take much longer than before to do so. Maybe this is one of the causes of the psychological weakness of today’s youth and the increase in events that didn’t use to happen or were very rare occurrences. I’m not just referring to the moral problem but to the loss of a healthy sense of reality: we often live in a virtual world where anything is possible because nothing is real. Virtualism and nihilism are two sides of the same phenomenon.

Given all this, the person is going backwards. We are right to keep in mind a basic law of sociology: the weaker a person is, the stronger the influence of anonymous opinion, the more forcefully the media enters and seizes the individual personality and his life, the further the possibility of growing in the real order is destroyed. Real order, in fact, is born of reality, truth, freedom and responsibility. The strength of hidden or visible persuaders and the virtual world’s power of suggestion are the opposite of order and spontaneity; they act only through external violence and force. Because of them young people are increasingly unable to head resolutely towards an authentic education. Hidden persuasion and the suggestion of images

cause anarchy. The central task in this stage of life that we are talking about is to realize this and to educate oneself to achieve one’s authentic self-affirmation in reality, which is the other pole of genuine order that aims at being, good, beauty, honour, respect, and courage. Those who are not able to grow psychically backtrack and lag behind, missing a chance that will make it difficult for them to catch up.

The educator’s knowledge must be explicit, perfect, in act

The knowledge conveyed by the teacher is in part the same knowledge that the student can grasp through his own abilities. Nevertheless, this does not allow man to be called teacher of himself, since it is evident that he lacks the perfection that can guide him to the most complete acquisition of knowledge. Hence, although self-education (inventio) is more perfect than education, since he who learns by himself “is more skilful”, nevertheless, in teaching the educator possesses the virtue that he expects in his student and “can teach it to a pupil more readily than the pupil himself could learn it from his own”. This active imperfect potential in the student is what leads us to affirm the need for a teacher. Hence St. Thomas’ admirable synthesis formulated in De Magistro, where he combines the teacher’s action and the student’s action almost as in a single perfect act: “So a man is said to cause knowledge in another through the activity of the learner’s own natural reason, and this is teaching. So, one is said to teach another and be his teacher”.  

St. Thomas compares the teacher-pupil relationship to the one between doctor and patient: “knowledge is caused by a teacher in a pupil, not as heat is caused in faggots by fire, but as health in a sick person by a doctor, who causes health inasmuch as he furnishes some remedies which nature makes use of to cause health; and consequently the doctor proceeds in the same order, in his curing, as nature would cure. For just as the principal healing force is one’s interior nature, so the principle which chiefly causes knowledge is something intrinsic, namely, the light of the agent intellect, whereby knowledge is caused in us, when we descend through the application of universal principles to some special points, which we gain through experience in discovery. And similarly the teacher draws universal principles down to special conclusions; and hence Aristotle says in I Posteriora [2, 71b] that ‘a demonstration is a syllogism that causes knowledge’.”

As conceived by the West’s cultural tradition, and certainly in Christianity, teaching (docere) – like healing – is in some way a sacred reality. It touches the
highest peaks of human relationships. So, while it is sufficient for the pupil to possess a rational nature in order to learn, it is not enough for the teacher to be able to teach. Teaching implies in the educator or teacher the perfect possession of knowledge, so it is necessary that those who teach (or are teachers) possess explicitly and in perfect act the knowledge that they cause in others, as he who learns through instruction comes to possess it. Knowledge must feel at home in those who teach, and not suffer any distress or restrictions. Since an agent operates because he is in act, the teacher teaches in so far as he possesses knowledge in act. It is therefore necessary that the teacher has already assimilated and contemplated knowledge. Such possession of knowledge on behalf of the one who knows and teaches lies neither in repeating nor in drifting. Teachers should make the generous legacy of the great geniuses of the past their own and reinterpret it in the light of their times, since it is often left idle and even repressed by the very process of schooling and systematization. In fact, if it were not possible to unleash this potential that manuals and the encyclopaedism of dictionaries oftentimes tend to suffocate and disguise, the true educator would have no other choice than between repetition and error. It is a matter of going back to the sources, leaving aside the contaminations brought about by the course of time. To explain what I mean by this I am reminded of Niccolò Machiavelli’s (1469-1527) letter to Ambassador Francesco Vettori (1513), where the former described how he managed to find in the classics such potential for meaning written only for him discover, and was completely transported by them: “I step inside the venerable courts of the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, I nourish myself on that food that alone is mine and for which I was born; where I am unashamed to converse with them and to question them about the motives for their actions, and they, out of their human kindness, answer me. And for four hours at a time I feel no boredom, I forget all my troubles, I do not dread poverty, and I am not terrified by death. I absorb myself into them completely”. The permanence of the possession of knowledge in the teacher and his continuous updating of it (inventio) as food “that alone is mine and for which I was born” for the duration of his time as an educator is thus a requirement. It places the delicate binomials of man and truth, human being and good in the context of a real and always current interpersonal relationship. It entails the clear awareness that all this is required by the unparalleled task of giving the subject to educate a “small” but necessary aid, as a secondary dynamic agent, framing the act of teaching in a genuine, true and beautiful act.

The teacher must also proffer truthful words; in this way “the words of the teacher are more proximately disposed to cause knowledge than things outside the soul, in so far as they are signs of intelligible forms”. And since no man is capable of possessing all knowledge, which explains why Jesus Christ forbid his disciples to call themselves teachers – “For we are forbidden to call man a teacher in this sense,

39 Cfr. Santo Tomás: “Doctrina autem importat perfectam actionem scientiae in docente vel magistro; unde oportet quod ille qui docet vel magister est, habeat scientiam quam in altero causat, explicite et perfecte, sicut in addisce acquiritur per doctrinam” (De Veritate, 11, 2 cor.).
40 “Magister docet inquantum actum scientiam habet” (ib., ad 6).
41 Online at http://www.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/Ren/flor-mach-lett-vettori.htm
42 “Ipsa verba doctoris audit, vel visa in scripta, hoc modo se habent ad causandum scientiam in intellectu sicut res quae sunt extra animam, quia ex utrisque intellectus intentiones intelligibiles accipit; quamvis verba doctoris propinquius se habeant ad causandum scientiam quam sensibilia extra animam existentia, inquantum sunt signa intelligibilium intentionum” (De Veritate, q. 11, a. 1 ad 11).
that we attribute to him the pre-eminence of teaching, which belongs to God” – it is appropriate to listen to several truly learned teachers because “what you do not learn from one, you learn from another”. This is the root of the need to have and support good schools and universities where teachers and professors teach collegially.

Knowledge is indispensable in the teacher who teaches speculative truth, when his aim is to teach moral virtue. In the educator, moral virtue is even more necessary, hence the importance of example in this field, which is much more effective than theoretical indoctrination: “because in questions of human actions and passions we give less credence to words than to actions”. When we place moral virtue above actions, we discover more easily the truth about the good that must be practiced. Paul VI said that today’s man needs role models and life models more than teachers. Moreover, when the educator contradicts what he says with his behaviour, all discourse is futile, especially for the young man who begins to admire him. He feels cheated. Therefore, his behaviour should endorse his words and account for them. It is well known that Kierkegaard speaks ironically of those educators resembling a swimming instructor who cannot swim, who only knows how to swim in theory, and thus always teaches on dry land, afraid that a student will take him seriously and jump into the water: for such a teacher would not be in a position to help.

But this does not mean neglecting the true discourse about what should or should not be done, because truth is not only useful to knowledge, but also to the good life. The most necessary moral virtue in the educator is undoubtedly practical wisdom (ϕρόνησις – prudentia), because through it he governs all others and it is the one that he uses to direct the mind of the learner to move him to good deeds. This is why Thomas Aquinas says that the moral educator is also called preceptor, since making precepts is proper of prudence; not only individual prudence but political prudence which seeks the good of the city and thus the common good.

New educational guidelines

In the global world being open to justice is also important because man is not only an individual but also a citizen of a city and today, we would say, of the world, and the quintessential political virtue is justice. Rawls is right in renewing the Western tradition that begins in Greece: “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought”. It can be said in a simplistic way that until the Second Vatican Council, in the sixties, the Catholic world lived in according to a unique set of values. What mattered the most were personal conduct and the virtues that aimed at the perfection of the individual. A behaviour centred on the intimate behaviour of people in relation to what we may call individual ethics.

43 “Quia Dominus praeceperat discipulis ne vocarentur magistri, ne posset intelligi hoc esse prohibitum absolute. Glossa exponit qualiter habe proibitio sit intelligenda. Prohibetur enim hoc modo hominem vocare magistrum, ut ei principalitatem magisterii attribuamus, quae Deo competit (De Veritate, q. 11, a. 1 ad 1).

44 “Debemus audire non solum de uno, sed multis [...] Quod non addiscis a uno, addiscis ab alio (Sermo Jesus proficiebat) Online at http://www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/CDtexts/Serm08PuerIesus.htm.


46 “Sermones veri non soloeum videntur esse utiles ad scientiam, sed etiam ad bonam vitam. Creditur enim eis inquantum concordant cum operibus. Et ideo tales sermones provocant eos, qui intelligent veritatem ipsorum ut secundum eos vivant” (In X Ethic. lect. 1, n. 10).

47 “Prudentia, cum sit praecepsiva, magis videtur ad magistros pertinere, qui etiam praeceptores dicuntur (S.Th., II-II, q. 49, a. 3 arg. 3).

was the time when the values associated with the family, marital fidelity, friendship, and honour were elevated above all others. Without voiding this scale of values, the Council returned to the great tradition of the Church but added a new set of values based on social engagement with those persons whom we do not necessarily even know. The Council pointed out that it was not enough to observe an upright conduct in relation to ourselves and our loved ones. It was necessary to think about the rest of the city, of the country and of the world. Another perspective, which had always accompanied the Church from the Gospel through the patristics (St. Augustine) and the high medieval tradition (St. Thomas) to the great theology of authors like Vitoria and De Las Casas at the time of the discovery of America, was also emphasized: social awareness and love for the poor and the homeless. The Blessed John Paul II used to say that the Church’s social magisterium was the Gospel for our times.

From that moment onwards, Catholics were urgently called to respond to two sets of equally important values. One of them had to do with a person’s intimate, personal behaviour and, we would say, with the other person I can see, my immediate neighbour, the you standing in front of me. The other set of values, which is certainly not new but renewed in its importance, had to do with social behaviour, with the attention of the rest, especially those I cannot see, but who live with me in my city or country, or in the global world, or the future generations. A double set of moral obligations has ensued every since. The collective ideal of an authentic Catholic conduct has since turned into loyalty to the values of personal virtues and social virtues simultaneously, which has doubled the requirements of a worthy life. When this double requirement became a characteristic of the new era in relation to the growing perception that the world was globalizing, and when we realized that we increasingly relied on one another and were interdependent, we were able to link this new requirement to a dialogue with all the great religions. Protestants, Jews and Muslims were also affected each in their own way by the new consciousness of a globalizing society, where the shocking spectacle of social injustice gains momentum at the national level, but especially at the international one. Ever since the great moral ideals have had their source in religion as they still do today, this double ideal of personal integrity and social solidarity has gone into effect even beyond the realm of the great religions, embracing even the bearers of Eastern spirituality and the agnostics who have made righteousness and goodwill the moral compass of their actions. So, along with personal virtues, today it is very important to teach the social virtue par excellence, which is justice, meaning the fact of giving each his own. Freedom cannot be understood without justice, as proved not only by Rawls but also by Sen. Dewey’s criticism of the traditional liberal type of school is true in a way, because it overlooks student socialization; in fact, school work is organized in such a way as to encourage exasperated individualism, which compromises the teaching of a democracy based on justice as equity.

Similarly we have realized that our relationship with the nature that surrounds us, which we call environment, is very important for our survival, peace and for future generations. We have rediscovered that the environment is our habitat, our home. Hence we demand an education that takes into account this new correlation between the human being and the environment, in order to teach each one of us to prevent this habitat from being harmful to our health or well being. The philosopher Hans Jonas teaches us that in the face of the “Prometheus Unbound” that is today’s technology, which may threaten the survival of the world, the new imperative is to “Act so that the
effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life”. 49
We know that the main energy we use today derives from fossil fuels, be it oil or coal. While it mobilizes production and satisfies needs and comforts, it creates pollution and heats the atmosphere, causing climate changes leading to desertification. We should demand an education that teaches us our responsibility to promote an environmentally sustainable development, possibly with new forms of energy that we can barely envision today: an education that repositions us in our planet according to its real possibilities of sustenance. In the hierarchy of the Church, perhaps Benedict XVI is the most convinced person of the growing problem of the destruction of our habitat. Since the beginning of his pontificate, his motto has been “If you want peace, respect Creation”.

At the same time, education should aspire to develop a common vision of humanity, which is essential for peacekeeping. To achieve this goal it is necessary to rely on the universality of both standards and ethical principles, as expressed in particular by the concepts of human rights and the human dignity of the person, as well as by the universality of knowledge, wisdom and the sciences. Therefore it is also necessary for the educational process to offer the new image of the universe that the scientific community considers discovered with regard to the cosmos, our planet Earth, life, the appearance of human beings and of their societies.

The relativistic, nihilistic and atheistic tendencies of some modern movements that our current Pope Benedict XVI criticizes with increasing force,50 in the wake of his enlightened predecessors, have been matched by the progressive return of the ethical, metaphysical and theological question coming not only from several traditions of contemporary philosophy, but also and above all from science itself. The brilliant Pius XI had realized this when he restored the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, appointing the most eminent scholars to it regardless of race or religion.

Science today is experiencing a phase of unforeseen and unforeseeable development. The recent successes in the study of nuclear and sub-nuclear particles, aimed at analyzing the structure of matter at an original and fundamental level, have been particularly significant. This path, which seemed unimaginable until less than a century ago, is in continuous expansion and research is in full swing, full of the hope of new discoveries. The recent developments in astronomy are also particularly striking. Think of the data that artificial satellites are gathering about Venus and Saturn. These findings further confirm the great unity between physics and astrophysics, clearly shown whenever one reaches a deeper level in the understanding of the reality of nature. The same can be said about progress in biology, with the discovery of the basic macro- and micro-molecular structures of life. And here we seem to be at a new beginning.

Science, nevertheless, gives us only what it can supposedly give, even though it is very generous. Many times, however, we almost seem to expect more from it. The enthusiasm that science has inspired in recent years has obscured many people’s sense of limit. Media ideologists in particular seem to have lost it. Hope has grown for science to become the only revealer of the mystery of being and man, thus fuelling its aspirations of becoming the sole explanation of the existence of the world and of the human being. But this is a mirage, an illusion, because substitution is impossible. It

49 The Imperative of Responsibility (German ed. 1979, English ed. 1984).
cannot aspire to erase the boundary between the natural sciences and the other sciences.

The “wonder” that stimulated the very origin of science in ancient Greece, far from diminishing with new discoveries, expands continually to become, in the most profound spirits, a sort of “creaturely amazement” that increases the distance between the consciousness of our knowledge of the truth of nature and reality itself. The extreme connection that is being discovered among the primary forces of the cosmos and the ultimate particles of matter, attests that man, at least as far as his body is concerned, is now reduced almost to the dawn of creation, of which he too in the earthly adventure is an element and a fleeting moment – whether in the complex structures of science laboratories or in the humble occurrence of everyday life. No less amazing is the sight of a dawn or a sunset, of spring flowers and autumn fruits than the galaxies millions of light years away which expand the universe beyond all possible imagination. We can say that the man who set foot on the moon and inhabits the new space stations has just crossed the threshold of the house of infinity.

Thus, in a way, mystery is no longer a negative notion but a positive one. In the biblical sense mystery indicates the extent of that which has no measure, which exceeds all measure, because mystery is the sole measure of itself destined for man who has been seeking it for thousands of years and who now finally sees it advancing on the horizon of his temporal destiny. The grandeur and complexity of contemporary science in its understanding of nature, both of the fundamental forces of physics and of the molecules of life of biology, are reversed immediately in the human being. Amazed by the mystery of the infinite, it is man himself who can expand beyond all limits the project of his being, as envisaged by Heraclitus with the Lógos and Aristotle who defines the intellect as “capable of becoming and making all things”.51

It is the new positive sense of the mystery of biblical creation that challenges an affirmative answer to this first and last pretension of philosophy and warns man that earthly life has a goal and that “that the kingdom of God is near”.52

Thus one can understand why even these luminaries of contemporary science are stunned by the continuously increasing “new world”. They too are aware of the wonder of being faced with the immensity of the unknown, which seems to stretch and amaze at every discovery of the new Nobel laureates. And they too feel the same need to experience God’s presence as the common man and the unprejudiced philosopher. And from the forefront of contemporary culture returns the subject of philosophy and religion that seemed left behind as a superseded phase in the course of history. Hence also the need to teach Fides et ratio, to call it with the name and theme of Pope John Paul II’s most important Encyclical from this point of view.

St. Thomas rightly says that the human being is not just a citizen of the earthly city, but is also a participant in the celestial city, whose ruler is God and whose fellow citizens are the angels and all the saints, whether they reign in glory and rest in their true homeland or else still travel the earth as pilgrims. According to the teaching of St. Paul to the Ephesians, “you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God”.53 But human nature is not sufficient to make the human being a citizen of this city, he must be elevated to it by the grace of God. Because it is clear that those virtues that belong to men as citizens of an earthly city, cannot be acquired

51 De Anima, III, 5, 430 a 14-16.
52 Lk 21:31.
53 Eph 2:19.
by them by virtue of their nature: they are not caused by our actions, but infused by
divine gift. Hence the importance of having a sound anthropological basis as a
prerequisite of education. This stems partly from scientific knowledge and partly from
philosophical and theological knowledge, because the human being is not only a
rational animal, a social person, but also a child of God, called to be a citizen of the
true homeland. Thus we also need to teach how to become citizens of this homeland.

Belonging to the celestial city generates an ebb and flow of the energies of
grace, love and forgiveness in the earthly city of the globalized world. In this sense
the Christian Churches have an important role to play, in so far as they are the direct
recipients of the Gospel’s binding heritage that calls for grace, love and the
forgiveness of one’s enemies. Today there is a great need for the peoples of the
nations of the globe to receive the grace of God and be compassionate towards one
another, and take into account the suffering of others when they demand revenge for
past injuries. What is needed here is something that formally resembles forgiveness
but is based on love and grace. Of course, advancing along this path requires great
prudence and restrained foresight. The idea of forgiveness does not distance us from
the social and political sphere as one might think. The history of the last few years
provides some wonderful examples of a kind of fusion between compassion and
politics. Consider Sadat’s whirlwind trip to Jerusalem and many another leaders’
signs of what we could define “political charity”. Of course, if, on the one hand,
charity goes beyond justice, on the other we must prevent it from replacing justice.
Charity is still a surplus, an added resource, and this surplus of charity, compassion
and respectful affection can give globalization a more deeply solidary soul, full of
profound motivations, courage and new energy. John Paul II’s effort to exercise
forgiveness in order to recover the full unity of Christian churches and walk alongside
non-Christians and non-believers, seems more necessary and exemplary than ever to
provide the Catholic Church’s new evangelization project after Vatican II with a solid
dose of charity.

Globalization has strengthened the relationship between the great religious
traditions that increasingly know and acknowledge one another. The dialogue
between these religions and cultures, so wisely carried out by John Paul II and now by
Benedict XVI, is becoming increasingly more vital. This is mainly due to the
emergence of new forms of fundamentalism and systems that are not controlled by
governments and that use fundamentalism in their power struggles for selfish and
sectorial interests. This dialogue could also strengthen the foundations for the
establishment of a wide universal framework of ethical values, based on justice and
love, and to progressively find an institutional ethical dimension thereof, based on
consensus.

The Church thus responds to the challenge of globalization by teaching this
new evangelization centred on grace, doctrine and the praxis of Jesus Christ who
makes the human being aware of the depths of his humanity, of his existence and of
his agency.

Thank you.

54 “Homo autem non solum est civis terrenae civitatis, sed est particeps civitatis caelestis Jerusalem, cuius rector est
dominas, et cives Angeli et sancti omnes, sive regnent in gloria et quiescant in patria, sive adhuc peregrinantur in terris,
secundum illud apostoli, Ephes. II, 19: estis eves sanctorum, et domestici Dei, et cetera. Ad hoc autem quod homo huius
civitatis sit particeps, non sufficit sua natura, sed ad hoc elevatur per gratiam Dei. Nam manifestum est quod quodiones illae
qua sunt hominis in quantum est huius civitatis particeps, non possunt ab eo acquiri per sua naturalia; unde non
causantur ab actibus nostri, sed ex divino munere nobis infundantur” (De virtutibus in communi, q. un., a. 5).