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## EDUCATION AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY THE ROLE OF FAMILY, SPIRITUALITY AND UNIVERSITY

### EDUCACIÓN Y ECOLOGÍA INTEGRAL EL PAPEL DE LA FAMILIA, LA ESPIRITUALIDAD Y LA UNIVERSIDAD

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*Abstract:* This article asserts the need for education in order to move towards integral ecology and studies the role that the family, spirituality and the university can play in this formative task. The family has the primary right to educate and it is indeed the most important school. Spirituality “can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world”. The university must also play an important role, harmoniously integrating learning and social service, rather than reducing itself to a merely instrumental and transmitting function. Thus, a new relational paradigm will be possible, one that fosters family relationships and a holistic vision of reality. This urgent need has also been highlighted by the current Covid-19 pandemic.

*Keywords:* Education, Integral ecology, University, Family, Spirituality

*Sumario:* Este artículo muestra que la educación es imprescindible para poder avanzar hacia la ecología integral y estudia el papel que la familia, la espiritualidad y la universidad pueden desempeñar en esta tarea formativa. La familia es «la más importante escuela» y la espiritualidad ofrece las motivaciones que necesitamos «para alimentar una pasión por el cuidado del mundo». También la universidad debe desempeñar un papel importante, integrando armoniosamente el aprendizaje y el servicio social a la comunidad (*service learning*), en lugar de reducirse a una función meramente instrumental y transmisora. Será así posible un nuevo paradigma relacional, que potencie las relaciones familiares y la visión holística de la realidad. Se trata de una necesidad urgente que la pandemia del Covid-19 ha puesto nuevamente de manifiesto.

*Palabras clave:* Educación, Ecología integral, Universidad, Familia, Espiritualidad

This article asserts the need for education in order to move towards integral ecology and studies the role that the family, spirituality, and the university can play in this formative task. The family has the primary role and right to educate<sup>1</sup> and, indeed, it is “the most important school.”<sup>2</sup> Spirituality offers the motivations we need “to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.”<sup>3</sup> It even helps us to experience “the intimate connection between God and all beings” (234); that is, it allows us to reach the mystical experience. We need that “interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes, and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity” (216).

The university can also play an important role in this educational path, especially if it succeeds in integrating the acquisition of knowledge with social service to the community (*service learning*). Ideas and knowledge are not enough. Instead of limiting itself to a merely instrumental and transmitting function, the university must strengthen family relations and a holistic vision of reality. It has been proven that, even in the classroom, the quality of the relationship between teachers and students conditions the success of education.<sup>4</sup>

The university must also cooperate with other educational agents. Among them, the encyclical *Laudato si'* mentions the school, the family, the media,<sup>5</sup> and catechesis (213).

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, «Address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See» (Jan. 9, 2020), in *L'Osservatore Romano*, [OR], 6 (Jan. 10, 2020) 4-5, here 4.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, «Address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See» (Jan. 11, 2016), in *OR 156/7* (Jan. 11/12, 2016) 4-5, here 4.

<sup>3</sup> Francis, «*Laudato si'*. Encyclical letter» (May 24, 2015), [LS], n. 216, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis [AAS]* 107 (2015) 847-945; Id., «*Evangelii gaudium* Apostolic exhortation» (Nov. 24, 2013), [EG], n. 261, in *AAS* 105 (2013) 1019-1137. In the body of the text, the quotations of the encyclical *Laudato si'* will be indicated with just the numbers in Parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> “A fruitful education does not primarily depend on the preparation of the teacher or the skills of the pupil, but on the quality of the relationship that is established between them.” Congregation for Catholic Education, «Global compact on education. *Instrumentum laboris*», [PEG], n. 3.2, in <https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/it/instrumentum-laboris/> (May 14, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Today it is recognized that the media are powerful shapers of reality, capable of conditioning the entire ecosystem. We are all immersed in the vital environment that they create and we must inhabit it responsibly. Cf. Carbaajo Núñez M., “*Todo está conectado*” *Ecología integral y comunicación en la era digital*, Paulinas, Lima 2019.

“Education is not limited to school and university classrooms; it is principally ensured by strengthening and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate, and the right of Churches and social communities to support and assist families in raising their children.”<sup>6</sup>

Education is essential to change the individualistic mentality which is at the base of the technocratic paradigm. It is necessary to re-establish the four fundamental family relationships: with God, with oneself, with others and with nature, which correspond to the four levels of the ecological balance: spiritual, interior, social, and natural (210). Besides, it is urgent to review the philosophical and anthropological ideas that have prevailed in Western society, in order to lay the foundations of a new relational paradigm.<sup>7</sup> In this line, the encyclical *Laudato si'* refers to integral ecology and affirms that everything is connected.

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm (111).

The first part of this article shows that the Covid-19 pandemic is unmasking the technocratic and individualistic ideology that has prevailed in contemporary culture. We need to establish a new relational paradigm, learning from the experiences of the past; for example, from the responses that the Franciscan friars offered in the 14th century during the Black Death epidemic. The second and third parts present the role that the family and the spirituality can play in the educational path towards integral ecology. Finally, the fourth part of the article studies the importance of the university in restoring a holistic vision of reality and in strengthening family relationships at all levels.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, «Address to the members of the diplomatic corps» (Jan. 9, 2020), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> We have studied this topic in our article: Carbajo Núñez M., «Franciscan Spirituality and Integral ecology. Relational bases vs the Throwaway culture», in *Islamochristiana* 43 (2017) 59-78.

<sup>8</sup> An Italian version of this article will be published with the proceedings of a full-day conference meeting organized by the Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical University Antonianum on February 28, 2020.

## 1. The Covid-19 unmasks the technocratic and individualistic ideology

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in Wuhan (China) at the end of 2019, has caused a huge socio-economic crisis and, once again, has uncovered our vulnerability, the absurdity of our despotic anthropocentrism, and the falsity of our claim “to be like gods.”<sup>9</sup> One tiny and inert element of nature has been enough to bring into disarray the entire technocratic society of competitive individualism and globalized indifference.

Fascinated by technological advances, we have neglected fraternity and relational goods, that are “the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities.”<sup>10</sup> As the Bible illustrates: “in his prime, man does not understand” (Ps 49,21).

Some authors have recently maintained that, through biotechnological progress, we will be able to overcome the physical limitations that derive from our belonging to the physical Web of Life. They claim that we will achieve a post-human (or trans-human) condition that will be more secure and self-sufficient. “The era when humankind stood helpless before natural epidemics is probably over.”<sup>11</sup> This claim of increasing superiority and autonomy over the rest of creation has again fallen to the ground with the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 1.1. A dialectic of perennial conflict at all levels

The Covid-19 pandemic forces us to review the concept of freedom. Franciscans see it as the essential aspect of everything that exists and relates it closely to gratuity and gift. Liberal ideology, however, has reduced it to a simple absence of constraint, making of it another individual property. Each one must follow his own way, fighting mercilessly against the other competitors.

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<sup>9</sup> Gn 3,5. The author has developed these ideas on the Covid-19 pandemic and has related them to the Franciscan economic proposal in the preface to his book: Carbaajo Núñez M., *Franziskanische Wirtschaft. Ein Vorschlag um aus der Krise Herauszukommen*, Be&Be Verlag, Heiligenkreuz 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Francis, «Extraordinary moment of prayer» (March 27, 2020), in *OR 72* (March 29, 2020) 8. “We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other.” *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> Harari Y.N., *Homo Deus: a brief history of tomorrow*, Harvill Secker, London 2015, 14.

It is not strange that the countries which are having more difficulties in managing the health emergency are those with a more accentuated liberal tradition, because they tend to minimize the problem, giving priority to economic interests, and because they have strongly privatized and neglected their health care system.<sup>12</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) has insisted on the need to confine the population to deal with the health emergency. However, some of these countries have preferred to maintain a high level of economic activity, assuming the risk of an excessive increase in the number of deaths and infected people. Following an ever-latent social Darwinism, they have put aside the medical care to the weak and the elderly in order to devote their scarce health resources to the younger and more productive social classes. Some governments let the epidemic run its course without seriously confronting it, because they wanted to achieve “the herd immunity” as quickly as possible.

At the toughest moments of the health emergency, a fierce fight broke out among these countries, as each of them wanted to get as much medical material as possible, without caring about other countries’ needs. Some of them even tried to confiscate the equipment that was directed to another nation. Attempts were also made to secure the exclusivity of a future vaccine, while allowing the diffusion of inaccurate and unverified information on possible medical treatments.

## 1.2. Current relevance of the Franciscan response during the Black Death

The crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic can be compared to the social crisis provoked by the Black Death, which spread in Europe from the year 1347 onwards. That pandemic killed a third of the European population and forced people to revise the way they saw reality and the human person. Seven years earlier, in 1341, a credit bubble had burst in Florence, thus giving way to severe economic and financial crisis. More than thirty years were needed to get over it.

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<sup>12</sup> The health system in the United States is more expensive than in many other countries and ordinary people find it more difficult to have an easy access to their services. Emanuel E.J. «The Real Cost of the US Health Care System», in *JAMA* 319/10 (2018) 983-985, and other articles in this issue. In Italy the number of beds per 1,000 inhabitants was 9.2 in 1980, 5.8 in 1998, 4.3 in 2007 and 3.6 in 2017. Cf. [https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/04/Istat-Audizione-fondi-sanitari-integrativi\\_Allegato-statistico.xlsx](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/04/Istat-Audizione-fondi-sanitari-integrativi_Allegato-statistico.xlsx)

In those moments of enormous health and socioeconomic crisis, the Franciscan friars proposed again the ethical and economic principles that they had developed in the previous one hundred years. Based on them, the friars encouraged people to humbly recognize their own fragility and to strengthen collaboration at all levels.<sup>13</sup> Avoiding a “paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need” (*Caritas in Veritate* 58), the Franciscans invited all citizens, rich and poor, to be active and creative in the construction of the community (*communitas*). In fact, on both theoretical and practical levels, the friars made a decisive contribution to overcome the crisis and to bring about the emergence of modern economy.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.3. Towards a new relational paradigm

The universal fraternity proclaimed by the Franciscans has also been highlighted by the current epidemic. The Covid-19 virus knows no boundaries, no social classes, no other type of division or limit. Any stranger I meet on the street is so closely bound to me that he/she could be essential to my own survival. The same can be said about the rest of creatures. Recently, Pope Francis repeated that “we have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us. [...] The earth does not forgive: if we have despoiled the earth, its response will be very ugly<sup>15</sup>. And he added: “I do not know if this crisis [of Covid-19] is nature’s revenge, but it is certainly her response”<sup>16</sup>. John Paul II had already affirmed that when the human being does not follow the Creator’s plan, “nature rebels against him and no longer recognizes him as its master.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (+1274) had already warned against an arrogant manner of engaging in theology “a pride of reason that sets itself above the word of God.” Benedict XVI, «General audience» (March 17, 2010) in *OR* (March 18, 2010) 8.

<sup>14</sup> We have developed this topic in our book: Carbaajo Núñez M., *A free and fraternal economy. The Franciscan perspective*, Tau, Phoenix (AZ) 2017. The Franciscans even promoted financial institutions, such as the Mounts of Piety. *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Francis, «General audience» (April 22, 2020), in *OR* 92 (April 23, 2020) 8.

<sup>16</sup> Francis, «Interview in *The Tablet* magazine» (April 8, 2020), in *Internet*: <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/17845/pope-francis-says-pandemic-can-be-a-place-of-conversion->

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, «*Sollicitudo rei socialis. Encyclical letter*» (Dec. 30, 1987), [SRS], n. 30, in *AAS* 80 (1988) 513-586.



The virus has uncovered “once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.”<sup>18</sup> “Everything is connected.” The ties that unite us to all creatures are so strong that we can only survive if we collaborate for the common good, accepting with joy that we are beings-in-relationship, deeply dependent on each other. “We can overcome global challenges only by showing solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst.”<sup>19</sup>

## 2. The family is the first school of integral ecology

We will use the term “family” not only to refer to the nuclear family, normally based on marriage, but also to the family of believers in God the Father,<sup>20</sup> to the universal human family, and to the cosmic family. All of creation is one big family under the same roof. Integral ecology embraces these four levels, which are mutually dependent and closely related.

The family founded on marriage is the first school of integral ecology. In it, we experience the logic of gratuitousness and develop the capacity to relate seeking communion and building community. It is “a school that teaches how to overcome a certain individualistic mind-set which has worked its way into our societies”<sup>21</sup> and into our relationships with other creatures.

“The family is the principal agent of an integral ecology, because it is the primary social subject which contains within it the two fundamental principles of human civilization on earth: the principle of communion and the principle of fruitfulness.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Francis, «Extraordinary moment of prayer» (March 27, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Francis, «Extraordinary moment of prayer» (March 27, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> The Church “is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family.” Second Vatican Council, «*Gaudium et spes*. Pastoral constitution» (Dec. 7, 1965), [GS], n. 40, in AAS 58 (1966), 1025-1120; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [CCC], n. 854, LEV, Vatican City 1997; cf. John Paul II, «*Familiaris consortio*. Apostolic exhortation» (Nov. 22, 1981), [FC], n. 74, in AAS 74 (1982) 81-191.

<sup>21</sup> Francis, «Message to participants in the 47th Social week of Italian Catholics» (Sept. 11, 2013), in *Notiziario della CEI 47/4 (2013) 189-192*. (English: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130911\\_settimana-sociale-cattolici.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130911_settimana-sociale-cattolici.html)).

<sup>22</sup> Francis, «*Amoris Laetitia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation» (March 19, 2016), [AL], n. 277, in AAS 108/4 (April 1, 2016) 311-446.

A well-structured family privileges being over having and helps its members to welcome the mystery of the Triune God. “The mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities.”<sup>23</sup>

“In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. [...] These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings” (213).

Unfortunately, many families in our society marginalize their grandparents and avoid children. Thus, it is not surprising that many feel “crushed in the present because they forget the past and fear the future.”<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis recalled that “the elderly retain humanity’s memory”<sup>25</sup> and that children “bring life, cheerfulness, hope.”<sup>26</sup>

“The crisis of the family has produced a human ecological crisis.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, the environmental crisis is a crisis of relationships. In our individualistic society, family ties are weakening and the global threatens the local. The media and social networks convey only an illusion of community, while responding to the logic of consumerism. We need to restore relational goods and family relationships at all levels to make integral ecology possible.

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<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, «*Centesimus annus*. Encyclical letter» (May 1, 1991), [CA], n. 39, in AAS 83 (1991) 793-867. In the family, “man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. [...] It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected. *Ibid.*”

<sup>24</sup> Pasquale G., «*Sensus fidei, luogo privilegiato del discernimento*», in *CredereOggi* 221 (2017) 55-69, here 57.

<sup>25</sup> Francis, «Address to the faithful at Pietrelcina» (March 17, 2018), in *OR* 64 (March 18, 2018) 8.

<sup>26</sup> Francis, «General audience» (March 18, 2015), in *OR* 64 (March 19, 2015) 8.

<sup>27</sup> Francis, «Address to participants in the international colloquium on the complementarity between man and woman» (Nov. 17, 2014), n. 2, in AAS 106/12 (2014) 979-981.

### 3. Spirituality and mysticism in the educational path

Spirituality is fundamental in the educational path towards integral ecology. If we do not learn to take care of our interior life, we cannot take care of the exterior life, and vice versa. The same can be said of the identity/alterity binomial (*PEG* 2.5). We all need to “develop a spirituality” (240) and a mysticism that helps us to perceive reality in an integral way, as a joyful mystery of communion and relationships. In his theory of enlightenment, Bonaventure identifies four degrees of light in human knowledge: exterior, inferior, interior, and superior. He invites us to have the mystic’s profound gaze.

Let no one think he will find sufficiency in a reading which lacks unction, an enquiry which lacks devotion, a search which arouses no wonder, a survey without enthusiasm, industry without piety, knowledge without love, intelligence without humility, application without grace, contemplation without wisdom inspired by God.<sup>28</sup>

Spirituality purifies our hearts and our relationships, offering us values and motivations to live in a more authentic, sober, fraternal, and satisfactory way. With practices such as fasting, abstinence, and almsgiving, it helps us to live “in communion with all that surrounds us” (216), to understand that “less is more,” and to grow in “the capacity to be happy with little” (222).

Bonaventure affirms that sin has blurred our capacity to immediately perceive the reflection of the Trinity in every creature (239). We need to recover that “distinctive way of looking at things” (111), in order to be able to contemplate the world “from within” (220) and make ecological conversion possible. Without the mystical and contemplative dimension, we are incapable of listening to others and of hearing the “paradoxical and silent voice” of creatures,<sup>29</sup> which speak to us even if we cannot hear their voice (Ps 19,4).

Today, we have many answers, but we do not know how to formulate the fundamental questions. In this context, we must learn to inhabit silence, to reflect, discern, meditate, and savor the soft and slow rhythm of life.

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<sup>28</sup> *Itin.* Prol. n.4 (*Quaracchi* V 296). “Quando fides non assentit propter rationem, sed propter amorem eius cui assentit, desiderat habere rationes.” Id., *ISent.* Proemium q.2 ad 6 (*Quaracchi* I 11).

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, «Catechesis» (Jan. 26, 2000), n. 5, quoted in *LS* 85.

### 3.1. The path of beauty and the integral approach

In the educational path towards integral ecology, the logic of gratuitousness, and the path of beauty (*via pulchritudinis*)<sup>30</sup> must be fostered. In fact, a good aesthetic education helps us “to reject self-interested pragmatism” (215). The mystic has this contemplative gaze and he/she is capable of perceiving and admiring the beautiful (*QA* 56), “expanding horizons beyond conflicts” (*QA* 104). This evocative and symbolic language allows us to focus our attention on a symbolic horizon that helps to overcome polarities and conflicting dialectics, discovering in the face of others the splendor of “the image of God.”<sup>31</sup>

Bonaventure affirms that the rational reading of nature must be completed with the symbolic reading. In fact, only the contemplative can understand the dignity and overall beauty of the book of nature.<sup>32</sup> That beauty has its source in the Trinity.<sup>33</sup>

Education and evangelization are not attractive when they are detached from beauty. “It is not possible to love what is not beautiful,”<sup>34</sup> said Saint Augustine. Indeed, the way of beauty is “a particularly meaningful way of expressing spirituality.”<sup>35</sup>

The aesthetic and contemplative vision of creation must be accompanied by an integral approach that includes different disciplines: the theology of creation, spirituality, cosmology, etc. Until recent times, the theology

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<sup>30</sup> “The notion of the quality of life” cannot “be imposed from without, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group.” *LS 144*; Francis, «*Querida Amazonia. Apostolic exhortation post-synodal*» (Feb. 2, 2020), [*QA*], n. 40, LEV, Vatican City 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Francis, «*Christus vivit. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation*» (March 25, 2019), n. 165, LEV, Vatican City 2019.

<sup>32</sup> «Non est autem haec inventa ad “fugam ignorantiae”, quia multo plura scibilia posent tradi in tanta quantitate doctrinae quam hic tradita sunt; sed hic eadem frequenter replicantur, ut efficacius inducatur auditor ad operationem eorum quae hic persuadentur» Duns Scoto J., «*Ordinatio*» [*Ord.*], Prol. n.355 (*Vat. I* 231).

<sup>33</sup> «Pater, lux vigentissima; Filius, splendor pulcherrimus et fulgentissimus; Spiritus sanctus, calor ardentissimus.» Bonaventure, «*Collationes in Hexaëmeron*», [*Hex.*], Sermo XXI I (*Quaracchi VI/1* 380).

<sup>34</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The confessions*, IV 13,20, in Migne, *Patrologia latina*, [*PL*], 32, 701 (In English: Sheed & Ward, London 1999); Id., *De music*, VI 13,38, in *PL* 32 1183-1184.

<sup>35</sup> XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, (Oct. 7-28, 2012), *Message to the People of God*, LEV, Vatican City 2012, n. 10 ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20121026\\_message-synod\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20121026_message-synod_en.html))

of creation had been neglected. On the other hand, there has been an insistence on the fallen nature due to sin and, therefore, in need of redemption,<sup>36</sup> forgetting that empirical realities are also the object of spirituality. The Incarnate Word does not redeem us *from* the matter, but *with* the matter and *with* the body. It is not by chance that Francis of Assisi prayed by repeating: “*Deus meus et omnia*” (My God and my All). Indeed, he saw “all things in God and God in all things.”<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2. Francis of Assisi, model of integral ecology

The socio-environmental crisis is linked to the crisis of the family and to the crisis of spirituality. In reality, all these are expressions of a single crisis. To overcome it, we need to be “nourished by a mystical spirituality in the style of St. Francis of Assisi” (*SI9df* 17).

Assuming the experience and intuitions of the “Poor Little Man” of Assisi, Bonaventure affirms that, to get true wisdom, a threefold gaze is necessary. In fact, we can approach the sensitive world, with the eyes of the flesh; the inner world of the soul, with the eyes of reason; and the mystery of God, with the eyes of contemplation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Christian “creed itself is overbalanced in favor of redemption. [...] Creation becomes increasingly less important.” Berry T., *The dream of the Earth*, Sierra, San Francis 1988, 126; Fox M., *Original blessing*, Bear, New Mexico 1983, 54. This leads to the “conclusion that matter, the body, and sexuality are now somehow problematic, even malignant.” Becker W.H., «Ecological sin», in *Theology Today* 49/2 (1992) 152-164, here 157.

<sup>37</sup> Bonaventure, «The minor legend», [*Lm*], 3,6 in Armstrong R.J. – J.A.W. Hellmann – W.J. Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, 3 vol., New City Press, New York 2001, [*FAED*], II, 684-717. Bonaventure affirms that the human being can ascend towards God through sensible things because he is like a microcosm, whose interior and psychological order contains and responds to the order of the macrocosm: “In anima namque humana idem est *intimum et supremum* [...] unde quanto magis redit ad interiora, tanto magis ascendit et unitur aeternis.” Id., «Commentaria in II librum Sententiarum», [*Sent.*], d.8 p.2 a.unicus q.2 (*Quaracchi* II 226b-227a). “Notando igitur, quod iste mundus, here dicitur *macrocosmus*, intrat ad animam nostram, quae dicitur *minor mundus*, per portas quinque sensuum, secundum ipsorum sensibilibium *apprehensionem, oblectationem et diiudicationem*” *Itin.* c.2, n.2 (*Quaracchi* V 300a).

<sup>38</sup> “Oculum *carnis*, quo videret mundum et ea quae sunt in mundo; oculum *rationis*, quo videret animum et ea quae sunt in animo; oculum *contemplationis*, quo videret Deum et ea quae sunt in Deo.” Bonaventure, «Breviloquium», [*Brevil.*], II c.12 n.5 (*Quaracchi* V 230b).

The uncreated Word is the book of wisdom. [...] Throughout the entire creation, the wisdom of God shines forth from Him and in Him, as in a mirror containing the beauty of all forms and lights and as in a book in which all things are written according the deep secrets of God.<sup>39</sup>

Francis of Assisi's mystical approach is especially evident in two of his writings: "The Canticle of the Creatures" and "The Praises of God"<sup>40</sup>. It is noteworthy that the qualities he assigns to creatures in the first writing are the same as those he attributes to the Creator in the second.

Above all, Francis shows a mysticism, an ecological spirituality, and a holistic way of being in vital communion with all creatures. He "recognized, loved, and praised their Maker in all things,"<sup>41</sup> discovering himself as a universal brother.<sup>42</sup> He even personalized the other creatures ("Brother Sun", "Sister Mother Earth"). Indeed, he "was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature, and with himself" (10).

John Paul II praised his contemplative outlook, typical "of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift."<sup>43</sup> Benedict XVI says that Francis of Assisi was "not only an environmentalist or a pacifist," in the sense we now give to these terms; "he was above all a convert."<sup>44</sup> In fact, "his being a man of peace, tolerance, and dialogue, is ever born from his experience of God-Love."<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis adds that Saint Francis' vision is integral: "He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (10).

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<sup>39</sup> "Verbum increatum est sapientiae liber [...]. Ut sic *multiformis sapientia Dei* ex ipso et in ipso per totum regnum refulgeat tanquam a speculo decoris omnium specierum et luminum contentivo et tanquam in libro, in quo secundum profunda Dei mysteria omnia conscribuntur." Bonaventure, «Lignum vitae» [*Lig. Vitae*], XII n.46 (*Quaracchi VIII* 84-85).

<sup>40</sup> Francis of Assisi, «The Canticle of the Creatures» (*FAED I*, 113-114); Id., «The Praises of God» (*FAED I*, 108-111).

<sup>41</sup> *Lm* 3,6. "Whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise" (11).

<sup>42</sup> Celano T. of, «The Life of Saint Francis» [*ICeI*], n. 81 (*FAED I*, 171-308); Bonaventure, «The Major Legend» [*LM*], n. 8.6 (*FAED II*, 525-683).

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, «*Evangelium Vitae*, Encyclical letter» (March 25, 1995), n. 83, in *AAS* 87 (1995) 401-522.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, «Meeting with the priests of the Italian Diocese of Albano» (Aug. 31, 2006), in *InsB16*, II/2 (2006) 163-179, here 178.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, «Address at the square in front of the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels» (Jun 17, 2007) in *InsB16*, III/1 (2007) 1139-1146, here 1145.

#### 4. The university and integral formation

“Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life” (213). Continuing this initial formation, the university should promote research to learn about environmental problems and to know how to address them. It cannot limit itself to transmitting technical and scientific information. Its formation must be comprehensive, aimed at transforming heart and mind, promoting solidarity and ecological citizenship. Thus, it must help to improve our four fundamental relationships and to strengthen the role of the community in the educational task. Pope Francis recently affirmed that “as a university, as educational institutions, as teachers and students, life itself challenges us to answer these two questions: What does this world need us for? Where is your brother?”<sup>46</sup>

The current technocratic paradigm reduces everything to an object of analysis and dissection (knowing to dominate). On the contrary, the Franciscan conception of science invites us to “acknowledge” the mystery of others, to growth in wisdom and love. Hence the importance of collaboration between science and religion. Einstein said that “science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”<sup>47</sup>

##### 4.1. A polyhedral education, because “everything is connected”

The search for unity in diversity, typical of authentic family life, must also continue in university education. The model is “the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness” (EG 236). This multidimensional approach requires “an «educational village», in which all people, according to their respective roles, share the task of forming a network of open, human relationships.”<sup>48</sup>

The “open and inclusive education” fosters individuality instead of individualism; that is, it places at the center the singular, unique, and, at the

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<sup>46</sup> Francis, «Address. Meeting with educators» (Quito, July 7, 2015), in *OR* 153 (July 9, 2015) 7.

<sup>47</sup> Einstein A., *Ideas and opinions, Crown-Bonanza, New York, 1954, 47.*

<sup>48</sup> Francis, «Message for the launch of the Global Compact on education», in *OR* 207 (Sept. 13, 2019) 8. “Unity and difference are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary they imply each other.” *PEG* 3.1

same time, intrinsically social person. In addition, it seeks to overcome “division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships.”<sup>49</sup>

“The true service of education is education to service” or, better still, “education as service” (*PEG* 4.3). Students, teachers and researchers must bring their talents to fruition, not so much for self-promotion, but rather to give back to the community what they have generously received. Therefore, the university should not be reduced to a transmission of knowledge but rather it must train people to be ready and available to serve the community. It should also strengthen the cognitive society and a planetary citizenship, pursuing “the common good, which truly has a place for everyone” (*EG* 236).

This inclusive and interdisciplinary education fosters a holistic view of reality that cannot be reduced to the sum of the individual parts. Indeed, “the whole is greater than the part” (141), “unity is greater than conflict” (198), and “time is greater than space” (178).

Pope Francis recognizes “that we still lack the culture needed to confront” the current socio-environmental crisis (53). We are in “a culture obsessively centered on the mastery of human beings – individually and as a species – over reality.”<sup>50</sup> Trying to fill this gap, the apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* asks for ecclesiastical universities to be scientific and cultural laboratories. “On the cultural level of academic training and scientific study”, they should promote “a broad and generous effort at a radical paradigm shift,” and at “a bold cultural revolution,”<sup>51</sup> especially with regard to the method used. In fact, *Veritatis Gaudium* invites all to assume “interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches carried out with wisdom and creativity” (*VG* pr. 4c), so that new models of progress and development may emerge (194).

#### 4.2. An interactive, dynamic, and inclusive process

Education cannot be understood as modelling the trainee, instilling previously elaborated values and ideals. That would be to instruct, not to educate. In his pastoral and formative work, the educator has to develop the

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<sup>49</sup> Francis, «Message for the launch of the Global compact on education» (Sept. 12, 2019) 8.

<sup>50</sup> Francis, «Address to participants in the general assembly of the Pontifical academy for life» (Oct. 5, 2017), n. 1, in *OR* 229 (Oct. 6, 2017) 7.

<sup>51</sup> Francis, «*Veritatis Gaudium*. Apostolic constitution on ecclesiastical universities and faculties» (Jan. 29, 2018), [*VG*], n. 3, LEV, Vatican City 2018.



creativity of an artist, because there are no valid answers that can be applied to every person in a uniform and mechanical way.

Rather than a linear transfer, education is a process of mutual assistance, in which everyone helps each other to discover what everyone already is and to learn how to be more and more him/herself. More than transmitting a program, education is an alliance, a partnership, to advance together towards the truth. Using the expressions “compact” and “educational alliance,” the Pope underlines the importance of dialogue and affectionate respect for diversity. Instead of being a threat or an obstacle, diversity helps and enriches everyone.<sup>52</sup>

Paolo Freire asserts that it is not a matter of educating others, but of being mutually educated, while confronting together the daily challenges. “Nobody educates anybody, nobody educates himself, human beings are educated by each other, mediated by the world.”<sup>53</sup>

*Veritatis Gaudium* invites all to promote a true culture of encounter in order to reach a plurality of knowledge through dialogue, fraternity, discernment, and network collaboration (*VG* pr. 1 & 4).

Indispensable in this regard is the establishment of new and qualified centers of research where scholars from different religions and from different scientific fields can interact with responsible freedom and mutual transparency, thus entering into “dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity(*VG* pr. 5).

In fact, “education requires entering into sincere and genuine dialogue.”<sup>54</sup> The Church is a “community of brothers and sisters” that try to overcome the globalized indifference<sup>55</sup> of our society, which “makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers” (*CV* 19).

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<sup>52</sup> Francis, «Message for the launch of the Global Compact on education» (Sept. 12, 2019) 8. “The inability to accept the diversity of others” leads to war, possessive abuse, and domination. Francis, «Message for the 53rd World Day of Peace» [*WDP*], (Jan. 1, 2020,) 1, in *OR* 19 (Jan. 25, 2020) 8.

<sup>53</sup> Freire P., *Pedagogía del oprimido*, Madrid 2008 (20ª reimpresión), 69 (Id., *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Bloomsbury, New York 2018); Cf. NANNI C., *Corresponsabili. Crescere ed educarsi insieme*, Roma 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Francis, «Address to the members of the diplomatic corps» (Jan. 9, 2020) p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> “In a world marked by a «globalization of indifference» which makes us slowly injured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves.” *WDP 2014, n. 1, in Insegnamenti di Francis, [InsFco]*, LEV, Vatican City, vol. 1,2 (2013) 751-753, here 751-752.

### 4.3. An inductive education

The Amazon Synod proposed an inductive method of education, which gives priority to the local over the global. Starting from the local, it offers a global vision of reality. In fact, the Synod focused on a specific geographical area, but it had a universal resonance, showing that the challenges of the Amazon are also ours. In its final document, the Synod invited us to learn from the indigenous peoples, specifically from their holistic cultural vision:

The pattern of thinking of indigenous peoples offers an integrated vision of reality, capable of understanding the multiple connections existing throughout creation. This contrasts with the dominant current of Western thought that tends to fragment reality in order to understand it but then fails to articulate the relationships between the various fields of knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

The Synod also affirmed the importance of the path of beauty. The post-synodal exhortation has showed a specific way of carrying it out. It also invites us to do the same: “Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense” (*QA 56*).

### 4.4. An education that strengthens relationships and community

The university must also address the lack of solidarity and empathy of our globalized world. “Our societies are characterized by growing individualism and division.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly enough, the most frequent users of new communication technologies tend to be the least empathetic.<sup>58</sup> At world-wide level, “a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized” (50), thus depriving many people of a worthy life.

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<sup>56</sup> Amazon Synod, «The Amazon: New paths for the Church and for an integral ecology. Final document» (Oct. 26, 2019), [*S19df*], n. 18, in Internet: <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/> (April 27, 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Francis, «Address to the Plenary of FAO on the occasion of the 2nd International conference on nutrition» (Nov. 20, 2014) 3, in *OR* 266 (Nov. 21, 2014) 8.

<sup>58</sup> On the rapid decline of empathy among university students, especially from 2001 onwards: Konrath S. - O’Brien E.H. - Hsing C., «Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students over Time: a Meta-analysis,» in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15/2 (2011) 180-198.

In order to face these challenges, the university must help people to “inhabit education”, inserting it into the web of life, with its faces, places, and relations. Well integrated in community life, the university will help people to reflect on social needs. It will also promote debates and specific initiatives, so that students will feel encouraged to increase their knowledge and skills through service and solidarity within the community (service learning). Therefore, the educational activity will unite learning with social service to the specific community in which everyone lives, strengthening the values of active citizenship and promoting the care for the environment

## Conclusion

Contradicting the current Darwinist vision of society, this article has highlighted the need to change mental ecology in order to reach integral ecology. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the absurdity of the current technocratic and individualistic ideology. Surely, the long weeks of confinement have been a good opportunity for us to reflect on the need for a more relational paradigm.

We have to begin a serious educational process towards a more holistic and integral vision of reality that helps us to strengthen relational goods over economic ones and to restore our four fundamental relationships: with God, with others, with ourselves and with creation. In this educational path, the family, spirituality and university must assume a fundamental role.

The data offered by science are not sufficient to bring about a change in mentality and lifestyle. Above all, we need internal motivations. Pope Francis reiterates that Spirituality and “faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters” (64). In fact, “if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously” (11).

It is necessary, therefore, to undertake an educational path that will strengthen “an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone” (202). The different areas of education (school/university, family, spirituality, media, catechesis, etc.) must collaborate in promoting a holistic perspective that emphasizes the relationship and interdependence of all beings. In this way, human beings and all other creatures will once again be able “to extend a friendly hand to one another” (106).

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