

AN INTERCULTURAL HUMANISM

Translation by Alberto Gabba / Gordon Leonard Symons

“Philosophy was not considered throughout the ages as the discovery, or rather, the invention of reality through our reason, but as integral wisdom, that is to say, as Man’s spiritual answer to the problem of existence. The configuration of this response can be of an intellectual type and, consequently, reason is not excluded, but it is, however, only a portion - even if an essential portion - of the human instrument, useful for meeting the demands of Being and for being able to participate in it”.
(Panikkar 1966)

“O Timothy, my friend, my advice to you, as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, is to leave behind you everything that is perceived and understood, everything that is perceptible and understandable, all that is and all that is not, and set aside understanding, strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge.
(Dionysius the Areopagite)

I think it is evident to all of us that we are living in times of great transformation, and this is happening in all fields, religious, social, cultural, industrial, technical; and even this very pandemic that is attacking all of humanity these days, seems to have the appearance of a watershed, of a transition to a new era. We are living in the years of globalization, certainly also favoured by the interests of big capital, in some ways imposed on us “from above”, but globalization will in any case be

an inevitable phenomenon, because it is an inevitable consequence of modernity, to which no backlash of old nationalism or suprematism can possibly resist. Every part of the world is inexorably on the way to becoming more and more multi-ethnic and as a consequence the confrontation between different peoples, with their own way of thinking, acting, living their own culture and spirituality, will become more and more intense. All this will give rise to a great transformation of civil life in every part of the globe.

There is historical evidence that dates back to the dawn of the Middle Ages, which I want to report to you, because in it is palpable an atmosphere similar to what we are experiencing; here too a great change is felt, precisely a transition towards a new era. It is an episode that took place in England, which at the same time testifies to the passage to a new form of religiosity and to a renewed influence of the Latin culture for the inhabitants of ancient Britain; it speaks to us of a new age that is emerging, represented by Christianity, an epochal passage that has led these tribes to agree to abandon many gods, celebrated during an immemorial paganism, to welcome a single god in their place. The chronicler of the time, known to us as the venerable Bede, brings us the words of his “Thane”, as in fact were called the “chieftains” of the time in Northumberland, which I believe means Northern Umbria. The scene takes place in Eburacum, near present-day York, the ancient city where the emperor Septimius Severus died. The event takes place two hundred years after the departure of the legionaries wanted by Arcadius, another Roman emperor, who had decided to withdraw his legions from the country, leaving the Celtic populations of Great Britain to face the Saxon invasions alone. The Thane’s name was Edwin, and he had received a request from a Christian missionary to be allowed to spread the message of Christ among his people. In this chronicle Edwin seeks advice from his pagan priest, named Coif. We have received Coif’s answer through more than thirteen centuries, thanks to the venerable Bede. Coif answered something like this: “Frankly, Sir Edwin, since I have served our gods and presided over sacrifices, I have been neither happier nor more fortunate than a man who does not pray, and my pleas are seldom answered.

Therefore I approve of welcoming a new and stronger god". In other words, the gods we've had so far haven't turned out to be very good, let's try this one and see if it's any better. At this point Sir Edwin, probably rather perplexed by the high priest's answer, asked the opinion of another Thane, a vassal of his. And he gave a much more inspired answer.

This Thane, whose name has not survived, replied: "The life of men on earth, oh king, compared to the immense spaces of time of which we know nothing, seems to me to resemble the flight of a sparrow entering a hall through a large window, a hall which is heated by a good fire lit in the centre, like the one where you take meals with your advisers and trusted friends, while the rains and snows of winter rage outside.

And the bird quickly crosses the hall and comes out on the opposite side, and after this brief respite, having come from winter, returns to winter and is lost from our sight. Of the short life of men, we do not know what precedes it, nor what should follow it". Sir Edwin must have taken this response in a positive sense as well as that of the high priest, for he allowed St. Augustine of Canterbury to begin his apostolate in England. Thus, that island entered a new era, the era of European Christianity.

Today we are living again this sensible "advent" of new times, but we are different men from those of the times of the venerable Bede; it may be because of the successes of science, technology and economic well-being, but the need to ask ourselves the fundamental questions about our own existence seems to have decreased in us. With modernity human beings acquired well-being but received in exchange a loss of the sense of the sacred, and of mystery and a widespread sense of meaninglessness.

This cultural crisis is also reflected in modern philosophy, which no longer claims to play the role of a discipline that can lead man to wisdom, which was its true original meaning when it appeared in Greece and the only and profound motivation in ancient Hindu philosophy, to fail, more and more often, into the narcissistic gymnastics of intelligence. Ancient philosophy was operative, it was a practice to become

better, a practice to become wiser. Philosophy then did not consist in the teaching of abstract theories, nor in the exegesis of some texts, but was above all the art of living. Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was a Stoic, tells us in his memoirs of the exercises he dedicated himself to, the same that Plutarch and many Epicureans do. Plotinus also tells us about his meditation, and much of this was taken up by Ignatius of Loyola in his "Exercitia spiritualia". Thanks to Philo of Alexandria we have two lists of these exercises that the Stoics practised. They are practical exercises, I read them to you because they make you think, they are: Research, In-Depth Examination, Reading, Listening, Attention (meaning both vigilance and living in the present), Self-Control (meaning detachment from passions, in psychosynthesis we would say disidentification), Indifference to indifferent things (meaning that all moments have the same value, there must not be a difference in evaluation between moment and moment). This is the first list. Second list: Therapies of passions, the Remembrance of what is good, the Fulfilment of duties, the *prae meditatio malorum*, (the reflection, done in advance, on evils such as poverty, suffering and death).

Then he repeats Reading and Self-Control in this list as well. Assagioli has taken up this idea again, and in fact for him psychosynthesis is practice, is an exercise to become better people, it is not an idea, it is not a faith. In my opinion, a new humanism should be based on this, on the teaching of practices and reflections to improve oneself. Today we have a great knowledge of useful practices that could have a widespread diffusion, because we have a high level of education, but we don't treasure them. Some exercises could be taught in schools nowadays, naturally adapting them to the age of the young people, for example, to make young people discover that they must be the ones to try to give meaning to their lives, to make them understand how important their own self-realization is and the importance of commitment for the conquest of their own happiness.

We must help young people to overcome the materialist vision, remind them how much inner work matters, that the world we perceive is a world that ultimately takes

place within us and that therefore, in true scientific terms, is, as Jung said, just an inference of our psyche. *Truly* understanding this would allow the new generations to overcome the dangerous dichotomy between the knower and the known, a vision that has led to the supremacy of the subject over the object, that is of Man over nature and, what is even more dramatic, over the *different from us*. We are not only what is inside our skin, we are also everything we meet and experience. “*I am me and my circumstance*” said the philosopher Ortega y Gasset.

For this we must arrive at a new ethic, that knows how to value in educational terms the recent knowledge acquired from psychology and from the discovery of the unconscious. Thus overcoming an old ethic that has always considered man’s behaviour as a simple consequence of his rationality, that has imposed as universal customs that belonged to Western culture, that preached an idealistic perfection and that was often the cause of mechanisms of removal and repression.

The new ethic should also take charge of recomposing a dangerous split, in order to allow what in Jungian psychology is called “the acceptance of the Shadow”, that is, recognizing that selfishness, the so-called “evil”, is something present in all of us, that the division of the world into good and evil, light and dark, is actually a dangerous unconscious mechanism of self-absolution, a projection of one’s “Shadow”, which leads to point out the “other”, the different one, as the scapegoat, as happened from time to time with respect to “witches”, Jews, Chinese, emigrants and so on. I believe that by now humanity has the knowledge both in the scientific and psychological fields to advance to a superior, non-dual vision, that is, one that allows us to maintain the sense of distinction by avoiding that of separation, by recognizing the intimate unity of the human race, and in this way knowing how to give to the different one the status of dignity in being what it is, beyond our ability to understand it.

Going back to the new generations, we must recognize that in them there is an ever-greater lack of interest in what in the past were the cornerstones of human civilization, such as religion, politics and, in part, even science. The new generations don’t seem to place

any more trust in creeds and ideologies, much less in revelations, and, in my opinion, a profound need for authenticity is increasingly evident in them. Today’s young people perhaps have a lower cultural depth than the generations immediately preceding them, but at the same time we find in them a greater sincerity, a more peaceful expression of what we simply are. This attitude can bear important fruits and be a source of real renewal, if we know how to support it with the right sensitivity and due in-depth analysis.

Finally, humanism means re-sacralising Man and the Cosmos, and I see a possibility in this direction precisely through the tools of intercultural experience. While for us Westerners truth is something that is sought and defined through concepts, in the Eastern experience truth has been sought above all through states of consciousness, an equally experiential and ultimately objective truth, even if less objectifiable, representable; but which has served for centuries to bring man closer to his essential condition. The failure of reason comes precisely from the search for ultimate truths, which seem to retreat as thought advances.

I believe that truth is knowable, but I don’t think it can be known through thought, which is incapable of embracing totality. Instead, I believe in experience. Experience can make us partakers of the whole. It is not possible to have a concept of totality, but in a certain way, it is possible to have an experience of it.

In the possibility of contacting his own essence, man rediscovers his substantial nature, and can shed light on his most authentic being. I believe that the first quality to be recognized, in order to better outline the sacredness and right value of the human being, consists in recognizing his transcendent aspects and highlighting them.

In many ways Man has shown himself to be a being capable of going beyond himself. While animals are conscious, Man is self-conscious, that is, aware of being conscious, and so he is capable of transcending himself and his condition. The human being can bear witness to himself, he can observe himself as other than himself, he can correct himself, he can transform not only his surroundings but also himself into an “other”. This is the first quality of his possibility of transcendence. Another quality is the ability to sacrifice himself for the good of a greater number of people. Of this we have innumerable examples in so many biographies, examples of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Even the need to grasp a “meaning” of life arises from his instinct to transcend the simple events of his existence through his creative intentionality. But transcendence is also something more everyday; we need to go beyond ourselves to understand in a true, profound way who is before us and speaking to us, to really “feel” the other. Transcendence therefore falls within the “spectrum” of human nature and testifies to us how it is customary for man to go beyond himself. For us, who have largely colonized the physical world

and the world of thought, it is a matter of developing a new plane of reality, a territory hitherto crossed only by rare pioneers, to be explored and known, from which we can obtain the answers that rationalism has lacked to lead us to a new, more profound and experienced humanism. The Being can be grasped not through a conceptual plane, but as a state of consciousness, thanks to the habit of contemplation. Man's existence realizes itself all the more as it orients itself towards transcendence. Whoever manages, through the contemplative function, to give life to this dimension, to a union achieved experientially and consciously, obtains a transformation of values which, in the long run, will also transform his or her personality. A faith will follow, which is not a decision to believe, but a faith which originates from experience, which has the gift of that authenticity that can only be born from experience. Therefore, even faith, authentic faith, is a gift of experience, in this case of the contemplative state. A state of union that originates from the ability of mental silence and from the attractive force of absolute stillness and of the joyful condition of our central being. A state that has no similarities with other human activities, save perhaps with dance, in which the action is not thought out but has its origins in rapture, as Mevlana Rumi intuited. A state that cannot be described in rational terms but perhaps only in symbolic, poetic terms, to be able to express what is the paradox of ecstasy: the fact that we can only reach ourselves by transcending ourselves, that we are truly ourselves only in the impersonal condition. Contemplation gives true fullness to life, because it makes us recognize it as a state and not as a concept, thus life acquires for us a value in itself, which goes beyond that of the quality of events. In this way, through it, eros of life and for life is rekindled and strengthened. Finally, contemplation leads us to the understanding, again experiential, that the world is in us, and that therefore we *are* the world. Our new ethic should be based on this last realization, in what I call *restitution*: making sure that our action, our *doing*, is a doing that comes from the world, *and is the making of the world*.

Sergio Guarino

CONSCIOUSNESS

Translation by Achille Cattaneo

The Plank length is the smallest unit of measurement and is calculated on three (main) constants (Newton's gravitation, Planck's action quantum, and Einstein's speed of light) of the order of 1.6 millionths of a billionth of a billionth of a centimeter and the interesting thing is that to obtain it three universal constants intersect: Newton's G (gravitation) (classical physics), Planck's h (cut) (quantum mechanics), the c (cube) that appears in Einstein's equations (relativity): 1.616252 raised to -35 meters.

Ordinary consciousness is not able to understand "*umana-mente*" such dimensions, only imagination allows a vague knowledge / understanding. Consciousness has limits determined by the so-called physical body, which is then consciousness itself: consciousness that is nothing but the sixth of the senses (according to the Orientals). The Egyptians considered the brain useless and considered the **heart** important as a seat of feeling and consciousness. Only a just heart, therefore pure and light (but above all "right") that weighed as much as the feather of the wing of one of their goddesses (Maat, represented by an ostrich feather) allowed the deceased - from which he was taken in the funeral rite (celebrated by the embalming priest in the guise of Anubis, god-jackal protector of the dead and "in the [virtual] presence" of Osiris) - to access the eternal afterlife. It is a fairly accepted concept that the primitive nervous system has been improving up to the **brain**, evolved first into the **reptilian** one that stops at the first degrees to allow reproduction and survival, then to the **limbic** one whose structures allow (in addition to the previous cause-effect reactions in the environment) the first «emotions» and then multiple emotions become feelings, and finally to the increasingly perfected one with the **gray matter** - to nuclei (of the base and thalamic) and on the cortex - where the psychic faculties reside including consciousness (theory of Mc Lean) and it is the latter - according to Westerners - the seat of consciousness