

EDUCATION IN A GLOBALISING ENVIRONMENT

*Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo
Pontifical Academy of Sciences
and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*

On 16-17 November 2005 a joint workshop of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on the subject of 'globalization and education' produced a Statement which summarized the conclusions of that workshop (The Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Statement on Globalization and Education, PAS extra series 25, PASS extra series 6, Vatican City, 2005). This Statement, and my comments and observations on it, constitute the subject of my paper today.

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This document begins by stressing that education in an age of globalization can be a powerful instrument for peace and for bringing humans closer together. Any project of education must be based on a sound anthropology, on a correct vision of man, and this project is a matter of justice: all men and women should have the right to education, at a time when our wealth of knowledge, today, 'is unparalleled in history'.

The specific conclusions, which are listed after this brief introduction, were as follows: 1. there is a divergence between developed and undeveloped countries in access to education and this is a reality that should be corrected; 2. inequalities also exist between schools attended by the poor and schools attended by the rich, and are to be found also in the fact that nearly 200 million children in the world receive no education at all; 3. 'The adverse consequences of inadequate education policies for poor people are amplified by globalization'; 4. education should play an important role in achieving social integration at a time of massive immigration flows (which is of course, one of the key features of globalization); 5. education should engage in human promotion, develop understanding and kindly ties between peoples and groups, and engender a sensitivity to the environment (which is, of course, a global reality); 6. education has a special role to play in developing cultural awareness and interaction (and this, of course, at a time when cultures are coming closer together); 7. education at the same time should develop a common sense of humanity (which is, of course, ever more important in a localizing context); 8. education should draw and be based upon the recent advances and syntheses of science, religion and philosophy; 9. mothers, fathers and families have a vital role to play to primary education and should participate more in the formal educational processes; 10. the parameters of education should be expanded

towards such objectives as 'work abilities, the cultural and linguistic heritage, ethical values, social cohesion, and the environment'; 11. increased resources should be made available to develop the skills and expertise of teachers at all levels; 12. the role of communication and information technology (one of the great phenomena of our globalized epoch) in education should be greatly developed.

II

It is certainly the case that the new dynamics that characterize world developments and have received the appellation 'globalization' have given rise to extensive analysis and discussion. One aspect that has perhaps not received due attention is that of education and the role that it should play in managing and guiding these new challenges that face humanity. Of notable importance in this context, it seems to me, is this 'Statement on Globalization and Education' issued by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences following their joint meeting on the subject. This document constitutes a contribution of great value to a debate that will certainly grow in importance in the future, and which this meeting in Bratislava is carrying forward with great incisiveness.

First and foremost, these two Academies, which list among their members scientists and scholars of international prestige, call for an educational project in an increasingly globalized world which should be based on authentic knowledge of human beings, in dialogue with science, and within the context of increasing awareness of the diversity and the interdependence of economies and cultures principally brought about by the impact of information and communications technology and increasing migrations. This appeal, it should be stressed, is based upon a reaffirmation of the importance of teachers, and in a clear echo of Thomas Aquinas the Statement, implicitly rebutting the growing idea that in some respect education, too, is a matter of unguided study with 'do-it-yourself books, CDs and Internet downloads, emphasizes that through contact with true teachers, students 'may achieve a standard of education that they would not obtain on their own'.

The reader of the Statement also encounters such principal appeals as the utilization of our unprecedented volume of knowledge for the benefit of the developed and developing worlds, implicitly calling for a new synthesis which today is not even planned despite the models of effective synthesis that can be found in history (Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas); and the use of education to promote the human person, human dignity and human rights; to secure peace and co-operation in the world; to safeguard the environment and the integrity of the Creation; and to move Tom a 'multiculturalist' approach to an 'intercultural' perspective that builds up the common good based upon truth and justice. A central theme is thus a global perspective on education in order to

achieve a shared global approach to global realities at a time of globalization.

The Statement thus also declares that 'Everyone has the right to an education that sees the environment as a home, so as to prevent it from becoming harmful to health and well-being'. It is clear that at a time of acute concerns about the possible impact of global warming, and the exhaustion of the world's resources (one may think most readily here of deforestation and water supplies), not to speak of widespread pollution, education within a globalized environment can greatly help to raise global awareness about the dangers to the global environment, preparing the way for effective responses. I would like to stress that faith provides us with the conviction that the 'earth is the Lord's and all it holds' (Ps 24:1), that our Creator has given us the gift of creation, and that He found the creation 'very good' (Gen 1:31). Our response to environmental problems, by educational routes as well, should also be an expression of this conviction and a sign of our respect for the creation and God's design. In this the Catholic Church and the other Christian Churches, as the strong custodians of this heritage or in various ways participants in it, have an especial role to play. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Hildegarda of Bingen were splendid witnesses to this tradition of upholding the integrity of the creation.

Worthy of special comment is the Statement's observation that 'The relativist and nihilistic tendencies of some modern movements, which Benedict XVI and his predecessors have criticized with increasing force, have been matched by a welcome and progressive return of ethical, philosophical and religious questions', and its observation that the new advances in such areas as physics, astrophysics and biology lead mankind to a new realistic approach to the Creator and to further 'wonder' at its character. This new positive horizon revealed by science, affirm the two Academies, constitutes an appeal to science, philosophy and religion to continue their constant active dialogue, in particular to establish a 'sound anthropological basis as the pre-condition of education today'. I believe that this appeal has an especial value at a time when, in part as a concomitant of deChristianisation, the true character of the human person is increasingly lost from sight.

I would like to stress that in these and other observations this Statement takes up many of the ideas and principles developed by the Magisterium of the Church. The truths, for example, of *Fides et Ratio* here find a powerful echo, as do those expressed in the addresses of successive Popes to these Academies which are to be found in their important publication *Papal Addresses to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences 1917 - 2002 and to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences 1994 - 2002. Benedict XV, Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II* (The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Vatican City, 2003, 524 pp.). In addition, the very fact that these *two Pontifical Academies* have published this Statement bears witness to the historic and con-

tinuing commitment of the Catholic Church to science, culture and education, a role which in the past led her to be recognized as *Mater et Magistra*.

Indeed, it cannot escape notice that the Catholic Church today, perhaps the first 'global' institution, through her international network of universities and schools is committed to the achievement of many of the objectives outlined in this document and seeks to ensure that within the context of globalization education is powerfully directed towards the progress of humanity, in particular through the instruction of the new generations. In this context, the words spoken in Cologne by His Holiness Benedict XVI, a brilliant student and then university professor, whose life has been a testimony to the quest for truth, to learning and to education have a powerful resonance: 'I know that you young people aspire to great things, that you want to commit yourselves to a better world'.