

**The Letter of Benedict XVI on Education:  
a guiding light for secularism and Catholicism**

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Abstract:

This work analyzes the Letter of Pope Benedict XVI on „Educational Emergency’ (2008), that makes it essential for a new thinking on both the secular world and the Catholic.

Keywords: educational emergency, Catholic education, discipline

**Introduction**

The coinage of the term „Educational Emergency’, belongs to the same Pope Benedict. Although he is not an educator in the pure sense of the word (Bissoli 2009), during the years of his Pontificate he made educational interventions explicating a complex thought on education. In his capacity as Pastor of the Church, he sought to address this Letter „to the diocese and the city of Rome’, to all men of good will, – believers and non-believers. Furthermore, for the first time, in a metaphorical way and explicitly in the opening to his latest encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*.

At the beginning of the Third Millennium, the Catholic world feels the need to take stock of the situation of education. The reconnaissance work carried out by Grace and O’Keefe SJ. (2007) worldwide, constitutes a survey on the strengths and weaknesses, on the challenges and opportunities, of Catholic education in the world at the beginning of the Third Millennium. This effort is aimed, as stated in the Preface, to affirm the importance of the Catholic Church as an international educational agency.

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The Catholic Church is the most important and representative educational system based on religion. As such, it is a point of reference for education policies at the international level as recognized by the editors of the volume for the strategic role that catholic education plays in democratic societies, even in those countries where Catholicism is a minority.

Another assumption that guides this work is the finding today of the importance of deepening dialogue between catholics and non-catholics on education. I will outline some issues that are explicitly shared in the catholic and secular vision of education as evidenced in the Introduction of the UNESCO Commission Report on Education by J. Delors (1996).

This document is particularly significant and represents an important support to the essential convergence of purpose between secular and religious vision of education.

Delors refers to the need to follow common paths in education as well as in politics, overcoming ideological conflicts, sharing a common humanity and destinies in excess of ideological and religious factions, as clearly indicated by global (economic, ecological, social and cultural) phenomena that characterize our lives.

In this work some sort of dialogue between different expressions will be offered: mainly the Pope's one and that of the former Chairman of Education of UNESCO, as paradigmatic of the dialogue between Catholics and the secular world. These items will be enriched by other documents associated with these two, to clarify their meaning or representing possible sources of hermeneutics.

The choice to analyze those two documents emerges from the timing of them. They belong to two crucial moments of our time. The „Report on Education for the XXI Century' was presented at the UNESCO General Assembly setting the goal of literacy for 2000 worldwide as a draft by Education For All (EFA) 2000 Project, in a general climate of excitement for the turn of the century.

At the dawn of the new Millennium, Benedict XVI addressed the issue of Emergency in Education at a historical moment marked by disappointment and

distrust on the effectiveness of globalized economic policies and outcomes of highly ineffective educational processes, including the deferral of EFA 2000.

### **The core of education**

The UNESCO Education Committee established in „Education: a treasure within’, the well-known „four pillars of education’ for the Twenty-first century, proposed as the paradigm on which any education proposal is based today.

„Learning to live together’ is the architrave resting on the other three, viz. „learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be’.

The „four pillars of education’ are a radical change compared to the previous paradigm of the „three Rs’, namely „reading, writing and arithmetics’:

„The “three Rs” [...] are given their full due. The combination of conventional teaching and out-of-school approaches should enable children to experience the three dimensions of education – the ethical and cultural, the scientific and technological, and the economic and social’.

A shift is made from single basic skills to educational dimensions which regard both school conventional teaching and out-of-school approaches, as a combination oriented to form individuals.

Benedict XVI addressed the issue of Emergency in education, at a time when it seems urgent to re-consider the role of educators and what dimension the specific work of each educator should focus on.

Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priests and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great "educational emergency", confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning’ (Benedict XVI, 2008).

The results of highly ineffective educational processes are seen in increased racial discrimination among young people and bullying, perhaps the best known example of educational failure which involves almost 50% of students in Italy between secondary, lower, and upper school (Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro, 2008).

It is therefore meaningful to search for common guidelines in education through overcoming ideological and religious barriers. The search for what unites us, together with what distinguishes us – as well as the search for a renewed ethical sense shared at world level stated by global interdependence – is an unavoidable path to be followed, both for the secular world and catholics as declared by the UNESCO credo in its opening document “UNESCO what it is, what it does ?” (2009):

UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values.

This objective must be pursued through appropriate and effective educational activities that promote the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. Nevertheless, educational policies, the Commission says, have been relegated to last place in governmental agendas, or harshly criticized. The Commission intends to revive the centrality of educational actions in human and social development.

It is not, says Delors, meant to education as: „A miracle cure or a magic formula that can open the door to a world in which all ideals will become reality, but as one of the main means available to promote a more harmonious human development’ (1996).

The prosperity of the world depends on the welfare of all people and the poorer children are the indicator of this. When global attention is centered on them there is hope that this happens to all those in need. This cannot happen „when adults are too inclined to concentrate on their own problems’ (Delors, 1996).

The Pope emphasizes the relationship between the welfare of children and youth and the future of the city of Rome, a metaphor for the whole world: „On them depends the future of our city’. The Pontiff’s educational vision goes beyond the mere

acquisition of skills, to emphasize the ability to move towards what is good and the acquisition of a solid moral status.

Something, however, is opposed to such a polished and shared educational project.

Attitudes that tend to undermine this project, (utopian, but necessary), as Delors precises, are recognized by both: is necessary to escape the circularity „sustained by cynicism or resignation’ (Delors, 1996).

Benedict XVI endorses this view. Our society, he says, is made by people who select values and implement lifestyles that correspond to ethical guidelines that „have a great influence on the formation of new generations for the good, but often also to evil’.

The analysis would reveal several shared themes between the two documents and also the peculiarities of each. My aim here is to blend together the two documents so that both „voices’ appear in the main points that form the structure of this work. Thus, the following four common, but principle themes emerge:

1. education: an emergency among world tensions;
2. it is hard to educate and it is hard to live together;
3. anguish: a prominent theme;
4. finding the right balance between freedom and discipline.

## **1. Education: an emergency among world tensions**

One difference between the two documents lies in the quality of these and the recipients of the information provided.

Delors’ document, is the preamble to a report primarily addressed to governments, resulting from the need to „make suggestions and recommendations [...] which can serve as a renewal program and action for policy makers and officials at the highest levels’, (UNESCO, 1996).

During its work, however, the Board has not forgotten the initial users and actors in educational processes: „learners of all ages, first’, then „teachers, educators, parents, community members, or other participants in education’.

Delors’s document outlines general topics that must move governments on educational issues. International education policies are then implemented in national frameworks carrying them out according to their internal situations. The Pope's Letter is a pastoral document addressed to the people of God: to the clergy at all levels, but first of all to the totality of the faithful: the language is therefore very simple and straight-forward.

The Pontiff’s Letter can be conceived as divided into two parts. In the former the Holy Father makes a concise analysis of the pressing problems on education. He bears in mind the current socio-economic framework and particularly the achievements of technological society. The latter puts forward some proposals on which education initiatives must be based.

The truly innovative aspect of the Letter suggests the recovery of a seemingly outdated mode of education: „finding the right balance between freedom and discipline’.

### **1.1 Education and the crisis of values**

When a new life is presented to the world, the educational task for believers and non-believers becomes not only a necessity, but also a commitment.

Instead, we are witnessing today a proliferation of educational styles, not always reasonably justified, based on spontaneity or a real lack of education, by people who, in many cases, appear not to present any educational attitude meant as a coherent educational proposal oriented toward an explicit purpose.

Education problems become a real emergency when adults seem to be no longer able to educate young generations and it is possible to feel the sense of fatigue and

uneasiness which affect educators „by undermining their hope for the future’(Toso 2007).

There is a remarkable convergence in secular and catholic areas, on the crisis of values affecting the world.

Delors identifies diffused tensions to be solved, which globally reflect those existential questions to which every person is called to respond during his life: An identity crisis (*who am I*):

- the belonging to historical and cultural roots through local and global tensions,

- the universal and the individual, which is the individual and common good; historical tensions (*where am I from*),

- including tradition and modernity;

the need to await against the immediate need to solve personal and collective problems (*where do I go*);

- between immediate needs, „the predominance of the ephemeral’, and long-term policies:

- tensions affecting the increasing knowledge and questions about what is really needed, to make choices that preserve culture, despite the pressures of society and the economy on curricula.

Lastly, – another factor defined as „perennial’ by Delors – is „the tension between the spiritual and the material: often without realizing it, the world has a longing – often unexpressed – for an ideal and for values that we shall term “moral”. It is thus education’s noble task to encourage each and every one, acting in accordance with their traditions and convictions and paying full respect to pluralism, to lift their minds and spirits to the plane of the universal and, in some measure, to transcend themselves’.

This statement is an important point of convergence between the two documents. The presence of ethical values and the possibility of transcendence is not only an openness to other religions and cultures, it is an explicit reference to Christian

faith, the longing and unspoken desire for many people to true love and for overcoming self-transcendence, breaking down invisible barriers that divide people.

## **1.2 The young**

Many people's lifestyle reflect these tensions. The Pope interprets the implicit request of education by the young who want „not to be left alone to face the challenges of life’.

Catholic studies on the so called „youthful state’ (Mion, 2007, 2008; IARD, 2007) show important differences emerging in today's society than forty years ago. The lack of a relevant social position to young people caused by reduced population size, they cannot be defined as a „generation’, and their specific problems fade within society. Their condition is no longer a passing phase but assumes static characteristics reinforced and supported by a prolonged stay in the family.

The experiential horizon is diversified, but disconnected and incoherent, in attempts which are part of the natural desire of youth for adventure and discovery.

The great ideal tensions are struggling to develop into viable projects thus including young people still engaged in a genuine search for meaning.

More often dangerous oscillations occur between a flexible vanishing identity and an identity made of rigid ethno-centrism, and the sole care of their interests.

The dimension time shows young people living here-and-now who do not seem to have roots and a future which they cannot imagine or make plans for.

Current social complexity requires them to be of special maturity to face. A stable platform of values must be built among not always compatible cultural trends; between rigidity and flexibility, and between personal aspirations and social rhythms, which often have different speeds.

## **1.3 Teachers and educators**

The report of the Delors' Committee reserves an important part to the different degrees of education, from basic education to university. The contribution of teachers is crucial.

The Introduction highlights the direct responsibility in carrying out their duties and their indispensable role in conveying to learners of all cultures the heritage of mankind: „a relationship that is strengthened by and developed through dialogue’.

In continuity with the 1972 Report by President Faure, the importance of „Learning to be’ is reaffirmed. The role of teachers is to enable the „hidden treasure’ (hence the title of the Report) of the individual potential to come to light and express it in a more congenial way.

The most important treasures to be discovered are: „memory, reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, the aptitude to communicate with others and the natural charisma of the group leader, which again goes to prove the need for greater self-knowledge’. These cognitive abilities for the most part, plus the innate leadership, is a component in some individuals. Teachers have the responsibility to identify and exploit them.

Delors detects a higher responsibility of teachers personally involved in furthering the processes of education for all, due to the increasing difficulties in fulfilling their educational duties. This mainly because today there exists an absence of parental and religious guidance which prevailed among preceding generations. Despite this, we are witnessing a growing importance being given to teachers within society. Indeed stresses Delors, they feel „isolated’ because of criticism directed at them: „they want their dignity to be respected’.

The role and function of educators shows a gap on the aim of education. The vision of the Pope goes to the qualitative aspects of human existence: the truth and goodness, and the responsibility as a mission for the educator.

The vision of the UNESCO Committee on the contrary, pursues the use of cognitive skills and their development: even in personality development, looks for

leadership that can promote group collaboration, along with problem-solving and decision-making capacity, as if „man’ has been reduced to this size.

The language of the Pope in the Letter is sometimes extremely brief due to the brevity of the document:

The educator is thus a witness of truth and goodness. He too, of course, is fragile and can be mistaken, but he will constantly endeavour to be in tune with his mission.

Dear faithful of Rome, from these simple observations it becomes clear that in education a sense of responsibility is crucial: the responsibility of the educator, of course, but also, as he grows up, the responsibility of the child, the student, the young person who enters the world of work. Those who can measure up to themselves and to others are responsible.

It is therefore necessary to clarify the concepts expressed with some other sources.

In the Conciliar Declaration "Gravissimum educationis" (1965), the Church emphasizes the right of every person to education. It sets the direction and final aim: in answer to each person’s vocation, contributing to the „human formation of man’ (Morin, 2000), „educating the original in us, that flexes differently, even if substantially and essentially the heart is always the same’ (Giussani, 1995).

Such education is bound to be personalized, (Grav.ed., 1965). It keeps its universality because of the same nature of men’s innermost feelings which have remained unchanged over time and through cultures: „my heart is your heart and is the same heart as the heart of those who live far away in other countries or Continents’ (Giussani, 1995).

The target paradigm for an integral and fully-fledged education lies in helping children and young people „to develop harmoniously their physical, moral, and intellectual endowments’ (Grav.ed., 1965).

The Council pronounces itself on the need to be trained to genuine freedom, to „gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives and in pursuing true freedom’ (Grav.Ed., 1965), developing the power of choice and decision.

To overcome obstacles due to emotional and cognitive conflict and the consequences of opting for a path rather than another should be learnt. For this reason the Council recommends on the opportunity of practicing it „as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy’ (Grav.Ed., 1965).

As is clear from the Declaration this skill must be exercised, to be permanently acquired, and stumble in the experience of defeat, disappointment and frustration.

It is the “narrow door” we strive to enter through, a goal for which the Gospel invites not so much to make efforts, but rather *to train* oneself (as suggested by the Greek translation) through an exercise made steadfastly and at increasing difficulty levels.

„Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt’ (Grav. Ed., 1965).

The original factor of Catholic education is the discovery of the vocation and the response to this call. Learners must discover it within their mind and heart as an opportunity to pursue with enthusiasm and conviction, their life goals.

When this has been identified, liability becomes the essential corollary. Educational accountability is a path made of perseverance and ability to react to almost inescapable defeat.

The appearance of education as a vocation for teachers is particularly important in Italy where there is the phenomenon of the feminization of teaching (Ministero P.I., 1999).

The social task entrusted to teachers cannot be regarded as a cultural heritage, because of a tradition-related or a gender-related heritage. Nor can it be considered a profession as any other, since it can only result from a choice in line with people’s innermost nature, which enable them to reach self-attainment, to commit themselves, and be properly trained to provide a remarkable social contribution.

The ineffectiveness of a teaching exclusively restricted to increase pupils' cognitive abilities appears in the words of the Pope:

„Therefore, an education would be most impoverished if it were limited to providing notions and information’.

Schools are designed not only to develop intellectual faculties, possibly according to more or less rigidly set parameters – which are also questionable as shown by the lively debate held on the PISA survey – or on the sole preparation for professional life. They are also designed to „form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life. [...] They promote friendly relations between pupils of different talents and backgrounds and foster a spirit of mutual understanding’ (Grav. Ed., 1965).

In like manner the Holy Father explains clearly the scope of university education, also at the European level, a thing he holds dear and for which he dedicated different phases from his Pontificate (Garcia Amilburu, 2010).

[...] it is necessary to give priority to an education in the human and moral values that will enable all young people to acquire self-confidence, hope in the future, concern for their brothers and sisters in humanity, as well as to take their place for the growth of the nation with an ever more acute awareness of others” (Benedict XVI, 2007).

This ambitious end becomes more difficult to realize even with a deepened acquaintance of man if the human aspiration to transcendence is ignored in the search for truth and, in particular, for Europe and its Christian roots

“But man cannot understand himself fully if he ignores God. This is the reason why, at the time when the Europe of the third millennium is being built, the religious dimension of human existence cannot be neglected.

Here the special role of the university emerges as a scientific universe that is not merely limited to various specializations: in the current situation the university is

required not to stop at teaching or imparting technical and professional knowledge, which are very important disciplines but do not suffice, for it must also undertake to play an attentive educational role at the service of the new generations, making use of the legacy of ideals and values that marked the past millenniums.

Thus, universities will be able to help Europe to preserve and rediscover its "soul", revitalizing the Christian roots that brought it into being" (Benedict XVI, 2007).

## **2. It is hard to educate and it is hard to live together**

Subsequently Pope Benedict XVI goes into the merits of real or alleged responsibilities. The Pope becomes the spokesman of those who look for someone's easily identified fault: "Thus, it is natural to think of laying the blame on the new generations, as though children born today were different from those born in the past".

### **2.1 An abnormal generation?**

The increasing scholastic difficulties related to Dyslexia, the Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), the so called "new disabilities", learning disabilities unrelated to cognitive skills, and the need for serious education curricula on legality and citizenship along with a surge in knowledge, exert pressure on school curricula as well as the need for continuous updating, which represent a pressure upon teachers.

The educational emergency is strongly felt by adults who do not know what to teach. Such questions are urgently raised in families, within which ethical education is increasingly difficult.

[...] thus today, the request for education which is truly such is in fact increasing. Parents, anxious and often anguished about the future of their children, are asking for it; a great many teachers going through the sorrowful experience of their schools' deterioration are asking for it; society overall, seeing doubts cast on the very foundations of coexistence, is asking for it [...].

The spread of precarious employment facilitates the triumph of utilitarian logic. There is a driving force for a violence that becomes a lifestyle for youth and children in schools where the „peaceful transfer of knowledge (is) called into question by the presence of everyday school violence’ (Ferry, 2003).

## **2.2 Incapable adults?**

Parents feel the need for education to be spontaneous, which often turns into a sort of spontaneism without rules. After all, the search for perennial youth entices parents who in order to remain young, consider the relations with their teenage sons and daughters as a relationship between friends, thus giving up their responsibility, dangerously delegating their education tasks upon teachers, with damaging consequences from loss of credibility among young generations. “Must we therefore blame today’s adults for no longer being able to educate?” (Benedict XVI, 2008).

Against this backdrop, the ensuing education demand seems to involve adults at first, to whom young people seem to address not so much to find a source of affection but rather people who can guide „and assist them in finding strategies suitable for facing the instability which currently marks also the subsequent phases of life’ (Buzzi, Cavalli, e De Lillo 2002).

Parental surrender of their responsibilities in education, has created a gap between generations more severe than that of the past. "The generation gap" which Benedict XVI refers to, certainly always did exist, but now becomes deeper and more serious. Silence reigns between generations. The demand is weaker because there is a lack of counterparts.

The very education demand has been met by a reductive response confined to education and the development of technical skills and abilities. Evidence show the lack of a fundamental ethical learning which can turn into „the customary ability to act honestly, in freedom, with a view to reaching an ultimate goal’ (Braido, 1967).

### **2.3 Political failure?**

Jacques Delors finds in disillusionment the promises that social and economic development had to ensure, the main theme of the end of century balance.

The reference to „empty words and vain’ is the harsh attack Delors launches on the economic policies of the XXth century and on those who wanted to ensure wealth for all as well as the international policies that propagated global peace.

These wishes were disregarded, firstly, by the dramatic differences that still divide the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, and secondly by the proliferation of bitter and bloody micro-conflicts that continue to claim victims. Signs of tension smolder and explode between nations and ethnic groups as a result of the accumulation of social and economic injustices.

„The truth is that all-out economic growth can no longer be viewed as the ideal way of reconciling material progress with equity, respect for the human condition, and respect for the natural assets that we have a duty to hand-on in good condition to future generations’ (1996).

The challenge of economic globalization has also fallen heavily on educational phenomena. If it is construed as the spread of the values of capitalism throughout the world (Grace e O 'Keefe, 2007), it is possible to detect the proliferation of vast Olympus cathedrals which consist of malls, outlets and supermarkets open 24 hours a day for endless worship (Mofid, 2002).

The more serious impact of education is on children’s self-esteem built on business parameters and in companies that invest in a market that finds in them the best potential buyers (Schor, 2004).

### **2.4 Pacifism failure**

Disenchantment and disillusionment also regard the mythicized aspiration to live in a totally peaceful world:

How can we learn to live together in the global village if we cannot manage to live together in the communities to which we naturally belong – the nation, the regions, the city, the village, the neighbourhood? (1996).

Making his way Delors deals with an important term which will echo the words of the Pontiff: in front of the disillusionment of the expectations for greater global prosperity – the difficulty in poor countries to access higher education guaranteed only to a few, poses difficulties for young people to find stable and sufficiently profitable employment – apparently generates confusion, concern, or worse still, anguish.

### **3. A prominent theme: anguish**

The second part of the message conveyed by the Pope, in His capacity as Pastor, starts with a pastoral *incipit*: the Pope launches a message of hope: „Do not be afraid!’.

Anguish is a theme occurring repeatedly in the Scriptures. Divine intervention occurs when His people live in such a situation.

The Pontiff is conscious of everyone’s concern for young generations because the concern derives from the current situation of educational emptiness. An education that respects and promotes freedom and autonomy among young people may also give rise to anguish.

Thus, he moves to the second part of his Letter by identifying some „common requirements of an authentic education’.

### **3.1 Reset love in educational processes**

Every authentic education comes from love and translates into action predisposing a society where children can find their rightful place: „in the family, local community, and the nation’ (Delors, 1996). This statement is the Opening Introduction to Delors’ Report: this is a “must” which should never be overlooked „even when choosing between political, economic and financial options’.

However, in human history this has not always been so, since the puero-centrism has been “discovered” very recently.

Durkheim and Dewey, two great figures in the history of education, have very different attitudes to the function of love in education: the first, in its positivist approach, leaves little room for the affective valence in education. It consists of „action exercised by adult generations on those who are not yet developed in social life’.

Dewey’s attitude is different: education is the meeting point in the development of an individual and society, one in the sense of developing a full and creative freedom, and the other in the sense of democratic growth through the contribution of individuals. This can only happen through the gift of self.

Dewey’s concept echoes in Delors’ words:

education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims (1996).

### **3.2 A “stalled” humanity**

The foregoing considerations show a divided humanity between generations, between the rich and poor, and ethnic groups. According to Delors, degraded in its potential, humanity loses pressure for change: it „hesitates between continuing headlong along the same path and resignation. Let us offer people another way”, placing “renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of education’.

In the words of the Pope, training to the suffering is the syntonic answer for the larger interest of common good:

„the capacity for loving corresponds to the capacity for suffering, and for suffering together’.

Here echoes Karol Wojtila’s thinking ("beloved predecessor" of Benedict XVI) in "Love and Responsibility" (1980).

„We perfectly realize – wrote the then Archbishop of Krakow in 1960 – that what is truly good, is often linked to suffering and requires the relinquishment of a pleasure. (...) We must recognize what is beyond merely subjective pleasure, namely the objective good which is also capable of uniting people, thus taking up the form of common good. This is the real foundation of love’.

Delors underlines the need for enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other people and to understand the need for proceeding together (from Latin *cum-petere*) by overcoming the world’s erratic progression. Probably it is an invitation to proceed at a slower pace and be thoughtful, but this process must begin with “self-understanding” through an inner voyage „whose milestones are knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism’ (1996).

### **3.3 The right balance between freedom and discipline**

The Pope's proposal focuses on the rediscovery of an education to freedom through discipline.

Certainly this is a founding – albeit controversial – theme of pedagogy: a paradox seems to emerge regarding the aims of education which intends to make individuals free. It is the paradox of the “liberalizing authority” which marks the whole history of pedagogy: basically the education activity always waver between these two poles and, over time, one or the other have been viewed as paradigm.

Delors emphasizes the indispensability of the pupil teacher ratio, „a relationship that is reinforced by authority and leads through dialogue’. However, his claims stop

there, by the nature of the document, aimed to draw guidelines for national policies. Educators and teachers cannot get ideas for daily activities.

The Pontiff, on the contrary focuses on this point: "We thus arrive, dear friends of Rome, at what is perhaps the most delicate point in the task of education: finding the right balance between freedom and discipline".

The Pope shows two supreme aims of education: the person as the subject of education and education as the indispensable means to that end (Bissoli, 2009).

The educational emergency is a challenge because of the widespread atmosphere that leads to doubt "the value of the human person and the very meaning of truth and goodness; ultimately the goodness of life."

The educational demand remains and is the pre-requisite of the Papal poignant appeal: „thus today, the request for an education which is truly such is in fact increasing’.

The core of an "authentic" education is an education to freedom that exceeds „the disastrous idea of being whole and only a power of choice’ (IEC, 2009). Not ability to agree to goodness and the ability to relate with the freedom of others.

The world boosts the possibility and capacity of self-affirmation through individual choices but yet is subject to genetic neural, mental and social determinism. A contradictory message that has negative effects especially on young people (IEC, 2009).

The Pope beckons dialogue between freedom and discipline: the role of those who teach is to signal clearly of what is good and evil.

Dewey himself deals with the problem in 1897, speaking about teacher in "My pedagogic creed": „The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences’.

Select and support are key words here: "Select" implies to choose and communicate what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is not. It is an educator's active and responsible attitude, not collusive with the student's worldview.

Benedict XVI suggests: "what we must never do is to support him when he errs, to pretend we do not see the errors, or worse, that we share them as if they were the new boundaries of human progress".

"Assist" is the loving attention of those who help and support a process of growth and improvement. The Pope asserts „closeness and trust are born from love: [...] yet every true teacher knows that if he is to educate he must give a part of himself".

The Pontiff thus underlines the educator as an authority: a credible, influential, competent and experienced person, consistent with the choices of his life, involved and loving; a witness of truth and goodness, fallible but willing at the same time to correct and continue his mission.

Luigi Giussani wrote on the tension between authority and freedom, and the size of the risk in education (1995). His thinking has probably inspired the IEC document (2009) that represents the response by the "Cultural Project" to the Letter of the Pope. Giussani says the authority, „speaks of a person with a wealth of experience, choices made, and the responsibility assumed. Show to pupil his limit and his shortcomings: it attracts when the individual aspires to beauty, to truth and good, pointing to a possibility of happiness and fulfillment".

This triggers the desire to conform to authority. Then it sets out the conditions for an interim and critical approach, a desire to go deeply into things to practise personal options.

With this authority, from the Latin meaning "that which grows", the disciple becomes the one that follows, "obey" (from *ob-audio*) namely listening.

„The education task of a real authority is precisely expressed as a “consistency-based task”, „a powerful education to depend on reality’, as defined by Giussani.

The aim of education is to form people: the classic meaning of the word (*e-ducere*) clarifies the dynamic of the education process. Considering that people must emerge

in all their potential, this can happen in-so-far-as people are placed in a position to make “their” choices and “their” experiences, in a process which, however, must always remain gradual and be able to „face everything on its own’ (Giussani, 1995).

This entails two important considerations: the limit of the activity performed by educators, who shall step back to let young people free, and the “risk” that educators run when they let their students free of making their own autonomous and responsible choices, which implies the refusal, and hence also the failure of the educational project.

Giussani criticizes an education running no risk at all: „A fully “autonomy-based” education leaves young people a prey to their own tastes, instincts and really deprived of an evolution criterion; yet an education [...] only aimed to preserve them from any shock, makes them individuals unable to express their own personality while confronting with reality, or otherwise potentially rebel and unbalanced individuals’.

Even a secular philosopher as H. Arendt takes a stand against adults who reject the authority, refusing

„[...] to take responsibility in the world they have introduced their children and leave to fend those of which they should take care of’ (IEC, 2009).

In the Pontiff’s view, freedom is not achieved once and for all. Neither can we say that others have won for us, nor is it a cultural heritage:

the person's freedom is ever new. As a result, each person and each generation must make his own decision anew, alone. [...] As the child gradually grows up, he becomes an adolescent and then a young person; we must therefore accept the risk of freedom and be constantly attentive in order to help him to correct wrong ideas and choices.

### **Conclusion – The comparative dimension of hope**

At the dawn of the Third Millennium, the search for what unites us, together with what distinguishes us – as well as the search for a renewed ethical sense shared at world level – is an unavoidable path to be followed, considering the constraints we

experience in our life within a world whose borders are more blurred as a result of migrations and equalized – in spite of cultural diversities – by the outcomes of a global economy having profound repercussions on people's lives.

This study has made a comparative analysis of two contributions which can be considered milestones for tackling the problems raised by the current educational emergency: “Education: the Necessary Utopia” drafted by Jacques Delors as introductory remarks to the report drawn up by the UNESCO International Commission on Education, entitled “Learning: The Treasure Within”, and the Letter “To The Diocese and The City of Rome on the Urgent Task of Educating Young People” drafted by His Holiness Benedict XVI in early 2008.

At comparative level, the two contributions are basically convergent: the Papal Letter is addressed to the Diocese and City of Rome – hence explicitly both to believers and non-believers – and, similarly, Delors' considerations appear to be focussed on aspects regarding ethics and people's inner growth, as well as on the tensions resulting both from material aspirations and desire for transcendence.

In both documents we can find the expression of the need to start a dialogue between believers and non-believers, finding the main road to try and solve the social and economic imbalances, which are recorded everywhere in the world.

Both documents express the disillusionment and disappointment in the objectives that social progress and education had to pursue at world level – united by love for young generations and solidarity between adult educators and young people themselves.

Globalized world tensions and the attempts mainly made at individual level to come to terms with an “ever changing context” result in the loss of certain and shared points of references for effective education.

What is called into question, however, is hope, namely the prospective trustful vision which guides any educational activity. The immediate consequence of the loss of hope is increasing concern and disorientation which may even lead to the feeling of having no way out.

The Pontiff addressed his pastoral warning to the city of Rome aimed toward a return to trust in God and devoting to education driven by an authentic love for Man.

This love is manifested through the search for a common good that must go through the waiver of personal gain.

This dimension rooted in the Pope's message represents even for Delors the guiding light to seek, the “other way” which he indicates to the nations, while rediscovering the moral dimension of living together through education.

In the analytical part, the two documents go hand in hand, although there is a gap on the solutions to be proposed.

The Committee is concerned that: Learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be, are necessary skills for education in the XXIst century.

The Pope points out that the core of change is finding a new balance between freedom and discipline based on hope, a pillar of the Christian faith: „the soul of education, as of the whole life, can only be a dependable hope’.

Hope in a pedagogical sense is to believe in the possibility of improvement, growth, and progress of the pupil.

God created man incomplete, and gave the serious task of finishing His work in an ongoing project of perfectibility.

With these assumptions, the educational dimension cannot be confined to education alone, as technologically advanced or to the use of Internet all around the globe. “Young people cannot be termed only “mere” products and dumped into the world market after their education. They are humans in continuing growth” (Pittau, 2004).

Within every human person there exists a dimension that can be properly called comparative. It puts the individual in a continuous confrontation with its development by opening prospects for improvement of his own humanity in a horizon of sense that

cannot be separated by a relational dimension that links him today in connection with the whole of humanity.

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