

SPIRIT OF SERVICE

In his *Message* for the launch of the *Global Compact on Education*, on September 12, 2019, Pope Francis clearly points to the specific goal of the initiative: a renewal of our commitment, with and for the new generations, to implementing a new educational alliance «to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity». Moreover, the pope indicated that the best way to meet this ambitious and more-than-ever necessary target is building an “educational village” wherein «to find global agreement about an education that integrates and respects all aspects of the person, uniting studies and everyday life, teachers, students and their families, and civil society in its intellectual, scientific, artistic, athletic, political, business and charitable dimensions. An alliance, in other words, between the earth’s inhabitants and our “common home”, which we are bound to care for and respect. An alliance that generates peace, justice and hospitality among all peoples of the human family, as well as dialogue between religions».

It goes without saying that this undertaking is not likely to be easy or rapidly implemented, given the fragmentation and crisis – sharpened by COVID-19 pandemic – affecting the present social and economic scenario. The Pontiff himself is fully aware of this and in his *Message* he called for the necessity of a triple form of courage in order to give substance, flesh and blood, to the Educational Pact: the courage to place the human person at the center; the courage to capitalize the best energies, creatively and responsibly; the courage to train individuals who are ready to offer themselves in service to the community.

What follows is a quick comment on this last form of courage highlighted by pope Francis.

The first thing to remember concerning this point is that educational dynamics of any kind cannot reach their goal without a dynamic of generous service. As for an example, the only goal of parents committed to the devel-

opment of the offspring should be to empower their children to do things themselves, to make their way in the world without parental intervention. The same is true of any educator. After all, every educator should constantly recite for his/her pupils a mantra like this: *I work so hard with you in order that you – because of me – can do without me.*

There is no doubt about what a commitment of this kind requires from the educator: it is a job as tough as completely at a loss. As soon as it is accomplished, it is over.

In this perspective, that spirit of service that pope Francis requires as the specific feature of every fruitful educational process is, to some extent, a necessary condition since the very beginning of the process itself.

So, it is not by accident that since time immemorial one of the fundamental laws that human sciences laid down as decisive for education is the one according to which only *by encountering an adult* can a child grow, that is can become an adult him/herself. In not merely chronological terms, an adult is just whoever can forget him/herself and take care of others; just whoever is able to stop pursuing his/her interests and make room for the needs of others, primarily the need of the little ones to grow, reach maturity and hence become completely developed human beings; just whoever hugs that truth according to which the spirit of service is the human way to happiness.

And here lies the key to a better understanding of why pope Francis spoke about the need to summon the *courage* to form to that spirit of service. Only by living that spirit intimately one can teach it. Well, sorry to put it so brutally, but that *spirit of service* has been withdrawn from the world since a long time ago by adults' generations.

There is no scholar exploring the current anthropological dynamics – from Bauman to Soller, from Galimberti to Recalcati, from Pietropolli Charmet to Stoppa – who has not highlighted what a momentous adults' transformation took place in the last decades. Most of adults have got trapped in the forever-young culture and consequently they are less and less up to the task of implementing their educational and generative vocation, i.e. that “spirit of service” which should supposedly enlighten their presence in the world.

Daily life provides us with the stories of so many adults who made of appearing young their life ideal: for them, youth is no more a season of life but a kind of permanent model of being human. Accordingly, instead of making themselves models of fulfilled human life, they take their children as a model to imitate in their own existence, disavowing completely their edu-

cational commitment. Instead of living out what makes adult life authentic – i.e. forgetting oneself in order to take care of the other – today’s adults get into a crazy fight with life, time, being old, the finite and precarious condition of human existence, and the reality of death itself. The overall result is a generation of adults who love their own youth more than their own children. Therefore, when speaking about a global compact on education, we have to think about not only young generations but also the adult ones which, probably more than the former, need to recover that “spirit of service” who alone is capable of fruitfully keeping the world going.

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In Memory of Giorgio Mazzanti

After a long illness, on March 12, 2021, Father Giorgio Mazzanti, admired and loved professor of Sacramentary Theology at Pontifical Urbaniana University, passed away. On March 11, the Faculty of Theology of PUU had organized a Conference in his honor whose proceedings will be published on our pages. Now He is contemplating the face of the Lord Jesus, the Spouse of humanity, a core theme of his theological research.