



***“May we strengthen all educational endeavors  
that help people grow in their identity,  
while vowing to help them in achieving that reality.”***

**Olmer Alveiro Muñoz Sánchez\***

Two contemporary historians, Eric Hobsbawm and Giuliano Procacci, propose that the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st is *Barbarie*. They see this period as the beginning of fragmentation, lacking a moral compass, and the gradual loss of fundamental ideals and enlightenment: Equality, Freedom, and Love for Each Other. In short, this century has resulted in tremendous changes that have caused people to let themselves be used as instruments, rather than as agents of change, as so beautifully expressed by the great philosopher Koenigsberg Emanuel Kant.

It is therefore, from this academic and cultural point of view, that I intend to bring to light the values that have been engendered through the education of the Company of Mary over the last four hundred years – in the education of the whole person: in religion, economics, politics, science and technology- all following the guidelines of the Gospel and of the Christian Humanism, in service to all people now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Philosophical and educational points for reflection on education.**

### **1.- The human person in search of meaning:**

From the very beginning, I refer to the existential crisis of young people from the late 20th century or the early 21<sup>st</sup> century – who learn by experience and discovery that science and technology, in and of themselves, do not bring any lasting joy. It is here where we most aptly return to Martin Heidegger and his thoughts about life and existence. It is precisely Heidegger’s criticism of modern society and its scientific model which has distanced us from the fundamental question of the human being, and has taken us to the limits of our being, and of things. From this perspective the questions that we should ask in the educational context are: Do we educate “people” or do we educate “things”? Do we educate men and women to take possession of themselves merely as useful objects for capitalism and/or as liberals, or do we actually focus our energies in maintaining the world awake and aware of each person - of his /her history, of the cosmos, as a presence, as liberty, as an opening to reach others? In the face of these questions what can education do? In the first place, we can try to raise intellectual awareness to a level of human existence, that is to say, to our scholarly cages that are not only centers of thinkers, but rather of people who look toward the transformation of their own context. If this is so, then it implies a social-political responsibility. In the second place, we have before us the challenge of a transformational education. One in which each individual is greatly moved, to the degree that the structure of our curriculum should lead toward a dimension of feeling, of being a person like all others.

**\* Profesor of philosophy, political science and classical languages in the Pontifical University Bolivariana in Medellín (Colombia).**

## 2.- The Face of the Other

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings before us a crisis in the breakdown of our foundations, of our basic principles. I agree with Emmanuel Levinas and his position about the face of the other as a manifestation of the disturbance of others and of humanity. If the western philosophies have helped us recognize the individual as one with rights and personal responsibilities, they are, too, responsible for distancing us from others in a profound way, that is to say, in the face of our fellow man and of God.

Fernando Savater points out that to educate in order to live better, implies that one must discover in the other his/her human face. That is, in itself, an assignment in education. It is a challenge in the face of a selfish and basically secular world that has forgotten God and needs to recover the human dimension of man. Is it possible that our curriculum in its diversity of knowledge is thinking about an encounter with the Other, and with other people? Are the methodologies in teaching really pertinent in directing our minds towards scientific and technological knowledge?

## 3.- Education Amidst Hostility and Conflict in Multi-Cultural Societies

From the global, as well as the local context of society, we find certain issues more difficult than others. Thus, we must prepare students to have a positive awareness in facing the difficulties that they may encounter in a changing world. The thesis of Thomas Hobbes, the Scott, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, suggests that human beings are innately selfish, and generally are out to protect themselves from others – that we should install a government and a governor; The Hobbesonian model that in principal stresses an essentially violent nature, leads us to think that the educational endeavor should perfect the *human nature*.. On the other hand, the philosopher Heracles proposes *“war is the father of many things” in as much as it changes things, it creates new spaces, new ideas, and new situations; signaling also that “Opposites attract and generate harmony.”* Setting aside that great theory, we may ask ourselves if education is merely a place in which all enemies are together, or is education the creator of infinite possibilities for dialog, debate, conversation, of consensus? Can we find that positive dissent may bring us closer to the truth? This said, we can propose that in the realm of education, the selfish aspect of man should not be imprinted on the student - (Hobbes), but rather the capacity of seeing diversity and differing opinions as building blocks for the future of man.

To educate in this sense, challenges us to be tolerant in pluralistic societies; this is already the case in India, where during many centuries Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus lived together. In Spain the Moors, Christians, and Jews coexisted for more than 8 centuries. Such a lesson cannot be denied by Christians either, as Christ lived and died among the Jews and others who were not Jewish, where the focus of attention is the person, not his language, nor his religion – it is his creator, and in this sense the whole person, who is open and free.

## 4.- The Feeble-Mindedness of Contemporary Man

Today one of the most controversial theories in philosophy is that put forth by the great Italian thinker Gianni Vattimo. He submits that the “metarrelatos” (we take these metarrelatos to mean the foundation that a person has as the fundamental basis of one’s existence as well as those we find in society as part of the fabric or actual construction of civilization.) From his point of view, the foundation has fallen apart and should not even exist today as widely reported. From our perspective we suggest that there is a large space or vacuum in the life of modern man, who believes and feels that such a strong foundation exist, and yet including a lack of values, of ethical behavior, of personal identity. This original philosophical position from postmodern Europe has great influence on the philosophical thinking and everyday life on the Latin American. Well then, perhaps today our challenge in education and in the Company of Mary should be to teach the solid

foundation of His existence. That is to say, the intellectual content should provide the *feeling* of his existence. What's more, a very rigorous academic program and elaborate curriculum serve very little purpose if they do not include the capacity to apply them to everyday life.

## 5.- The Hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) A Horizon of Understanding

In this last commentary I would like to make use of Hans George Gadamer's thesis in which truth comes from *interpretation*. It is not imposing, or absolute, and stands apart from the dialog, from the conversation, and from debate. It unites all measure of humanity and we can arrive at a place that Gadamer describes as the uniting of two horizons, that is to say the capacity to actively listen to another and to understand. It is the ontological dimension that opens the door, far removed from simple instrumentalization. It is the capacity to comprehend through language, from one to the other, to the human person, to the world, to reality, to make of the language, as Heidegger says, the home of the Creator. *The language as logos, like comprehension, like dialogue, keeps us alert and aware of others, of the world, of its history, and of its life.* This point causes us to think about the activities related to education: to educate is not merely to impart facts and information, but rather they should be directed to a generation of interpretations that expand over the world. At the same time they avoid intellectual radicals, and fundamentalist principles which are what produce wars, conflicts, misunderstandings, absolutes in structure, loneliness, and bitterness in man. To have an understanding of today is to know how to interpret.

## 6.- Some Conclusions:

I would like to conclude by pointing out some philosophical/educational aspects in order to put our mission into practice. First, it is urgent to value the educational element as a meeting place with others and in this sense, a place of ethics. And because of that, the contents of subjects and of various other disciplines should consider the other as being transcendent and not just an instrument or object (Immanuel Kant). In the second place, it is necessary to instill/replant the illustration in the students. That is, we should promote the study of that which the people of medieval times called the liberal arts in which we emphasize beauty and aesthetic quality. We should promote reflection on the various cultures, on history, on the revival of traditions as a value that is integrated in the search for truth. And thus avoid reducing academia to some institutions of higher learning in Columbia. In the third place, we should suggest that in the context of education, it is very basic to generate or allow room for the integration of diversity, of different cultures, recognizing the gifts of the other, in spite of the fact that they may be different. In this respect, Sister Beatriz Agudelo, says that the foundress, Saint Jeanne de Lestonnac *"was a woman who knew how to integrate various bodies of knowledge and experience..."* In the fourth place, it is necessary to revitalize our educational activities. A new Christian Humanism is the central axis that will allow us to recognize in others, in their thoughts, in their ideals, in what motivates them in life, the "Seeds of the Verb" as Vatican II Council said.

It is Christian Humanism, that which teaches us to respect and recognize others, and it leads us to consider our instructional activities as an integral formation that supersedes technical and instrumental activities.

Finally I would like to point out three attitudes drawn from the most contemporary writings of the philosopher, Michel, Foucault. He teaches that our ethical/esthetic thinking should have three principles that may be applied to our life and that we consider to be relevant for education. They are:

- a) to promote care for oneself as an ethical attitude in which one's own life and the lives of others is a fundamental value and that way we should take care of ourselves as an attitude that is not self-centered or egotistical, but rather of caring for oneself (that which in Greek is called EPIMELEIA.)

- b) the care of others as a political or community attitude, that is to say, the common and public wellbeing.
- c) the care of things and scientific endeavors. This attitude is reflected in the way we care for the world that surrounds us: the neighborhood, the municipality, the country, that we take care of our natural resources and the environment.

These three principles make us think that the field of education, should lead our students to care for themselves, care for others, their communities, the care for their environment, scientific endeavors, everything with the goal of succeeding in what Aristotle describes as “eudemonia”, that is to say, the pursuit of joy for all people in their daily lives.