

## EDUCATION FOR HUMANNESS

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We educate people for many purposes. We educate them to be nurses, accountants, lawyers, doctors and priests. We educate them to be good citizens, to possess certain moral values, to be committed to a certain religion.

Have we overlooked something? Is there a type of education that is missing from this list? I suggest that there is another possible purpose of education. This would be an education that would result in a fully human person, an education of a human being precisely as human.

A few years ago I spoke to a group of new teachers at the Ateneo de Zamboanga and I proposed this idea of an education for full humanness. These teachers reacted initially with puzzled frown and strong resistance. For them such a type of education, first of all, was simply not found at the Ateneo de Zamboanga. They felt that the education which they had received at the Ateneo was focused on two things: the learning of practical skills (such as nursing, accounting, etc. and good Catholics and Moslems, socially involved, men and women for others). They were not aware that any education for humanness was found at the school.

Their second reaction to this idea of an education for humanness was a question: how could you possibly do this sort of thing? How could you organize a school and set up a

curriculum which could train people to be human? These young teachers could not imagine what such a school would be like.

As I begin this talk I presume that this idea seems just as strange and wild for you as it seemed for those young teachers in Zamboanga. Without a doubt it is a strange idea: an education in *humanness*, strange because it is an approach that is so radically different from what we usually experience in modern education.

I feel challenged to clarify this idea. There seem to be three major areas which need to be confronted and discussed:

- 1) What is this *humanness* that such an education would seek to develop? What does it mean to be human?
- 2) There is need to speak about the approaches to education which are opposed to such an education for humanness. Any attempt to establish such a form of education would face stiff opposition. What militates against an education for humanness?
- 3) We need to explain the structure of this school for humanness. How do you train someone to be a human being?

### What Does It Mean To Be Human?

It is one of the strange paradoxes of human life that we can be human beings without being human. The character of human existence is quite different from the existence of any other living species. Every other living organism grows quickly and surely to a state of full development. An acacia tree necessarily is an acacia tree. A dog necessarily is canine.

Very rarely do we encounter a plant or an animal that is such a "monster" that it does not truly represent its species. But this does not hold true of human beings. We differ from plants and animals in that we can fail to be what nature destines us to be: human. We describe such failure as a person who is inhuman, or as a person who is an animal or a robot or a barbarian.

Humanness is a quality which is not given to us automatically at the beginning of life. It is an achievement that is only attained after a long period of development and struggle. Even when it has been achieved it is not possessed as a permanent endowment. We human beings can choose to live in such a way that we lose certain dimensions of our humanness.

With that as a preface I return to our question: What does it mean to be human? I find that such a question is almost impossible to answer. I am aware that there are so many dimensions to human existence that any list of basic human qualities would go on almost endlessly. I am also aware that in the history of human cultures there have been many different ways of viewing humanness, many different *humanisms*. Each one of these humanisms would tend to emphasize different human traits. Because of this, any presentation of basic human qualities will necessarily be controversial as well as incomplete. Nevertheless, let me proceed with my description of what it means to be human.

1) Fully human persons have a sense of personal identity, they know who they are. This sense of identity includes, first of all, a realization of their own special uniqueness. They have a sense of their own special gifts and the unique contribution that they can make to the world. Out

of this awareness of themselves and their gifts arises a sense of pride in themselves. They move forward in life with a certain confidence in what they can do.

They also know what they want to do with their lives, they have a sense of their own personal vocations. They have stepped outside the robot-like crowd where everyone is the same and they live authentic lives. They have developed their own special interests and have their own ideas about things.

2) Fully human persons have communication skills which are highly developed. They are able to present their feelings, ideas and dreams with clarity, force and humor. Such people are able to tell you in a clear way what they are thinking. They can persuade you by the power of what they say. They are interesting people who don't bore you when they talk to you. With these communication skills they are able to function in an active and influential way in their families and communities.

3) Fully human persons understand the human heart. They appreciate the great dreams that inspire human life: the great ambitions, the longings for love, the vision of creating something new, the hopes for success and achievement. They are aware of the deep vices that twist human life: frightening insecurity, quiet joy, gentle humor. They are sensitive to the many forms of suffering that arise in human life: loneliness, frustration, the sense of being a failure.

When a truly human person meets someone, he is sensitive to the hidden feelings that are swirling around in that other person's life: the anger, the guilt, the heartache, the disappointments, the silent hope, the unhappiness. A fully human person has an understanding, compassionate heart.

4) Fully human persons have active and inquiring minds. They are fascinated by the mysteries of life: the wonderful organization found in nature, the varying moods of their own heart, the hidden stories that other people have to tell, the strange happenings of human history, the profound affirmations made by religions, the hidden presence of God, the changes that take places in each of us as we move forward in life.

Fully human persons are full of many questions, especially the question "Why?". They are aware of their own ignorance. They realize that they have much to learn about life itself, about other people, about themselves, about God. They are disciplined enough to confront these mysteries of life, and actively to seek a fuller understanding of them.

In such active minds there is an attitude of critical thinking. Fully human people analyze and evaluate what they hear and read. They think for themselves. They do not accept blindly what is presented in the media, what is communicated to them from others, what has been passed down by cultural traditions. Out of this continuing process of personal analysis and evaluation rise personal judgements about truth and value.

5) Fully human persons appreciate beauty in its many forms. They take delight in well written language, in fine poetry, in well expressed speeches. They appreciate fine music and dance. Their lives have been enriched by the great human achievements in art and architecture. They draw life and strength from the wonderful beauty of nature.

Truly human persons not only appreciate beauty but they also strive to create it in various ways. They strive to speak and to write well. They take effort to make their homes and communities beautiful. They use their artistic gifts to

create beauty in music and the arts.

6) A fully human person has a vibrant understanding of the history and major achievements both of his own culture and of the whole human race. He has actively absorbed this history and these achievements into his own life. He lives as one imbued with the wisdom and the values of this culture. He glories in the great achievements of the human race: the great works of literature and art, the heroism of great warriors and patriots, the profound insights found in the great religions, the social accomplishments of great civilizations.

All this means that a fully human person lives as someone rich in tradition, a past. He possesses the wisdom, energy and creativity of humanity's past. He is not an alienated, isolated individual whose life is limited to the small details of his own private experience.

A fully human person is creative in some form. This creativity may be found in his social existence, in the way that he relates to people, creating friendship and community. It may be found in his exercise of a technical skill. As a carpenter, a cook or a dressmaker he fashions something new. It may be found in his fresh and original use of language. It may be found in his ability to create new forms of music or art. Or his creativity may be found in his discovery of himself, in the way that he fashions his own individual identity. He lives as the image of God, the creator who constantly fashions something new.

A fully human person will never be a mere follower, someone who marches to the step of the crowd, who merely fits into a pattern of life designed by others. Some amount of conformity may be necessary in his life but a human person is careful to preserve a significant part of his life for

spontaneous and original expression.

8) A fully human person has a character, possessing maturity and a sense of responsibility. He has taken control of the direction of his life and of the involvements that are found in that life and he stands behind them. This character shows itself in a personal moral code, a set of values and principles which he has chosen for himself and which he adheres to in his life. There is a consistency in such a human person's life; you know where he stands. His character also shows itself in certain distinctive virtues such as bravery, industriousness, reliability, loyalty, self-discipline.

Such a person has risen above a life of mere crowd morality, a life governed blindly by social pressure. He has set aside fear and shame and responds to the authentic obligations of his life.

9) A fully human person has a developed religious life. He lives in terms of a religious vision of his life, of that life's beginning in the creative love of God, of graced events in his life where he has been blessed by God, of that life's future return to the embrace of God. He has found things in his life which possess absolute value and with religious seriousness he holds them to be sacred and cares deeply about them. He has developed an active personal relationship with God, a dialogue which fills the center of his existence.

In all this we see that a fully human person rises above what is superficial in life. His life responds to the deeper meanings of life and he cares profoundly about what is truly important.

10) A fully human person is someone who is caught

beyond both childish fear of people as well as adolescent individualism. He has dared to commit himself to others and has become a part of society. His life is filled with involvements where he works together with other people and creates common achievements with them.

### *Opposing Philosophies of Education*

But, of course, you recognize as well as I do that this concept of an education for humanness is very much of a utopian dream. In the educational world of today students do not want this type of education, while administrators and teachers do not believe in it as a value. The reason for this opposition to an education for humanness is that there are other prevailing philosophies of education which militate against an education for humanness. Ideas have consequences and the dominant ideas in the world of education today block the possibility of this dream ever becoming a reality. Let us consider three of these opposing philosophies.

The first philosophy is one that we might characterize as a "trade school" mentality. This mentality views college as a place where people are trained for a very particular type of work. The focus of attention in such education is the future job and the precise skills that are needed for that job. Following this approach students are trained for their future work of being nurses, lawyers, doctors, accountants and farmers.

Such a trade school approach to college education has the advantage of practicality. Students learn practical skills which might be useful in a future job. In a world where human beings are forced to struggle in order to satisfy their many needs it is very helpful to have a skill which is marketable.

This usefulness of job-oriented skills provides clear motivation for students. They have a reason for working hard to master their courses for they realize that there are jobs and pay checks at the end of their efforts.

Despite these advantages, this trade school mentality produces a terribly inhuman atmosphere for education. This inhumanness is found first of all in the narrow way that students are looked at. A trade school mentality understands students merely in terms of their potentiality as workers, ignoring all the other dimensions of their lives. It overlooks their dignity and preciousness, the special roles that they will play in their families and communities, their capacity for understanding life, for appreciating beauty, for discovering a unique identity, for relating eternally with God.

It is interesting that the narrowness of this trade school approach appears in the way that it limits the social life of students. From the very beginning of their college experience students are grouped in classes according to their future trade. The result is that the only people they have a chance to socialize with are those that share the same trade orientation. If, for instance, they are nursing students they are put into classes where they only meet other nursing students. They make friends only with nursing students, they form clubs only with nursing students, they play games only with nursing students. They will have to wait until after college before they can meet people who are different from them.

A second philosophy of education that militates against education for humanness is that educational approach which we might call ideological. This would be a type of education which seeks to *form* students in such a way that a further goal will be achieved. This further goal might be social such

as the preservation of certain traditional patterns of living. We seek, for example, to inculcate into our students certain Filipino values. This further goal can be religious such as the forming of students to be adherents of a particular religious institution or way of life. It can be nationalistic, leading students to be dedicated to a particular nation with its goals. It can be revolutionary such as the training of students to change some aspect of a society or culture.

Such an ideological approach to education emphasizes control. The administration and the teachers seek to control both the thinking and the lives of the students. They justify such a treatment of students by affirming that it is the will of the parents that their children be "formed" in a particular way.

What judgement can we make of such a style of education? Positively, we can see a real value in this approach to education in the goals that it seeks to achieve. The preservation of a culture or a religion, the development of a sense of nationalism, the reform of society are all admirable goals. It is only reasonable that we seek to pass on to our children those values which have enriched our own lives.

But there is a danger in such an approach for it leads to a dehumanizing of the atmosphere of the school and a dehumanizing of the students. The atmosphere of an ideological school is dehumanizing, first of all, because its emphasis on goals results in a devaluing of the various courses and activities of the school. All of these courses and activities are seen merely as means to those goals and not as things which have value in themselves. History, literature, philosophy and science are seen merely as tools which will build those future achievements and not as courses which possess intrinsic value in themselves. Similarly, all the activities of the school (such as dramas, religious worship,

student clubs and even sports) are promoted because they will serve to bring about these ideological goals and not because they are worthwhile in themselves. The result of all of this is that the humanizing power of these courses and activities is largely lost.

A further problem with an ideological education is that it tends to produce students who have a limited sense of personal identity. These students have been trained to think and live as their mentors have guided them. They have not been allowed to go through that whole painful process of personal reflection and personal decision making which results in their having a sense that they have principles of their own. Without such a process students end up not knowing who they are. They can only repeat the slogans that have been drilled into them.

A further result of such ideological education would be a basic lack of self-confidence. Students would not believe in themselves, in their own intelligence, in their own goodness, in their own capacity to deal with the mysteries and difficulties of life. They would lack this confidence in themselves because they have gone to a school which did not have confidence in them. Instead of trusting them this saw the need to guide and control them.

A final negative aspect of such ideological education is the blocking of reflection and critical thinking. Such education promotes one "party line" and discourages any attempt to question that party line or propose another way of thinking. The ideologue has *the* answer and does not feel the need for any questioning or thinking. His life is centered on getting others to agree with him. The atmosphere of such a school would lack the intellectual atmosphere which is

necessary for the development of fully human persons.

A third enemy of an education for humanness is an educational approach which might be described as an education for "qualification." From the standpoint of a student, education is a matter of passing tests, fulfilling requirements and receiving diplomas. From the standpoint of the teacher, education is a matter of giving tests, computing grades and submitting those grades on time. From the standpoint of the administrator, education is a matter of fulfilling governmental requirements, attaining PAASCU accreditation and having students do well on bar exams and CPA exams.

Such an approach to education (emphasizing qualification) has the positive value of possessing a great deal of motivation. There is always a clear task to be performed and a clear reason to complete the task. The result is that students work hard to pass tests, teachers do a tremendous amount of work correcting papers and computing grades, administration spends much time and effort gaining accreditation.

Although such a "qualification" approach has much to commend it and is firmly entrenched in our schools it is, nevertheless, a rather inhuman system of education. First of all, it manages to miss the whole point of a college education. College is supposed to be a time when students learn and when students grow. What happens is that they become so focused on requirements and tests that they don't have any time for real learning. School becomes a constant process of cramming one's mind full of necessary information, putting that information down on one's exam paper and then promptly forgetting. It seems that the only thing that students learn in this approach is how to pass tests. An extreme example of

this is that period of a semester which is called exam week. It is a time when students become super-busy in preparing for examinations. In doing so they stop thinking, they stop being aware of one another, they stop being sensitive to life and to beauty. It is the climax of the semester, an inhuman climax, when students become like robots.

The basic error of this approach is its viewing education basically as a task, a job. It views learning as something that you work at, something you force. It forgets the basic truth that for education to be human it must be leisure. The Greeks had a clear understanding of this truth. The English word school comes from the Greek word *skole* which means leisure. In his *Republic*, Plato will say "Forced learning will not stay in the mind." If you don't have an atmosphere of leisure, if you make education forced labor then you will not have true learning.

It must be noted here that when we use the term leisure we do not mean mere play. There are in human life many forms of activity in which we escape from the world of work by distracting ourselves in some form of play. (We watch TV, we play cards.) While admitting that such enjoyable play may be very necessary in human life we must realize that it does not constitute true leisure. Leisure is a high point of human life, a deep experience which is only present when human beings live in the fullest possible way. It is found in activities such as the creation of beauty, the worship of God and profound conversation. Such activities go beyond mere enjoyable play and embody a fullness of living. It is such fullness of living that is desirable in a school.

What is the reason for this? Why must school be leisure rather than work? One reason is that it is only in

leisure that you have an openness of mind to see the mysteries of life, to appreciate the preciousness of human life, to understand the wisdom that is there in poetry, to become excited about the questions of science, to wonder about the questions of psychology and theology, to appreciate the beauty of mathematics, to be sensitive to life. It is only in leisure that you are open to these mysteries, that you let yourselves be moved by all that is there. When you are caught up in a "task," in worrying about passing a test or getting a diploma, your life is narrowed to that limited task. There is a wall between you and those life-giving mysteries.

A second reason why school must be leisure is that it is only in leisure that we have time to listen to ourselves and to respond to what we find there within us. We need time to dream, to sort out all the confusing elements of our experience, to experiment with our lives. Life constantly challenges us in new ways and we need the presence of leisure to understand those challenges and to respond to them. If as students we are super-busy with 25 units of course work we do not have a situation where we have time for ourselves to grow as human beings. If, as teachers, we are overburdened with a heavy teaching load, many papers to correct and a multitude of meetings to attend we will inevitably miss the opportunities for growth that life is giving us.

Leisure is necessary for human existence because it is at times of leisure that human life is creative. Freed from the tasks and routines of life, we are able to re-discover and re-make our lives. It is time of "re-creation" in the truest sense. In leisure we remake our relationships to other people, in leisure we set up in a new way the values and goals of our lives, in leisure we become partners once again with this wonderful earth that is our home, in leisure we re-discover God and our relationship to him. In leisure life becomes fresh

and new.

I have presented here three approaches to education which militate against an education for humanness ( a trade school mentality, an ideological concern, a concentration on qualification). It is obvious that these approaches are very much present in our schools and that they tend to dominate our lives. Does this mean that education for humanness is a utopian dream that can never possibly be realized? The young teachers that I spoke to in Zamboanga could not imagine a school where there was education for humanness. Can we?

### **How Do You Teach People to be Human?**

I thoroughly believe that an education for humanness is possible. It is possible to step back from those three philosophies of education which militate against humanness. It is possible to set up a school situation where students, teachers and administrators are led into a fuller living of their humanness. If we really want that type of education we can achieve it.

Let us dare for a few moments to be utopian, to leave the practical, organized educational world to which we are accustomed and to dream of a type of school where humanness would be developed. What would such a school be like? Let me present six elements of a school for humanness. I will leave it to you to suggest other elements.

First of all, this school for humanness must be place where the faculty and administrators are rather human themselves. You teach students to be human by bringing them into contact with people who are themselves human. For instance, students will learn to be well-rounded persons by interacting with teachers who are themselves well-rounded.

You don't staff a school for humanness with one-idea specialists, even though they may be brilliant and professionally competent. In a school for humanness teachers are really alive, they are moving into new fields, they have wide academic interests. I once visited a school in the States where each faculty member was expected to teach every course in the college curriculum. Imagine that. As a teacher in that school you would have to be able to teach science, literature, mathematics, language courses, social science, philosophy. You could not just teach the same basic courses semester after semester. Here was a school which required its faculty to be well-rounded, to be open to the full spectrum of human knowledge, to be constantly learning. Such a school would demand constant reading and growth on the part of its faculty.

In this school we would strive to bring our students into contact not only with the humanness of their teachers and fellow students but also with the humanness found in fine poetry, great literature, drama and fine arts. In the history of the human race there have been certain individuals and groups who have succeeded in attaining a high level of human living. It is possible in school to enter into the spirit and achievements of these people and to learn to live as they lived. If this is achieved, education is an experience of a *renaissance* where humanness of the past takes root and is born again in the lives of students and teachers.

Secondly, this school for humanness would require a great deal of personal interaction among students, faculty and administration. Ideally they would live together in the same buildings, eat at the same tables, play together and pray together. (I believe that something like this was attempted at the traditional English universities.) It is thru such close interaction that we enter into the lives of other people and

grow in humanness. You can never hope for a humanizing situation if the only contact students have with teachers is from the back of a lecture hall. Similarly you don't have a humanizing situation when students come to school, attend classes and then rush home again without ever having time for interaction with others.

In this school for humanness there is a need for students to interact with many different types of people, with students from many countries, with people who have a wide variety of occupations, with old people and with children. The wider the interaction, the richer will be the educational experience. The inhumanness of many of our present school situations is largely due to the limited socialization that is found there.

A third element to be emphasized in this school for humanism is self-expression. Students would be placed in situations where they would be constantly expected to express themselves. This expression would go beyond a parroting back of what has been given them by teachers or textbooks. It would be a matter of expressing in their own way their understanding of what they have read, their personal evaluation of the situations that they encounter in their lives. They would be expected to talk and to write, to put forth their ideas clearly, forcefully and cleverly.

A fourth way to guiding students to be human is to immerse them in a milieu of questioning. To achieve this, their teachers must be questioners, people who are actively wondering about the exciting mysteries of life and who are searching for an understanding of them. The students would be expected to enter into this questioning, to go beyond textbook formulas and to enter into the controversies found in the history of human thought.

They would be exposed to the major questions which are alive in science, politics, economics, education and religion. They would be confronted with the live issues that agitate these fields and they would be challenged to understand them and to take a personal stand.

A fifth way of leading students to become more human is to surround them with an atmosphere of beauty. The experience of education should be an experience of drinking in beauty. The physical environment of the school should be a beautiful one: beautiful buildings, beautiful classrooms, beautiful campus. Students should be led to appreciate fine music and fine art. The school should promote the presentation of beauty in various forms: music, drama, art, poetry. Each individual student should be led to create beauty in some form.

Sixthly, this school for humanness would help students to discover themselves, to develop a sense of their own identity. How could this be done? Somehow, somewhere students would be treated as individuals. They would be listened to. Each of them has special gifts, particular interests, a unique destiny. They would be given programs of activities and studies which would fit those special gifts, those particular interests, those unique destinies. In this school for humanness students would be growing as individuals simply because they would be living as individuals. They would not be following a plan of education suited for everyone in general and no one in particular.

### Conclusion

These ten basic qualities represent a provisional sketch of a picture of a fully human being. Of course, many more

qualities could be added to this list.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could educate students to possess these qualities? Wouldn't it be wonderful if our graduates were people who were fully human and fully alive? Their entire lives would be blessed as every waking hour of theirs would be richer and fuller. How grateful these students would be toward the school which opened up their lives and led them to live lives that were deeply human.

Wouldn't it be wonderful for our families and our communities and our churches if some of their members were people who were truly human? The presence of such people with highly developed human qualities would make an invaluable contribution to the lives of everyone in those communities.

A final question. Do you want to be in a school where there is education for humanness? If you do, what would that school be like?