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Un singolare elogio  
di una sposa speciale:  
l'ep. 44 di Paolino di Nola

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God himself educates  
*Carlo Maria Martini's theology of education  
in an ecumenical comparison*



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# Presentazione

Nel primo articolo di questo numero Enrico Cattaneo S.I. commenta la lettera con cui San Paolino di Nola elogia, nel 400-401, Amanda, moglie di Apro, presbitero. L'elogio è dovuto alla scelta fatta da Amanda sia di vivere l'intimità matrimoniale come sorella di suo marito, cioè in perfetta continenza, sia di prendersi l'onere dell'amministrazione temporale della famiglia, lasciando così libero Apro per compiere i suoi obblighi ecclesiali di ministro ordinato. Paolino, anche egli presbitero (e poi vescovo), è coniugato a Teresia, vivendo allo stesso modo. L'articolo riporta alla memoria un'opzione che si presenta oggi, in tempi post-moderni, come contraria alla cultura imperante, come certamente si presentava nel quinto secolo. Per questa ragione il testo studiato è la testimonianza preziosa della coscienza credente che ha certamente come motivazione profonda e segreta della continenza matrimoniale il desiderio di vivere radicalmente la freschezza del Vangelo. Inoltre, in appendice, l'autore offre ai lettori sia il testo integrale dell'epistola di Paolino, sia quello dell'epistola 27 di Agostino, inviata a Paolino e Teresia come elogio per la loro scelta, lettera che poi Paolino ha usato come fonte del suo elogio ad Amanda.

Il secondo articolo, scritto da Eraldo Cacchione S.I., sviluppa una prospettiva del magistero teologico del Cardinale Carlo Maria Martini poco nota, cioè quella che riguarda la pedagogia. L'autore avvia la sua riflessione partendo da tre lettere sull'educazione che il Cardinale Martini scrisse durante il suo governo pastorale a Milano (1980-2002). In esse, Martini prende in considerazione il dato biblico che rivela il modo in cui Dio è stato pedagogo con il suo popolo. Da questa premessa, arricchita dal bagaglio della spiritualità ignaziana con cui il Cardinale partecipa e si identifica, Cacchione identifica undici principi pedagogici 'divini' con i quali sistematizza la riflessione biblica del Cardinale Martini sull'argomento. Inoltre, l'autore mette a confronto, in prospettiva ecumenica, gli approcci di Paul Tillich e di John M. Hulls con quello di Martini, evidenziando la originalità di quest'ultimo.

La riflessione dei due vescovi, Paolino e Martini, a distanza di circa 1500 anni, su argomenti tanto diversi come la continenza e la pedagogia, non perdono tuttavia un speciale significato per il momento presente: quello di prendere consapevolezza dell'ineffabile presenza di Dio che, come mistagogo orienta giorno dopo giorno i suoi ministri e il suo popolo verso di sé.



# Un singolare elogio di una sposa speciale: l'*ep.* 44 di Paolino di Nola

di Enrico Cattaneo S.I.\*

Oggi sembra quasi impensabile che due coniugi, a un certo punto della loro vita matrimoniale, scelgano di osservare la perfetta continenza per amore di Cristo, pur continuando in un certo modo la vita comune. Perché allora si sono sposati? si obietta. Non così era nella Chiesa dei primi secoli, dove la perfetta continenza non solo era volontariamente abbracciata da uomini e donne anche sposati, ma veniva richiesta a coloro che erano chiamati al ministero (vescovi, presbiteri, compresi i diaconi), pur essendo la maggior parte di essi coniugati<sup>1</sup>. Evidentemente, in questo secondo caso, una tale scelta richiedeva il consenso della moglie e ciò non era possibile senza una intensa vita cristiana e senza il riconoscimento di uno speciale carisma.

Un esempio molto bello di questa spiritualità coniugale-sacerdotale si ha nella coppia Paolino e Terasia. Di illustre e ricca famiglia senatoria, Ponzio Meropio Anicio Paolino nacque a Burdigala (Bordeaux) verso il 355<sup>2</sup>. Educato nella cultura classica, allievo del poeta Ausonio, intraprese la carriera politica a Roma come edile, pretore, senatore e forse anche console. Dal 379 al 381 fu governatore della Campania, dove aveva dei possedimenti. Tornato in patria, verso il 384 sposò la ricca e nobile spagnola Terasia, fervente cristiana. Nel 389, sui 35 anni, anche Paolino decide di chiedere il battesimo, che riceve da Delfino, vescovo di Bordeaux<sup>3</sup>. La vita coniugale della coppia fu allietata, dopo alcuni anni, dalla nascita di un figlio, che però purtroppo morì dopo appena otto giorni di vita. Questo avvenimento doloroso affrettò nei due coniugi il progetto, da

\* Enrico Cattaneo, docente di Patrologia e Teologia Fondamentale presso la Pontificia Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Meridionale, sez. San Luigi, via Petrarca, 115 – 80122, [cattaneo.e@gesuiti.it](mailto:cattaneo.e@gesuiti.it)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. GANGALE, «*Coniugium sine opere coniugali*. La vita nuova nella lettera IV di Salviano di Marsiglia ai suoceri», in *Rivista di ascetica e mistica*, 2008/4, 735-770. Sono debitore di questo articolo per molti spunti, mentre per l'*ep.* 44 di Paolino devo riconoscere il mio debito verso C. SARNATARO, «La comunicazione della fede in Paolino di Nola» in L. LONGOBARDO-D. SORRENTINO (a cura di), *Mia sola arte è la fede*. Paolino di Nola teologo sapienziale (BTN 21), Pontificia Facoltà Teologica, Sez. San Tommaso, Napoli 2000, 299-346, ripreso in C. SARNATARO, *L'agire della chiesa nel tempo*. Figure, temi e problemi, Luciano Editore, Napoli 2007, 15-48.

<sup>2</sup> Cenni biografici in G. SANTANIELLO, «Introduzione» a PAOLINO DI NOLA, *Le lettere*, I-II, LER, Napoli-Roma 1992, 15-31; G. LUONGO, «Paolino di Nola», in E. GUERRIERO-D. TUNIZ (a cura di), *Il Grande Libro dei Santi*. Dizionario enciclopedico, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), 1558-1565.

<sup>3</sup> PAOLINO, *ep.* 3,4.



tempo vagheggiato, di vendere tutti i loro beni e di ritirarsi a vita ascetica presso la tomba di san Felice a Nola<sup>4</sup>. Essi nel contempo maturano la decisione di una vita coniugale nella perfetta continenza, vivendo «come fratello e sorella, in una adesione a Cristo e al Vangelo totale e profonda»<sup>5</sup>. Inaspettatamente per Paolino alla fine del 394 a Barcellona arriva l'ordinazione presbiterale per acclamazione popolare<sup>6</sup>. Subito i due coniugi si ritirano a Cimitile, presso Nola, in una vita di povertà e castità, nella preghiera e al servizio dei bisognosi<sup>7</sup>.

Questo impegno di continenza non era sentito come una cosa gravosa o singolare, dal momento che non solo singoli cristiani, ma anche molte coppie di sposi lo assumevano come esigenza del loro battesimo<sup>8</sup>. In una lettera a Vittricio, vescovo di Rouen, Paolino si rallegra per

«la condotta delle coppie di sposi sottomessi a Dio, i quali segretamente vivono come fratelli e sorelle (*arcana germanitas*), e con assidue preghiere invitano Cristo, che gode delle loro opere, a visitare quello che non è più il loro letto coniugale (*maritalis tori*), bensì il giaciglio della loro convivenza fraterna (*fraterni cubilis*)» (*ep.* 18,5).

Che degli sposi decidessero, di comune accordo, di vivere da un certo momento in poi «come fratelli e sorelle», era un loro personale «segreto»: cioè non lo sbandieravano, non ne facevano un vanto, ma era una *arcana germanitas*, come dice Paolino<sup>9</sup>. Solo quando la coppia decideva di ritirarsi in una comunità monastica o il marito era chiamato dal vescovo al ministero sacerdotale, allora questo proposito di castità veniva reso pubblico. È probabile che gli sposi lo notificassero ai parenti, agli amici e alle comunità, anche per rendere manifesta l'adesione libera della sposa a questa scelta. Così si spiega come mai Paolino e Terasia rendano pubblico il loro proposito in una lettera ad Agostino nel 395, poco dopo che Paolino era stato ordinato presbitero. Scrivendo anche a

<sup>4</sup> Sulla rinuncia ai beni terreni, cf. D. SORRENTINO, «Il vangelo della povertà in Paolino di Nola», in C. SARNATARO (a cura di), *Annuncio del vangelo e percorsi di chiesa* (BTN 27), Pontificia Facoltà Teologica, Sez. San Tommaso, Napoli 2005, 65-97.

<sup>5</sup> G. SANTANIELLO, «Introduzione», cit., 21. Girolamo scrivendo a Paolino verso il 395 si ricorda di salutare la moglie Terasia chiamandola «tua santa sorella», «tua santa compagna di servizio (*conseruam*) e impegnata (*militantem*) con te nel Signore» (GIROLAMO, *ep.* 58,6: PL 22,583.586).

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* 3,4.

<sup>7</sup> Terasia morirà nel 408 e Paolino sarà consacrato vescovo di Nola nel 410 e morirà nel 431.

<sup>8</sup> Questo lo menziona già Tertulliano: «Quanti sono quelli che, subito dopo il battesimo, suggellano la loro carne con il sigillo [della continenza]? E parimenti, quanti sono quelli, i quali, con mutuo accordo, rinunciano reciprocamente al debito coniugale, diventando eunuchi volontari per il desiderio del regno dei cieli?» (*Alla moglie*, 1,6,2: CChL 1, 380); «Quanti uomini e quante donne nei ranghi ecclesiastici hanno scelto la continenza! Alcuni hanno preferito il matrimonio con Dio, altri hanno restituito l'onore alla loro carne e si sono già dichiarati figli del mondo futuro, uccidendo in se stessi la brama della passione e tutto ciò che non poté essere ammesso nel paradiso» (*Esortazione alla castità*, 13,4: CChL II, 1035).

<sup>9</sup> La riservatezza di questa scelta era già raccomandata fin dagli inizi: cf. IGNAZIO DI ANTIOCHIA, *A Policarpo*, 5,2: «Se qualcuno può rimanere nella castità, a onore della carne del Signore, vi rimanga senza menar vanto. Qualora se ne vanti, è perduto; e qualora sia conosciuto oltre il vescovo, è corrotto». Già prima di Ignazio, la Chiesa di Roma, scrivendo alla Chiesa di Corinto per mano di Clemente, aveva detto: «Chi è casto nella carne non deve vantarsene, sapendo che è un altro che gli dà la continenza» (1Clem 38,2).



nome della sposa<sup>10</sup>, il neo-sacerdote esprime il suo proposito di povertà e di castità, ringraziando Cristo che lo ha liberato «da ogni rivestimento carnale (*omni amictu carnis*) e da ogni preoccupazione del domani», allontanandolo «dall'amicizia della carne e del sangue» per farlo sedere «tra i principi del suo popolo», elevandolo al sacerdozio, che lo rende «associato» di Agostino «nel ministero (*officio sociatus*)»<sup>11</sup>. Nella sua risposta, Agostino, con singolare finezza, dopo il cordiale saluto a Paolino, fa un esplicito elogio della sposa, che ha scelto di stare vicina al marito nella via della castità:

«Coloro che leggono [la lettera di Paolino e Terasia] vedono lì una sposa che è per il proprio sposo una guida, non alla mollezza, ma alla fermezza, ritornando ad essere ossa di suo marito: a lei ricambiamo il nostro saluto, unitamente a te; a lei, ritornata e ricondotta a formare una sola cosa con te e a te legata da vincoli spirituali tanto più saldi quanto più sono casti, a motivo dei doveri (*officiis*) esigiti dalla vostra santità»<sup>12</sup>.

Questo accenno agli *officia* allude certamente allo stato sacerdotale di Paolino. Va però notato che Agostino ha capito molto bene il ruolo che la sposa ha in questa scelta, e rende esplicito quello che nella lettera di Paolino era rimasto un po' nascosto<sup>13</sup>. In definitiva, la lettera dei coniugi aquitani ha suscitato tanto entusiasmo nella comunità di Agostino:

«L'hanno letta i fratelli, i quali godono instancabilmente e in modo ineffabile di così abbondanti ed eccellenti doni di Dio, beni tuoi. Quanti l'hanno letta, me la rapiscono, tanto sono rapiti ogni volta che la leggono»<sup>14</sup>.

Queste premesse erano indispensabili per capire la lettera che Paolino, assieme alla moglie Terasia, scriverà nel 400-401 ad Apro e Amanda<sup>15</sup>. Apro era un avvocato e magistrato aquitano, sposato con Amanda, dalla quale aveva avuto diversi figli. I due coniugi si erano poi convertiti al cristianesimo, proponendosi un ideale di vita secondo il vangelo<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> *Paulinus et Terasia peccatores*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ep.* 4,4. Infatti, quando Paolino scrive, Agostino è ancora presbitero. Per il testo, traduzione e commento di questa e delle altre lettere di Paolino ad Agostino, si veda T. PISCITELLI CARPINO, *Paolino di Nola, epistole ad Agostino*, (Strenae Nolanae, 2), LER, Napoli-Roma 1989.

<sup>12</sup> AGOSTINO, *ep.* 27, 2 (CSEL 34, 97-98). Su tutta questa problematica si veda il classico P. BROWN, *The Body and Society*. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity, Columbia University Press, New York 1988 (trad. it. *Il corpo e la società*. Uomini, donne e astinenza sessuale nel primo cristianesimo, Einaudi, Torino 1992).

<sup>13</sup> È singolare che anche Ambrogio nel ricordare a Sabino, vescovo di Piacenza, la scelta ascetica dei coniugi aquitani, faccia proprio un esplicito elogio di Terasia: «Anche la sposa (*matrona*) gli è compagna nella virtù e nello zelo, e condivide il proposito del marito. Perciò, trasferiti al altri i diritti sui suoi poteri, segue lo sposo, e là, contenta del modesto reddito del consorte, troverà un compenso nelle ricchezze della religione e della carità (*caritatis / castitatis* F). Non ha figli, e quindi la desiderata discendenza passa ai meriti» (AMBROGIO, *ep.* 27 [Maur. 58], 2).

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. SANTANIELLO, «Introduzione», cit., 102-104.

<sup>16</sup> Nella *ep.* 38,3 Paolino, esortando Apro a non scoraggiarsi di fronte al disprezzo di cui è oggetto per la sua scelta di Cristo, gli ricorda che «è opera sua [= di Cristo] in te l'umiltà che essi disprezzano e la castità che essi detestano». Lasciata la professione di avvocato, Apro aveva deciso di dedicarsi allo studio delle sacre Scritture e delle cose spirituali (*salubri consilio instructioni sanctae vacas, et intentus studiis spiritualibus*), forse già nella prospettiva del sacerdozio (*ep.* 38,10).



Essi poi avevano reso noto il loro proposito di continenza per amore di Cristo, motivato dal fervore ascetico e sfociato nella chiamata dello sposo al sacerdozio. Il legame tra i due casi è evidente, perché Paolino, nel tessere l'elogio della scelta fatta da Amanda, userà proprio le stesse espressioni che Agostino aveva scritte nell'elogiare il proposito di Terasia<sup>17</sup>.

Ma perché proprio l'elogio di Amanda? Perché era indispensabile che ella, come sposa e madre, acconsentisse liberamente e di cuore a questa scelta, che comportava la perfetta continenza, accettando di rimanere accanto allo sposo come una sorella. Inoltre ella aveva anche deciso di accollarsi l'amministrazione dei beni temporali e la cura dei figli, per consentire al marito di dedicarsi completamente ai suoi nuovi doveri sacerdotali. Questo rilievo dato alla figura di moglie di un marito-sacerdote mostra l'importanza che aveva la donna in questo tipo di scelta. Ma veniamo alle parole stesse di Paolino<sup>18</sup>.

Il ruolo decisivo della sposa in questo proposito di perfetta castità nel matrimonio e di distacco dai beni materiali è ripreso dalle parole di Agostino:

«Lì la sposa è per il proprio sposo una guida,  
non alla mollezza (*mollitudinem*) e all'attaccamento al denaro (*avaritiam*),  
ma alla continenza (*continentiam*) e alla forza (*fortitudinem*),  
ritornando ad essere ossa di suo marito» (*ep.* 44,3)<sup>19</sup>.

Questa scelta di castità, lungi dall'ostacolare l'unione degli sposi, la rende ancora più forte, perché «l'amore di Cristo (*caritas Christi*) unisce con vincoli spirituali che sono tanto più saldi quanto più casti», al punto che così si realizza quell'unità significata «dall'unione di Cristo con la Chiesa» (cf. *Ef* 5,32). In modo mirabile, la sposa «ritorna ad essere ossa di suo marito», da cui è stata tratta, secondo il racconto di *Gen* 2,23, ritrovando così l'unità spirituale:

«La tua consorte [...] è meravigliosa per quella sua grande emulazione del matrimonio di Cristo con la Chiesa, lei che l'amore di Cristo ti ha restituita, conducendola a formare una sola cosa con te, ed ora la tiene unita a te con vincoli spirituali (*spiritualibus nexibus*), che sono tanto più saldi quanto più casti (*tanto firmioribus quanto castioribus*), poiché dal vostro corpo voi siete passati al corpo di Cristo» (*ep.* 44,3)<sup>20</sup>.

Bella questa riflessione centrata, come conviene a una spiritualità coniugale, sul termine "corpo": vi siete distaccati dal «vostro» corpo, costituito da due individui, e siete passati a quello unico «di Cristo», del quale fate parte.

Paolino prosegue con una benedizione, rivolta direttamente agli sposi:

«Siate benedetti dal Signore,  
che ha fatto dei due una cosa sola,

<sup>17</sup> La dipendenza era già stata notata (cf. CSEL 29,371; SANTANIELLO, «Introduzione», cit., 87, nota 312), ma senza quel risalto che essa avrebbe richiesto.

<sup>18</sup> Traduzione di G. Santaniello (*Lettere*, II, 481-503), salvo qualche ritocco. Paolino aveva già scritto una lettera ad Apro (*ep.* 38), felicitandosi per la sua conversione, e un'altra ad Apro e Amanda (*ep.* 39).

<sup>19</sup> AGOSTINO, *ep.* 27,2 sopra citato. Notiamo che Paolino aggiunge due parole significative al testo di Agostino: *avaritiam* e *continentiam*. Per una sinossi delle due epistole, si veda l'appendice finale.

<sup>20</sup> Anche questo passo è ripreso dall'*ep.* 27,2 di Agostino (si veda l'appendice finale).



creando in se stesso i due (cf. *Ef* 2,14),  
Egli che solo compie meraviglie (cf. *Sal* 71,18),  
e trasforma non solo le anime, ma anche gli affetti,  
e le cose temporali in quelle eterne.  
Ecco, voi siete gli stessi coniugi di prima,  
ma non allo stesso modo di prima;  
siete gli stessi, e non più gli stessi;  
e conoscete voi stessi così come conoscete Cristo,  
cioè non più secondo la carne (cf. *2Cor* 5,16)» (*ep.* 44,4).

Paolino sottolinea come questa “trasformazione” sia opera di Dio, e che i coniugi, dopo questa scelta sono «gli stessi coniugi di prima, ma non allo stesso modo di prima», perché si amano di un amore tutto spirituale.

Segue una lode della sposa, che ha accettato di vivere nella castità, pur rimanendo nel mondo:

«Benedetta costei fra le donne (cf. *Lc* 1,28.42)  
fedele e molto gradita al Signore  
anche per questa sua dedizione (*deuotione*),  
con la quale ella per te [Apro] si è opposta  
alle costrizioni del mondo  
come alle tempeste [si oppone] una torre  
fondata su scoglio incrollabile» (*ep.* 44,4).

In effetti, Amanda, accettando di occuparsi dei beni della famiglia e dei figli, ha permesso al marito di essere libero da preoccupazioni mondane, per dedicarsi ai suoi doveri sacerdotali :

«Ella si prende cura delle cose del mondo (*saeculi curas*),  
perché non debba preoccupartene tu;  
se ne prende cura lei,  
perché tu possa occuparti del cielo.  
Dà l'impressione di possedere,  
affinché tu non sia posseduto dal mondo,  
ma sia posseduto da Cristo» (*ep.* 44,4).

Il marito-sacerdote deve dimostrare un distacco dai beni terreni non solo affettivo, ma anche effettivo. Per la moglie, invece, basta il distacco affettivo, dovendo occuparsi degli affari del mondo «dando l'impressione di possedere» agli occhi degli altri, ma avendo il cuore tutto rivolto a Cristo. La moglie accetta di occuparsi delle cose del mondo, per lasciare libero il marito-sacerdote di svolgere il suo ufficio. Ormai Apro non deve più preoccuparsi di ciò che avviene nella sua «casa terrena», ma sarà libero di occuparsi della «casa celeste» (*ep.* 44,4). Amanda, scrive Paolino, è veramente quella donna forte e saggia, «che ti è stata donata, più preziosa delle pietre preziose», e che «ti rende stimato alle porte della Chiesa» (*ivi*).

Questa diversità di occupazioni – e di preoccupazioni – non devono però essere occasione di contrasto, ma armonizzarsi in una complementarità feconda:



«Ella, infatti, anche nella diversità delle vostre occupazioni, ma salvo restando l'assenso della sua mente in piena armonia con te, è unita alla decisione della tua vocazione (*propositum*); e mentre tu, fedele e solerte, eserciti l'amministrazione che ti è stata affidata, moltiplicando i talenti del tuo padrone, anche lei, i proventi che con duro lavoro ricava dai beni terreni, non li tesorizza sulla terra, ma li mette a disposizione delle tue opere, piuttosto che dei dannosi profitti dell'avarizia» (*ep.* 44,4).

Paolino vede già che questi due coniugi, «diversi nella fatica, ma pari nell'impegno» e «impiegati nel compimento della medesima opera», alla fine entreranno nel regno dei cieli «con giubilo, portando i loro covoni » (cf. *Sal* 125,6), «lei servendoti il seme e tu seminando il seme del ministero». In altri termini, la sposa, che in qualche modo ha dovuto rimanere a contatto con le cose del mondo, per permettere allo sposo-sacerdote di dedicarsi «ai beni spirituali» non verrà defraudata della ricompensa celeste, ma sarà pienamente associata al marito-sacerdote, perché «ha preferito non questo mondo a Cristo, ma lui a se stessa» (*ivi*).

Molti altri esempi si potrebbero portare di coppie di sposi che hanno scelto la continenza perpetua in quel clima di intenso ascetismo tra IV e V secolo. Verso il 420, Eucherio, poi vescovo di Lione, assieme alla moglie Galla e ai figli Salonio e Verano, si era ritirato nell'isola di Lero, in prossimità del monastero istituito da Onorato, poi vescovo di Arles, nell'isola di Lerino, non lontana da Marsiglia. Ai due coniugi, Paolino scriverà una lettera nella quale si rallegra di saperli

«in ottima salute (*incolumes*), intenti a compiere l'opera del vostro venerando proposito (*uenerandi propositi*), ad attendere allo studio e ad aspirare al cielo con la stessa armonia di cuori (*in corde uno*) con la quale avete abbandonato i beni di questo mondo»<sup>21</sup>.

Merita di essere ricordata anche la coppia Salviano e Palladia, nativi di Treviri e trasferitisi poi nel sud della Gallia. Ebbero una figlia, Auspiciola, ma poi decisero di vivere il loro matrimonio nella continenza, e resero pubblica questa loro scelta, certamente per desiderio di una vita cristiana più perfetta in una comunità monastica, cosa che aprirà a Salviano la via del sacerdozio. Lo troviamo infatti presbitero della Chiesa di Marsiglia nel 429, quando egli doveva avere sui trentacinque o quarant'anni. La notizia di una tale scelta giunse ai suoceri di Salviano, i quali, ancora pagani, ruppero ogni relazione con la figlia, il genero e la nipotina. Per loro quella scelta era una cosa inconcepibile, e per di più sospettavano che fosse un'imposizione del marito. Salviano e Palladia scrissero allora una lettera, cercando una riconciliazione, basandosi più su sentimenti di umanità che sulle ragioni ascetiche. Scritta nello stile retorico antico, essa rivela dei tratti interessanti per il nostro tema<sup>22</sup>. Salviano si rivolge alla moglie chiamandola «straordinaria sorella», «amatissima e venerabilissima sorella, che mi sei tanto più cara di

<sup>21</sup> PAOLINO, *ep.* 51,1 (SANTANIELLO, II, 634-636). Sulla vita, opere e spiritualità di Eucherio, cf. L. CRISTIANI, «Eucher (saint), évêque de Lyon, † 449 ou 450», in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 4 (1960) 1653-1660.

<sup>22</sup> Il testo latino con traduzione italiana di A. Fracchia si trova alla fine dell'articolo di G. Gangale (cit. nota 1).





prima, quanto più è Cristo che vuole essere amato nell'affetto dei nostri cari»<sup>23</sup>. La lettera fa poi intervenire la stessa Palladia, con una perorazione che non è priva di accenti veritieri<sup>24</sup>. Quanto al tema della castità, la moglie-sorella così si esprime:

«[Mio marito] mi ha invitata alla religione, mi ha invitata alla castità (*inuitavit ad castitatem*). Perdonatemi, ho ritenuto ignobile opporre resistenza: mi è sembrata una proposta rispettosissima, onesta, santa. Anzi lo ammetto: quando egli mi ha parlato di questa cosa, mi sono vergognata di non averla proposta io per prima. Mi ci hanno portata anche la venerazione e l'amore per Cristo: ho ritenuto essere virtuoso tutto ciò che avrei fatto per amore di Dio»<sup>25</sup>.

Si può notare qui la decisione presa di comune accordo, dove la sposa ha la sua parola da dire e il suo punto di vista da esporre. Il motivo ultimo che unisce gli sposi in questa loro scelta è poi sempre l'amore per Cristo<sup>26</sup>.

Questi esempi, e i molti altri che si potrebbero portare, sottolineano sempre il motivo ascetico-spirituale della scelta di continenza nel matrimonio<sup>27</sup>; non si trova mai una motivazione che derivi da una esigenza del ministero sacerdotale, anche se di fatto si arrivava quasi sempre all'ordinazione dello sposo. Questa reticenza si capisce perché nell'epoca patristica era talmente evidente che la vicinanza con le realtà sante comportasse la continenza sessuale, da rendere superfluo esplicitarlo<sup>28</sup>. Inoltre, mentre la continenza per il regno dei cieli era una scelta personale, motivata dall'amore esclusivo a Cristo e al vangelo, il ministero ordinato era una scelta del vescovo, scelta che arrivava sovente inopinata, a volte dietro acclamazione popolare; il candidato l'accettava spesso a malincuore, cercando in qualche caso di sottrarsi con la fuga<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> SALVIANO, *ep.* 4,9 (PL 53,162 B).

<sup>24</sup> Come quando ella ricorda i termini vezzeggiativi che si sentiva rivolgere nella sua infanzia: «O genitori carissimi, abbraccio i vostri piedi, io, quella vostra Palladia, vostra cornacchietta (*gracula*), vostra padroncina (*domnula*), con la quale avete un tempo scherzato con tutti questi nomignoli con benivolissimo rispetto; io che fui per voi, con diversi nomi, ora madre (*mater*), ora uccellino (*auicula*), ora signora (*domina*), nomi, è chiaro, uno del genere femminile, l'altro dell'infanzia, il terzo del prestigio» (SALVIANO, *ep.* 4,13). Cf. EPITTETO, *Manuale* 40: «Le fanciulle non fanno in tempo a compiere il quattordicesimo anno che subito gli uomini le chiamano "signore"».

<sup>25</sup> SALVIANO, *ep.* 4,12 (162 C).

<sup>26</sup> Qualche volta nel modo di esprimersi può apparire una disistima del matrimonio, come nella *Vita di santa Melania* (Sources Chrétiennes 90, Cerf, Paris 1962). Cf. MARIELLA CARPINELLO, *Libere donne di Dio*. Figure femminili nei primi secoli cristiani, Mondadori, Milano 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Si veda quanto scrive Salviano: «A proposito dei coniugi i quali professano la continenza (*continentiam professis*) e sono pieni dello Spirito di Dio [...], se sono dotati di una virtù così singolare e hanno rinunciato, con l'austerità di un'ammirabile continenza (*admirabilis continentiae austeritate*), i piaceri carnali legittimi e dei quali, cosa questa ancor più notevole, hanno fatto esperienza, come potrebbero non consacrare a Dio qualcosa del loro patrimonio, essi che hanno accolto Dio stesso tra di loro?» (*Contro l'attaccamento al denaro*, 2,7: PL 53,195 CD). Questo testo è proposto da G. GANGALE, «*Contiugium sine opere coniugali*», cit., 738 (traduzione ritoccata).

<sup>28</sup> Si veda, ad esempio, quanto scrive Paolino proprio nella lettera ad Apro e Amanda: «In realtà, io penso che accenda un fuoco profano (cf. *Lv* 10,6) ogni uomo che, accendendo nel sacrario del suo cuore la fiamma di qualche desiderio corporale o mondano, osi avvicinarsi agli altari del Signore, i quali non tollerano se non l'accensione di quel fuoco, del quale il Signore dice: *Sono venuto a portare un fuoco sulla terra, e che cosa desidero, se è stato già acceso?* (*Lc* 12,49)» (*ep.* 44,6).

<sup>29</sup> Così Paolino stesso parla della sua ordinazione presbiterale: «Sono stato consacrato sacerdote da



Questo fa capire che i vescovi coscienziosi, quando volevano conferire l'ordinazione sacerdotale a qualcuno, non badavano tanto al fatto se fosse coniugato o meno, ma se avesse il carisma della continenza. Per questo vediamo a cavallo tra il IV e il V secolo tutta una serie di coppie di sposi che, avendo incontrato Cristo, decidono di passare il resto della loro vita coniugale nella totale continenza, e tale scelta porterà quasi sempre il marito ad essere chiamato al sacerdozio<sup>30</sup>. La moglie allora doveva rendere esplicita la sua adesione a questa vocazione singolare. Da qui l'elogio che Ambrogio, Agostino e soprattutto Paolino hanno tessuto di queste spose speciali.

Lampio a Barcellona in Spagna, in seguito alla forte pressione (*uim*) fattagli dal popolo improvvisamente infiammato» (*ep.* 3,4).

<sup>30</sup> Di fatto però questi casi dovevano essere abbastanza rari. Spinti dalla necessità, spesso i vescovi ordinavano persone sposate che non avevano mai pensato alla continenza nel matrimonio. Tuttavia, afferma Agostino, con l'aiuto di Dio essi riescono a tener fede al loro impegno. Questa *continentia clericorum* è portata da Agostino come esempio per spronare i mariti a essere casti, così come lo esigono dalle loro mogli: «Questi [chierici] per lo più sono designati contro la loro volontà (*inuiti*) ad assumersi questo stesso fardello (*sarcinam*), ma, una volta che lo hanno accettato, lo portano con l'aiuto di Dio fino al fine dovuto. Diciamo dunque ad essi [mariti tentati di adulterio]: E se anche voi foste costretti dalla violenza (*uiolentia*) del popolo ad addossarvi questo peso? Non custodireste castamente il dovere che avete accolto, rivolgendovi subito al Signore per ottenerne le forze alle quali prima non avevate mai pensato? Ma, obiettano, li ripaga abbondantemente l'onore. Rispondiamo: E a voi molto di più sia di freno il timore. Se dunque molti ministri del Signore accettarono questo dovere imposto loro all'improvviso e inaspettatamente, nella speranza di risplendere più luminosi nell'eredità di Cristo, quanto più voi dovete vivere in continenza guardandovi dall'adulterio» (*De coniugiis adulterinis* II 20,22: PL 40,486). È chiaro che il "fardello" assunto dai ministri coniugati non è l'astenersi dall'adulterio, ma la continenza totale.



## Appendice

### L'ep. 27 di Agostino come fonte dell'ep. 44 di Paolino

Paolino riprende alla lettera molte espressioni di Agostino, al punto che si può stabilire una sinossi. Tra parentesi quadre [ ] le lettere per individuare più rapidamente i passi corrispondenti:

PAOLINO, ep. 44

2. Expresserunt enim mihi faciem cordis tui [a] litterae tuae, illae litterae spei bonae, litterae fidei non fictae, litterae purae caritatis. Quid amoris sanctissimi spirant, [b] quam suavis in his et quantus Christi odor fragrat, quanta opulentia sinceri cordis aestuat, quomodo nobis anhelant sitim tuam et desiderium defectumque animae tuae in atria domini, quas agunt gratias deo, quae legenti mihi florescentium in te gratiarum dei iamque operantium uirtutum praebent spectaculum.

3. [c] Ibi paruuli siue etiam adultuli Babylo- nis filii eliduntur ad petram, uitia scilicet confusionis superbiaequae saecularis, quae procluius fides congressa superabit, si in primordiis ad Christum inlidere anticipata crescentium infirmitate praecauerit<sup>29</sup>. [d] Ibi et cedri Libani ad terram depositae et in arcae fabricam compagine caritatis erectae mundi huius fluctus inputribili robore secant. [e] Ibidem excitatus Christus, ut directionis tuae cursum ad stabilitatem suam ducat, uentos et maria tibi placans uidetur, cui iam in corporis tui naue uectatio et in tuo corde ceruical est, quia inuenit passer domum sibi, et habens in te, ubi reclinet caput suum. Illic et [f] coniunx, non dux ad mollitudinem uel auaritiam uiro suo, sed ad continentiam et fortitudinem redux in ossa uiri sui, magna illa diuini cum ecclesia coniugii aemulatione mirabilis est, quam in tuam unitatem reductam ac redditam spiritalibus tibi tanto fir- mioribus quanto castioribus nexibus caritas Christi copulat, in cuius corporis transistis a uestro.

AGOSTINO, ep. 27

2. Legi enim litteras tuas fluentes lac et mel, praeferentes simplicitatem cordis tui, in qua quaeris Dominum sentiens de illo in bonitate, et afferentes ei claritatem et honorem. Legerunt fratres, et gaudent infatigabiliter et ineffabiliter, tam uberibus et tam excellentibus donis Dei, bonis tuis. Quotquot eas legerunt, rapiunt, quia rapiuntur cum legunt. [b] Quam suavis odor Christi, et quam fragrat ex eis, dici non potest. Illae litterae cum te offerunt ut uidearis, quantum nos excitant ut quaeraris! Nam et perspicabilem faciunt et desiderabilem. Quanto enim praesentiam tuam nobis quodammodo exhibent, tanto absentiam nos ferre non sinunt. Amant te omnes in eis, et amari abs te cupiunt. Laudatur et benedicitur Deus, cuius gratia tu talis es. [e] Ibi excitatur Christus, ut uentos et maria tibi placare dignetur tendenti ad stabilitatem suam. Uidetur a legentibus ibi [f] coniunx, non dux ad mollitiem uiro suo, sed ad fortitudinem redux in ossa uiri sui, quam in tuam unitatem redactam et redditam, et spiritalibus tibi tanto firmiter, quanto castioribus nexibus copulatam, officiis uestrae Sanctitati debitis, in te uno resalutamus. [d] Ibi cedri Libani ad terram depositae, et in arcae fabricam compagine caritatis erectae, mundi huius fluctus inputribiliter secant. Ibi gloria, ut acquiratur, contemnitur, et mundus ut obtineatur, relinquitur. [c] Ibi paruuli, siue etiam grandiusculi filii Babylonis eliduntur ad petram, uitia scilicet confusionis superbiaequae saecularis.

3. Haec atque huiusmodi suauissima et sacratissima spectacula [a] litterae tuae praebent legentibus; litterae illae, litterae fidei non fictae, litterae spei bonae, litterae purae caritatis.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sal 136,7. L'interpretazione allegorica, che vede nei "bambini" di Babilonia scagliati contro la "pietra" i pensieri cattivi subito soppressi dalla pietra che è Cristo, si trova anche in Girolamo e risale senza dubbio ad Origene (cf. P. JAY, «*Super flumina Babylonis...* Lectures patristiques du *Psaume* 136», in B. GAIN, P. JAY, G. NAUROY (éd.), *Chartae caritatis*. Études de patristique et d'antiquité tardive en hommage à Yves-Marie Duval, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2004, 193-204).



# God himself educates

## *Carlo Maria Martini's theology of education in an ecumenical comparison*

di Eraldo Cacchione S.I.\*

«La Pasqua è la rivelazione e l'esperienza più alta dell'azione educativa di Dio, che libera il suo popolo e lo riconcilia con sé. In essa si manifesta il "mistero", cioè il disegno divino di salvezza che viene realizzandosi nel tempo, la pedagogia divina che porta l'uomo a partecipare della vita di amore del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito santo.»

Carlo Maria Martini, SJ,  
*Itinerari educativi*  
[Educational Itineraries], (1988)

[«The paschal mystery is the revelation and the highest experience of God's educational activity, which frees His people and reconciles it to God. In the paschal mystery, the 'mystery' is unveiled, that is, the divine project of salvation that finds its fulfillment in time, the divine pedagogy that brings humankind to participate in the life of love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.»]

## Introduction

In this article I want to start a conversation about theology of education. This subject is not much considered in theological academy for reasons that will appear clear in what follows.<sup>1</sup> However, theology of education is a very interesting subject and a disci-

\* Eraldo Cacchione, licenziato in teologia sistematica alla Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, California, attualmente insegna al liceo e anima attività di formazione religiosa e spirituale presso l'Istituto Massimo di Roma, [cacchione.e@gesuiti.it](mailto:cacchione.e@gesuiti.it)

<sup>1</sup> Theology of education is a relatively young discipline: if one types the sequence "theology-of-education" on an internet search engine or in the electronic catalogue of a library, the result will not be very satisfying: only a few titles, many of which are books of collected articles, and most see the issue of theology of education as a goal to reach or a problem to solve. Cf., for example: Peter C. Hodgson, *God's Wisdom: Toward a Theology of Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); Leslie J. Francis and Adrian Thatcher, eds., *Christian Perspectives for Education: A Reader in The Theology of Education*, (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing Books, 1990); Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis and Colin Crowder, eds., *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education*, (Leominster and Grand Rapids: Gracewing Books and Eerdmans Publishing, 1996); M.C. Felderhof, ed., *Religious Education in a Pluralistic Society: Papers from a Consultation on Theology and Education held at Westhill College, Selly Oak (an Affiliated College of the University of Birmingham)*,



pline that clearly shows that theology today is a research field in need of being re-thought in light of *interdisciplinarity*. In fact, theology of education can be taken as a paradigmatic area of concentration where issues of systematic theology, spirituality, pedagogy and educational theory converge in a comprehensive interdisciplinary discourse. Certainly there is not 'one' theology of education, but different theologies of education, depending on the foundational paradigm assumed and also on denominational specificities endorsed in addressing both problems internal to systematic theology (like Ecclesiology, Christology, Anthropology etc.) and questions of *practical relationships* between theological tenets and educational praxes in society.

My purpose is to view three viable models of theology of education in an ecumenical perspective, and to highlight how beginning a theology of education on the foundation that God himself educates his people can be more effective and insightful than grounding theology of education in abstract concepts or definitions. Such is the model of theology of education that Carlo Maria Martini provides in the first of his three pastoral letters on education, written when he was Bishop of Milan, Italy: *Dio educa il suo popolo* [God Educates His People].<sup>2</sup> After having expounded the main traits of his 'theology of educating,' I will offer the reader the possibility of examining two other models. One is taken from Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich's systematic theology, and in particular from his text *Theology of Culture*.<sup>3</sup> The third model comes from Anglican theologian and educational theorist John Martin Hull, who elaborated his ideas on theology of education in an article entitled, "What is Theology of Education?"<sup>4</sup> These three models are very different among one another, and represent three possible ways of doing theology of education; what appears to me is that Martini's approach is more fertile. In the Conclusions I will briefly try to draw out some reflections on these three models, and I will show how Ignatian spirituality, in whose stream Martini grew up as a Jesuit, theologian and biblical scholar, radically informs his 'theology of educating' and makes it more flexible and more interdisciplinary.

(London, Sydney and Auckland, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985); H. Lombaerts and D. Pollefeyt, eds., *Hermeneutics and Religious Education*, (Leuven, Paris, Dudley: Leuven University Press, 2004); William F. Cunningham, *The Pivotal Problems of Education: An Introduction to the Christian Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1940); William F. Cunningham, *General Education and The Liberal College* (St. Louis and London: Herder, 1953). Very interesting is what Donald L. Gelpi states about the lack of serious theological reflection on education in Donald L. Gelpi, "Creating the Human: Theological Foundations," *Horizons* (College Theological Society) 24, no. 1 (1997): 50-72, especially page 50: "the theological community almost never discusses educational theory professionally."

<sup>2</sup> Carlo Maria Martini, *Dio educa il suo popolo: programma pastorale diocesano per il biennio 1987-89* [God Educates His People: Diocesan Pastoral Program for The Biennium 1987-1988] (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano di Documentazione e Studi religiosi, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York, NY: New York Oxford University Press, 1959), Part Two, Chapter XI, "A Theology of Education," 146-157.



# 1. Carlo Maria Martini and the ‘theology of educating’

## 1.1 *A pastoral context for a theology of education*

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini is an eminent, internationally known, theologian and biblical scholar. He was Archbishop of Milan, Italy, from 1980 to 2002.<sup>5</sup> In that period, he wrote a series of three pastoral letters on education to his diocese, proposing in the first two of them education as the topic on which to focus diocesan work for the biennium 1987-1988, and then adding a third letter in the year 1989.<sup>6</sup>

In his first pastoral letter on education, Martini addresses the topic as part of a theological reflection to the benefit of all the educators of the diocese, whether they be teachers in public schools or Church schools, or catechists in a parish. In this pastoral letter Martini proposes the dynamic shown by God’s way of educating His people as a viable paradigm for the success of any form of education.<sup>7</sup>

At the outset of his letter, Martini explains the theological and methodological reasons why he addresses the issue of education in a pastoral document. He tells of his having arrived at the idea of addressing the problem of education as the logical consequence of the steps taken by the diocese in the previous seven years: the diocese had worked first on elucidating the end to achieve, to which the means should follow. Martini thinks in fact of the theme of education as the *means* to the end, the way to achieve the goals already indicated in earlier letters and diocesan meetings. The end – defined in the previous pastoral program under Martini’s leadership – was a ‘vision’ of man and the church. Martini was convinced that, after reflecting on the vision, the time would come to reflect more explicitly on the issue of the means to achieve it, and a series of letters on education came out as a result of such a program.

In order to better understand this peculiar pastoral context in approaching education, it is worthwhile summarizing what kind of vision Martini had previously proposed to his diocese. He offered three ideals of man, from which to draw a model of the

<sup>4</sup> In John M. Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education* (London and New York: The Falmer Press, 1984), 249-271.

<sup>5</sup> More bio-bibliographical information about Carlo Maria Martini can be found online: cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo\\_Maria\\_Martini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Maria_Martini) (accessed January 20, 2009.)

<sup>6</sup> The first of these letters was titled: *Dio educa il suo popolo* [God Educates His People]. After this letter, two more followed on the same issue: one was more focused on the practical identification of specific educational itineraries in the Diocese of Milan; cf. Carlo Maria Martini, *Itinerari Educativi* [Educational Itineraries] (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano di Documentazione e Studi religiosi, 1988). The last letter included a further series of pastoral indications on the issue of education; cf. Carlo Maria Martini, *Educare ancora* [Educating Again] (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano di Documentazione e Studi religiosi, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to observe how a theology of education can stem from a ‘pastoral’ document and not only from an essay of theoretical theology. This is the reason why I chose Martini’s *Dio educa il suo popolo: programma pastorale diocesano per il biennio 1987-1989* [God Educates His People: Diocesan Pastoral Program for The Biennium 1987-1989] as a referential model of theology of education, together with those of P. Tillich and J.M. Hull. The other reason why I chose it is that it is written by a scholar in the Catholic tradition whose theology is incontrovertibly post-Vatican II, and is Bible-centered. Furthermore, Martini is well versed in the long-standing educational tradition of the Jesuits.



church. In his specific reflection on each of these ideas, Martini had already highlighted an educational dimension. The first ideal proposed was the ‘contemplative dimension of the human person,’ that is, the area in which man finds his real identity through silence and prayer. Embedded in this vision, the educational dimension would be that of a ‘school’ of prayer and contemplation, aimed at helping people rediscover their true selves in a postmodern society.<sup>8</sup> The second ideal of Martini’s pastoral vision was that of ‘a man who listens to the Word of God.’ To complement this ideal, education should take the shape of a ‘school of the Word.’<sup>9</sup> Third came the ideal of a ‘re-unified man’ who finds in the Eucharist the center of reunification from all the fragmentation he suffers in ordinary life. To this end, education would be a ‘school of the Eucharist.’<sup>10</sup> From these three ideals of man, Martini drew the model of a ‘missionary church,’ based on the Gospel’s demand to ‘be a neighbor.’ Thence, education in how to ‘be a neighbor,’ as individuals and as local church, would become necessary.

It is at this point of the diocesan program that Martini clarified that, with the forthcoming series of pastoral letters specifically focused on education, he intended to switch from pointing at the ideal to identifying “areas, tools and models by which we can appropriate the vision each day.”<sup>11</sup> What is particularly noticeable, and perhaps unique, in this approach is that Martini offers a *pastoral* context for a theology of education.

## 1.2 Martini’s methodology in shaping a theology of education

In the general methodological introduction to his theological and biblical reflections about education, Martini suggests beginning not with ‘education’ but with ‘educating.’ With this distinction he wants to focus on a *dynamic*, rather than a static, definition of the term. Therefore, he states that he will not analyze and comment on the various, though interesting, definitions of education currently available,<sup>12</sup> but will describe the ongoing process of ‘educating’ that begins with ‘extracting’ from within ourselves what we already possess in a seminal way, and ends up with the formation of a mature person capable of making definitive decisions.<sup>13</sup> Before entering the constructive part of his

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Just by way of example I report the two definitions mentioned by Martini I find most interesting in the context of a theology of education. One comes from the Vatican II document *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1: “A true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.” Cf. *Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis*, October 28, 1965, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_gravissimum-educationis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html) (accessed October 1, 2008). The second definition is a quote from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century controversial Catholic theologian Antonio Rosmini Serbati: education “has the goal of making man the author of his own good.” Cf. *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Martini distinguishes the first phase of education from a period of ongoing education that lasts until the end of our life - even after a person has become able to make responsibly important decision for her life - and calls this second phase ‘self-education.’ Cf. *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 12.



theology of educating, Martini addresses some fundamental pastoral questions his writing intends to answer: are we capable of 'educating' (that is, of being 'stewards' in the process that leads pupils to become self-aware of their unique identity, so as to make fundamental options about their existence)? How do we deal with problems such as lack of dialogue in families, the low educational effectiveness of parents, and the apathy of adolescents in their emotional solitude? How do we consider the emptying of our churches and their recreational facilities, the difficulty on the part of the youth to be involved in anything that goes beyond their immediate self-interest, the often poor outcome of schooling, the generational revolts, the increasing number of gangs, the dangers of drug addiction and violence? But the last and most radical question he asks is: "Are *we* open to being educated?"<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Martini declares that the method he uses in his pastoral letter is itself intended to be an application of God's educational dynamic, by helping the reader extract from within him-or herself what he or she already possesses (a *maieutical* dynamic) so as to act, make decisions, be courageous, and educate.

### 1.3 *The educational dynamic in God's way of educating His people*

Like every good biblical scholar, Martini proposes to set out the central body of his exposition with a passage of Scripture to be taken as a hermeneutical key to the systematic reflection that will follow. He reminds us that the Bible presents a great educational tradition,<sup>15</sup> and then chooses a passage from the book of Deuteronomy as a paradigm of the compassionate, caring, patient and loving attitude of God educating His people: "in a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him."<sup>16</sup>

The bottom line of Martini's effort of shaping a 'theology of *educating*' is that *God himself educates*: God is "the great educator of His people."<sup>17</sup> Keeping this as the standpoint from which to reconsider our educational dynamics, and in particular those of Christian education, will enable educators to achieve their desired educational goals. If

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> Martini states: "It [the Bible] is full of pedagogical and didactic hints, expressed in the figurative language of parables, in form of examples, and in wisdom's dicta. The Jewish people had elaborated a very refined educational system, and in the Scripture we can find the traces of an outstanding educational tradition." Cf. *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 23, my translation.

<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 32: 10-12 [NIV]. The exegesis of the first verb used in verse 10b, which the NIV translates as "shielded" is very interesting: Martini prefers to translate this verb as "educated" instead of "shielded" or "encircled" (the choice made by the translators of the NKJV and the NASB), in obedience to a more literal reading of the original in Hebrew. Cf. *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 21, footnote 1. It is also interesting to note that among the English translations of the Bible, only the King James Version uses a term, "instructing," that is close to the meaning of "educating." In the KJV in fact we read: "He led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye."

<sup>17</sup> *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 21.





educators forget this – and forget their own histories of having been educated by God – they may end up unsuccessful and frustrated. Martini reminds us, by way of a theological foundation, that educational work is God’s work, not *our* work, and that first of all we must *learn* from God because we have been *taught by God*. Martini is convinced that too often educators – at least Christian educators – forget this essential fact and thus, in the context of a pluralistic postmodern society, lose their effectiveness and end up discouraged. As a remedy to this, Martini recommends that in our educational enterprise we become allies of “the true educator of the person,”<sup>18</sup> who is God. We must learn, in our programs of education and in our methodologies, from the program and methodology God uses to educate His people, as it can be understood from the Bible. In the history of God’s relationship with His people, God has carried out an ongoing educational action comporting moments of *rupture with the past, patient step-by-step growth, a demanding partnership with Him, a high elevation of the spirit, and the need for an unconditional faith in Him*.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Martini underlines that at the end of an analysis of God’s educational style, the concept of “God as educator” will be very close to that of a healthy ‘secular’ understanding of education, where for ‘secular education’ we mean an educational process tending to foster and respect personal *freedom*, avoiding any form of manipulation. Martini relies on the idea that true freedom – the freedom toward which God educates His people – is a ‘freedom for’ something (or someone), that is, freedom to make decisions; and decisions are made in the “sanctuary of personal conscience, in the heart.”<sup>20</sup> This presupposes, on the part of the educator, renouncing any form of manipulation of the person, and it can also be accomplished in the context of secular education.<sup>21</sup>

Martini also maintains that by focusing on God’s activity, light will be shed on the activity of both the educator and the *educated one*. In God’s educational dynamic, in fact, the educated person is stimulated by the educating person to cooperate in the educative process by the use of his or her *interior power*. In other words, an educational activity modeled on that of God tends to foster the process of ‘moral self-transcendence’ of the person toward her authentic ‘I.’<sup>22</sup>

After having claimed the need to ground our educational programs on the rock that is ‘God the educator,’ Martini describes eleven main characteristics of God’s educational program, and the methodology of the “educational pathway” on which God leads His people. Martini offers theological and biblical reflections on these characteristics in order to leave us with “enlightening guidelines for our educational task.”<sup>23</sup> I think such reflections can be said to constitute the scheme of Martini’s model of a very rich and biblically grounded ‘theology of educating.’ Therefore, I will examine them one by one.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 24.



- 1) *God's education is simultaneously personal and community-centered.* The purpose of such a kind of education is not just the development of the individual, but the *maturity of the whole community*.<sup>24</sup> This is because individual maturity cannot happen without collective maturity; vice-versa, the full development of the community presupposes that individuals have achieved their fulfillment. Martini argues that in Scripture these two dimensions are so intertwined that sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a text refers to the individual or the community (cf. Hosea 2: 16ff; Ps 50: 1). This is because God is the educator of each of us, but always in the context of a people's life. The penultimate reason for such an educational style is that the person has a 'communitarian nature,' and the community has a 'personality,' which is different from the sum of its individuals.<sup>25</sup> personal and communitarian destiny are interwoven. The ultimate reason is that the whole community is called to communion with God through the closest possible bond with Jesus, the incarnate Word, as *one body* (Cf. Eph 1: 3-23; Col 1: 15-20). Martini specifies that the name we give this binomial is 'Church,' and in the Eucharist we experience the call for every individual to be, within the Church, one people, one body, one in participating in the Trinitarian communion (cf. John 17: 21).
- 2) *God is patient in educating His people.* This means that God always educates starting from the circumstances in which the subject is at that moment (cf. Acts 8: 26-30). This happens even if the initial conditions are disastrous: God does not get discouraged (cf. Deut 32: 10; Ezek 16: 3-5; Heb 1: 1ff. 6: 1ff; and Hosea 11). The initial question God asks us in his educational process is the one he asked Adam in Eden: "Adam, where are you?" (Gen 3: 9).<sup>26</sup> Secondly, God helps us to move on step-by-step, and shows us the next *possible* step to take (cf. Mk 5: 19). By indicating a possible *itinerary*, God gently stimulates the subject so that he or she avoids moral stagnation. We can read the Gospels as examples of the itinerary in which Jesus leads his disciples.
- 3) *Ruptures and transitions.* God's way of educating, though step-by-step, is not always a linear, evolutionary process, but involves moments in which God pushes His people toward a break with the past. These difficult moments imply a 'transition' from an earlier phase to a new and different quality of life. We find cases of these difficult and radical transitions in the many examples of *conversion*. It is not easy for the educator to identify when is the right moment for a drastic transition and when instead it is time for continuity, but it is "characteristic of the Christian educational art to discern the difference between the two moments and the providential effect of both of them for the community."<sup>27</sup> A particularly delicate moment in a person's life is the time of adolescence, when for the first time the person reaches the awareness of herself as a 'totality,' facing important decisions to make. In this specific case, a task of every Christian educator – based on the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



contemplation of God's educational style – is to discern when the moment of important decisions comes, to prepare the person for this moment, and to become a 'mentor' to the person who is going through such a difficult time.<sup>28</sup>

- 4) *A pathway full of conflicts.* God's way of educating His people takes into account not only the good achievements, but also every negative event, and God uses rewards for good achievements and punishments for failures as a loving way to help His people stay on the right path (Cf. Ps 88; 105; 106; Nehem 9: 6-37). With this, Martini underlines the extreme *realism* of God's educating process (Cf. Judges 2: 11-22).
- 5) *God's way of educating is 'tough' and is embedded in a project.* God *rebukes* and *corrects* His people when they make mistakes (cf. Rev 3: 19; Heb 12: 5-7; Prov 3: 11-12). God's correction at first seems to cause sadness, but it turns out to yield fruit of peace and justice for those who are trained by God's way of educating (cf. Heb 12: 7-11; John 15: 1-2).<sup>29</sup> Martini here wants to stress that a good educator must not be afraid to impart a *demanding* education, so that 'they bear more fruit,' precisely because God acts this way with those he loves. Martini adds some important reflections: educating does not always mean giving what the pupils want. Educating does not always mean saying 'yes,' but requires the courage to tell the truth whether the educated ones like it or not. Educating means sometimes saying 'no.' The issue at stake is to find the right way to say this 'no,' not to turn away from loving correction: the truth must arise out of love and be communicated with intelligence, so that it does not discourage the recipient. The process of educational correction must also be characterized by a high amount of wisdom, leading one to rebuke at the right time. Finally, when one corrects, one must not only communicate the correction, but also communicate clearly the *reasons* on which it is based. Correction must touch both hearts and minds.
- 6) *God educates with a project.* In educating, it is important to show the final goals *and* the intermediate steps, within a flexible and balanced project. The project will be flexible because the ultimate goal cannot be calculated mathematically; rather, it is a 'living reality:' the maturity of the individual and of the entire people.<sup>30</sup> God's project is God's dream for His people over history. This dream is summarized in biblical passages such as Eph 1: 5-10 ("He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ, for him to act upon when the times had run their course: that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth"), Eph 4: 13 ("Until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself"), Rom 8: 29-30 ("He decided beforehand who were the ones destined to be molded to the pattern of his Son, so that he should be the eldest of many brothers; it was those so destined that he called; those that he called, he justified, and those that he has justified he has brought into glory"), John 1: 12-13 ("But to those who did accept

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 39.



him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name, who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself”), and 2 Pet 1: 4 (“Through these, the greatest and priceless promises have been lavished on us, that through them you should share the divine nature and escape the corruption rife in the world through disordered passion”). God’s dream is the accomplishment of His great project to create man “in his image” (Gen 1: 26-27). But God also has to face great disappointments, and must cope with unsuccessful education. The way God deals with it is a good example for every educator: God never let failures discourage him, but re-proposes continually his basic plan, and transforms failures into new educational opportunities.<sup>31</sup> Martini suggests that from Scripture we can learn the close relationship between education and truth, and that the effectiveness of our educational activity will depend on the attention with which we let ourselves be enlightened by God’s plan for humanity:<sup>32</sup> God’s project and the means to achieve it can and must become the source of inspiration for our educational projects. Finally, Martini underlines a fundamental characteristic of God’s plan for humanity: it is *liberating*. God leads man on a path toward authentic freedom: this path involves an ‘exodus’ from a state of slavery and an entrance into the realm of freedom, real freedom: a freedom enrooted in truth, granting wisdom and peace, making the person courageous and fearless.

- 7) *God educates His people within history*. God’s way of educating is not abstract, but on the contrary very concrete. God educates within man’s concrete history, and proceeds with the help of *words and facts*. Facts recall words, words explain the meaning of facts. Furthermore, God’s education always stems from *reality*, so that reality – rather than abstract doctrines – becomes an educational factor.<sup>33</sup> God does not encourage people to escape from reality, but rather educates men and women starting from the concreteness of their own gifts, talents, limitations, frustrations, mistakes, etc.<sup>34</sup> In Jesus, finally, we have an example of an educator who has used all the means furnished by reality to educate his people: comparisons, parables, examples from concrete life, contextual situations; Jesus left people free to make their own mistakes, and was always open and welcoming toward those who decided to turn back to him.
- 8) *God uses many educational instruments*. Here Martini makes the point that God is the main actor in the educational process. Everyone and everything else is a ‘tool,’ including ourselves: we are ‘the workers in his vineyard.’<sup>35</sup> God plays the essential part: “if God does not build the city, in vain men will labor.” (Ps 126). In this endeavor, God first acts as a *father*: he gives life, has educational foresight, is patient, intervenes at the right time, guides and corrects with the right amount of force.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, God

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 47.



educates through the Son. Thirdly, God gives Himself to our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who is our 'inner teacher.' Then, God avails himself of the help of the Prophets, the Apostles and the first Evangelists. All these educators constitute an 'educational ensemble'<sup>37</sup> and act as *instrumental subjects*. These subjects are, in the Old Testament's tradition, the entire 'people of Israel;' in the New Testament's economy, it is the church. Therefore the church is "the first and fundamental educator of the Christian. The church is mother: she gives us birth in the faith and educates us to the faith. In her womb every other Christian educational subject exists and moves."<sup>38</sup>

9) *Jesus as educator*. Martini states that we can read all the Gospels as stories about an educational dynamic by which Jesus mainly educates by choosing to 'educate the person.' This he does first and foremost through the many encounters and dialogues he has with people (some examples of educational encounters with Jesus are in Lk 2: 41-52; Lk 7: 36-50; Lk 10: 38-42; Lk 18: 18-23; Lk 19: 1-10; Lk 24: 13-35). The characteristics of this way of educating include welcoming the person he encounters and bringing her to 'manifest' her profound life situation. Jesus uses a method of approaching the persons he educates based on *empathy*, that is, he starts from where the person is. Then, he follows this procedure: he invites the person into a long process of purification; he asks for patience, and gives himself as an example of patience. He patiently helps people overcome any form of fanaticism and authoritarian zeal, and every ambitious craving. He educates people to forgive generously, to give up pride, to watch and pray, to give more importance to winning against ourselves than against others, to be able to recover even after having experienced our miserable situations. Jesus entrusts his disciples with serious responsibilities and wants them to become adults. He sends them forth in mission, after having shown them how to act. Another characteristic of Jesus' way of educating is that he 'lives with' his people. In particular, he lives with his disciples and educates them by continually sharing with them everything he is and has. Finally, Jesus has himself experienced the meaning of unsuccessful education: many times he was not able to make himself understood even by his own disciples.

10) *The Holy Spirit as an educator*. The first characteristic of the 'inner teacher' is its *universality* (cf. Wis 1: 7). There is no human environment that the Spirit does not reach in the work of convincing, exhorting, comforting, and fostering sanctity. The Spirit is already there, before we arrive; therefore, there is no 'irreparable' case. The most dramatic case is our deliberate refusal to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, the Holy Spirit requires that we become more sensitive to what happens in our heart, that is, to our *discernment*. In this way we can become "stewards of the Spirit, and thus real 'Christian' educators."<sup>40</sup> Thirdly, it is the Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets, and inspired the Scripture. This urges us to train ourselves in *listening* to the words suggested by the inner teacher, so as to respond.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



11) *Mary's educational path as a paradigm.* Martini proposes Mary, the Mother of God, as an outstanding example of a person who let herself be educated by God. He suggests that we go look at Mary's educational path in order to see how clearly we can observe in her all the aforementioned characteristics of God's educational style. As the final outcome of God's education, Mary is a person who has become '*mature and little*.'<sup>41</sup> maturity and humility stick together because *maturity of faith* consists of the wisdom of the cross (1 Cor 1-3), *moral maturity* is love (1 Cor 8: 12-14), and *maturity in hope* is keeping ourselves on our path and involved in our struggle through an ongoing self-renewal, until the end (Phil 3: 12-15). Finally, Mary has become *poor*, in the biblical sense of the 'poor of the Lord,' God's protégée.

In conclusion, Martini reminds us that the biblical picture of God's way of educating gives us the set of criteria to which the church must appeal, and from which she must draw inspiration, if she wants to accomplish her educational task.<sup>42</sup> These criteria can be summarized as follows: 1) God is the great educator of His people, so the church must not substitute herself in his place. As God's first project is to make man in his own image and likeness, the church cannot but feel in herself the same *urgency* to educate and a certain *pleasure* in being part of such a great educational endeavor. 2) God is so involved in his educational task that his love for us becomes jealous. Like God, only a *passionate* church can undertake such a difficult and challenging task. 3) God has a project whose goal is man's freedom. An educating church must also find a way to keep *project* and *freedom* in a mutually enriching relationship. 4) God has not exempted His people from experiences of poverty, like that of the desert, but has always helped them go through and beyond every difficulty. The same will be the style that the church has to adopt in her educational efforts. 5) God immerses himself in the river of history by facing the thousands of contradictions therein. He loves with a persevering love and expresses his loving correction with force. All of this can be said in a word: God is merciful. Only a church full of mercy can educate and bring consolation to the people. 6) The church, finally, is the historical means by which God continues his educational task; at the same time, the church must be continuously educated by God.

The final part of Martini's letter is more pastoral, and more related to the actual context of the Diocese of Milan in the period when it was written. Nevertheless, this part contains some indications that might turn out to be fruitful for a theology of education, especially when Martini proposes a theological-biblical scrutiny of the 'educational attitude' that is needed at the basis of every educational process. I report here only what seems to me to be the most important indication Martini offers about the 'spiritual characteristics' needed in the whole process of education in contemporary society. He deliberately offers this reflection to those educators who feel challenged and discouraged by the many difficulties that a postmodern, pluralistic society presents, and who are tempted to say: "educating today is impossible." Martini rebukes them and gives them

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 55-58.



the reasons why, even if educating today is *difficult*, it is still *possible*. According to Martini, what is required on the part of the educator is becoming conscious that educating is *complex*, is *a thing of the heart* (Don Bosco), and is *beautiful*.<sup>43</sup>

A) *Educating is possible*. Martini grounds the fact that educating is *possible* on the *faith in the human being* that Jesus always manifested throughout his life. This, in contemporary society, points to an educational commitment that stresses some non-negotiable fundamental values: the dignity of the human person, the affirmation of her existential needs, and the human solidarity that bonds together every human being in this world.<sup>44</sup> Concerning the complexity of our society, Martini says that educators must ask themselves: “according to what principles are today’s persons educated?” He then examines the positive and negative educational agents present in our societies. In this context, he proposes to identify the characteristics of a society capable of *educating* by *positively* influencing individuals: such a society so does when it is animated by a sense of the common good, when it acknowledges and valorizes the presence and work of all its members without excluding anyone, and when it continuously indicates common goals to pursue.<sup>45</sup> In all of these cases society tends to be *one* society, and even *one people*, avoiding dispersion and lack of meaning in our common life. Martini also stresses that a society educates through its individuals, and recommends that we keep in mind that every one of us, as an individual, is always a possible educator in every encounter he or she has with another person.

B) *Educating is a thing of the heart*. Martini borrows from Don Bosco the motto ‘educating is a thing of the heart,’ and gives it a particular theological interpretation. He defines this quality of educating as ‘educational charity:’ its main feature is the ability to identify the other person’s *needs*, and to take care of them in a loving way. Martini distinguishes among *real and positive* needs (those related to the physiological and psychological development of the person), *surrogate* or *false* need (those instilled by others in order to achieve interests different from that of the good of the person), and *vices* (like drugs, alcohol, gambling etc.). Martini remarks that a good educator is the one who is aware of these different needs, fosters the real needs, and counters the other two categories. He specifies that in the group of real needs there are some more fundamental needs/rights of the person, and the most fundamental of them is the need/right to love and to be loved. Therefore, fulfilling this need must be our most basic educational drive, and Martini offers many enlightening examples taken from religion and psychology.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, there is the need to perceive oneself as valuable for what one *is* and not for what one *does*. This constitutes a second fundamental educational goal and drive. These two drives give birth to an education that enlarges the heart of both the educator and the educated.<sup>47</sup>

C) *Educating is beautiful*. Finally, Martini states: “when we really live in communion and we enjoy the good and fulfillment of other people as ours, that is when educating

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 61.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> C. *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 73.



becomes beautiful.”<sup>48</sup> Martini is convinced that education is a ‘joyful art’ that cannot be forced and that requires from the educator a large amount of originality and creativity.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, it requires personal maturity, the achievement of one’s own identity, and personal integration on the part of the educator, so that he or she may be able to offer education as a real *aid* to the educated one. The last characteristic of a *beautiful* education is summarized in what Martini calls an ‘anticipating love’:<sup>50</sup> before educating the persons in any specific subject or discipline, a good educator must be able to create a rich *emotional relationship* with the educated one, who must be certain that first of all the educator *loves* him or her with a paternal, maternal and brotherly love. Martini concludes by saying that “an anticipating love, similar to that of God (Rom 8: 5), not only is the starting point for education, but is also the explosive force that generates those positive energies of the person – young or adult – that had been blocked, latent or deviated.”<sup>51</sup> An anticipating love can always find a way to make itself manifest when the educator shows compassion, a welcoming attitude, a deep empathic knowledge, a humble offer of oneself in service to the other, and a hopeful patience.

## 2. Paul Tillich’s model of theology of education

Paul Tillich dedicates a chapter of his *Theology of Culture* to the issue of theology of education.<sup>52</sup> In his analysis of the evolution of culture in Western civilization, Tillich uses an interesting theological framework of reference to explain, on the basis of specific shifts in educational styles, the revolutionary transitions that influenced changes in ideas and spiritualities. He suggests that every culture is shaped by the relationships between three main educational forces: ‘technical education’ (skills training, of every kind), ‘humanistic education’ (education according to the ideal of developing all human potential, both individual and social), and ‘inducting education’ (the induction of children into family, Church and society through the handing on of these agencies’ traditions, symbols and demands).<sup>53</sup>

Tillich applies his interpretive framework to the shift from medieval culture to Renaissance and its aftermath.<sup>54</sup> Tillich observes that when the mutual relationships between the three aforementioned educational patterns change, an entire culture changes and,

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 75. In the original, the term used is “amore preveniente,” stemming from the theological category of *gratia* (or *charitas*) *preveniens*, which represents the love of God that anticipates and generates his gracious actions in favor of humanity.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1959), Chapter XI, “A Theology of Education,” 146-157.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Theology of Culture*, 146-147.

<sup>54</sup> This cultural shift is normally interpreted in the light of the emergence of Enlightenment’s ideas. Cf. Marcel Chappin, *Subsidia per il corso di storia ecclesiastica recente: 8° ristampa, ad uso degli studenti* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2003).





in this framework, he postulates that medieval culture was a mix of inducting and technical education, and that the shift toward 'modern liberal' education lay in that the Renaissance combined elements of technical with elements of *humanistic education*, thus rejecting the medieval inducting education. According to Tillich, in 19th-century Western societies this configuration lasted until the death of humanistic education, which happened when humanistic education left its place as the dominant educational pattern to *technical education*. Finally, Tillich sees "the revolutionary movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an attempt to return to the medieval combination of technical with induction education."<sup>55</sup> Thus, according to Tillich we can interpret the culture we live in, or cultures in their historical development, by discerning the mutual relationships of the three aforementioned educational forces and especially by identifying which one dominates the other two.

Tillich concludes that in the history of Western culture there have been two important revolutions, and that these revolutions are related to how one of the three patterns has been able to subject the other two to itself. As we have already said, he identifies the first one in the beginning of the age we call Renaissance. This was the time when the paradigm of humanistic education was able to take over that of inducting education, which had been dominant in the Middle Ages. Tillich argues that humanistic education – based on the idea of man as a 'microcosmos' creatively mirroring the 'macrocosmos' (the world around him) through the full development of his individual and social potentialities – arose in contrast to the inducting education paradigm, of which the medieval culture provides the most important example for the Western world:<sup>56</sup> at a certain point in Western civilization the model of humanistic education subjected inducting education to itself, and when this happened, "a development started which still largely determines our spiritual destiny."<sup>57</sup> The second important revolution happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is related to the fact that a technical paradigm of education took over the humanistic one: the cultural creations of the past ceased to be 'alive' and were still used as means of education, but "without a spiritual center," as objects or possession like "material goods," and "adjustment to the demands of the industrial society became the main educational purpose," covering up the emptiness of the late humanistic education with the "national idea."<sup>58</sup>

It is not clear whether the humanistic traits of the pattern of education that evolved in Renaissance culture are really in complete opposition to the Middle Ages' cultural paradigm (many scholars would instead claim that there is *continuity* between medieval and humanistic culture). Neither is it clear to which "revolutionary movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" Tillich refers when he mentions an attempt to retrieve the inducting form of education. Nevertheless, the most interesting feature of his exposition is that Tillich offers a *theological* analysis of culture, and this analysis contemplates the central role of

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 147.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 149.



*education* in shaping society, not just from a philosophical or sociological standpoint, but from a theological perspective.<sup>59</sup> In particular, Tillich offers a theology of education as a model to analyze and solve educational problems present in contemporary Western societies. Tillich thinks that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the goal of the dominating inducing paradigm of education is to hand on to the children the “monstrous process of mass production and mass consumption which characterizes our industrial society as a whole,”<sup>60</sup> and all of this is further amplified by the high level of ‘technical education’ delivered to millions of students in colleges whose educational paradigm is fundamentally the same.

Here is the constructive part of Tillich’s theological theory of education: he makes an analysis of the differences between medieval inducing (religious) education and that of our contemporary industrial societies, and observes that the medieval specificity was to induct children into *the mystery of human existence*, by the Church’s handing on of symbols, traditions and demands that represent it. According to Tillich, the inducing education of the Middle Age has a *universal* character, and is not *nation-based*. Tillich remarks that in contemporary societies, where there is a new form of nationalistic non-religious inducing education, the ‘national idea’ cannot replace an induction which is *initiation into the human mysteries*, because in no way can it be called so, considering its characteristics. Moreover, the humanistic claims that contemporary education makes of itself are fundamentally void: in the Renaissance, humanism was rooted in the context of education of human potential as an expression of man’s “being a mirror of the universe and its creative ground,”<sup>61</sup> a context that was lost and died with the birth of industrial and mass communication society. According to Tillich, this contemporary ‘double emptiness’ (the emptiness of a real religious and humanistic education) explains many of the problems that are widely present in contemporary societies: cynicism, despair, mental disturbances, adolescent crimes, disgust with life.<sup>62</sup>

The second point Tillich makes is about the role of what he calls the ‘Church School.’ Tillich is convinced that the Church School can still offer, as it did in medieval culture, induction of the symbols that make human life meaningful and rich. This is precisely the place of Church School in the “spiritual geography of our time: in the Church School today the medieval tradition of inducing education is still alive (although the demands of technical education are acknowledged).”<sup>63</sup> What is not resolved in Church Schools is the problem of *humanistic education*, and this is Tillich’s main concern: he is convinced that due to its lack of ability to provide humanistic education, the Church School has found itself isolated from the most important trends of our society. The external evidence is that the Church, and the Church School, are now alone, in the sense that they no longer represent the *spirit of society*. What is the cause for this isolation? According to Tillich, the kind of induction into the symbols of Christian life our time’s Church School offers, is not strong enough to “give a personal center which can radiate to all sectors of contemporary

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibid*, 156-157.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 152.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.



life.”<sup>64</sup> This problem could be solved if the Church School, in accordance with the pattern of humanistic education, were able to develop more fully the human potential of our children, instead of just repeating the traditional induction of sets of symbols that conflict with those inducted in industrial pluralistic society and empowered by society’s high standard of technical education. In Western societies the Church School ought to enable children to answer – when they are asked to speak of God, sin, salvation and religion – questions that were never asked in the past or that were never posed in the terms in which they are put today. In order to do this, the Church School must have a humanistic approach so as to redefine the words and the theories through which the symbols of Christian life are conveyed. The Church School still has the task of conveying the traditional symbols of Christian life, but it must also endow pupils with the ability to answer the host of questions concerning the most radical problems that they will ask themselves, or will be asked by others, when they grow up. Such answers require a thoughtful articulation of words that, according to Tillich, only a humanistic education can provide.

Thus, in Tillich’s theology of education humanistic education has the advantage of being somehow more universal than inducting education into the symbols of religion, because religious symbols are shaped by the mythologies of specific societies. Tillich is convinced that the force of religious symbols is very strong at a subconscious level, and for this reason inducting education should be imparted during childhood (and a lack of it in the first years of school would be disastrous in the future life of the children, opening the way to an atheistic existence that could only be reversed occasionally by sudden conversion). Humanistic education comes to help inducting education when children grow up, because it aims to activate fully their human potential to answer the radical questions, especially the questions of *being* and *existence*.

“Christianity includes humanism and the radical question of truth which is the first principle of humanism. The inducting education of the Church School can and must include the principle of humanistic education, the correlation between question and answer, the radicalism of question, the opening up of all human possibilities, and the providing of opportunities where the pupil may develop in freedom.”<sup>65</sup>

Tillich maintains that this is the important task for today’s Church School. Such an ideal of a revised relationship between inducting and humanistic education is what lies at the core of Tillich’s theology of education, which is a fundamental part of his theology of culture.

“The problem of the Church School is more than the problem of a particular educational aim. It is the relation of Christianity and culture generally and Christianity and education especially. The problem is infinite and must be solved again in every generation. Within this frame, the Church School is like a small laboratory in which the large questions of Church and world can be studied and brought to a preliminary solution, a solution which could become an inestimable contribution to the solution of the larger problem.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 157.



### 3. John M. Hull's definition of theology of education and taxonomy of problems

John M. Hull is a British educational theorist who has dedicated his lifelong research to studying problems of religious education in the context of the relationships between Christian and public educational systems, and to modeling the relationships between theology and education.<sup>67</sup> He claims that between theology and educational theory there can be possible and fruitful connections (see his very interesting article "Christian Theology and Educational Theory: Can There Be Connections?" in response to the position of educational theorist P. Hirst, who negates those connections).<sup>68</sup> In an essay titled "What is Theology of Education?,"<sup>69</sup> which is "probably the most comprehensive attempt in print to answer the question it addresses,"<sup>70</sup> Hull tries to construct the theoretical framework needed to understand the nature, method and contents of theology of education by first assessing the reasons why it is a legitimate discipline for scholarly research, and secondly by offering a 'taxonomy of the problems' (methodological and epistemological) related to theology of education as a possible guideline for research work and eventual future syllabi in this area.

Hull begins his reflection by defining the area of concentration in which theology of education could fit. He states that theology of education is an *interdisciplinary* field of "applied or practical theology,"<sup>71</sup> whose nature depends on previous understandings of the nature and function of theology itself. Therefore, Hull contends that there will be as many theologies of education as there are theologies, with the exception of those theologies that cannot generate a real theology of education but, rather, other fields of applied theology, like "theology of Christian nurture, theology of preaching, or theology of indoctrination."<sup>72</sup>

With these initial remarks, Hull has already introduced his theory of education, a theory where *education* is distinct from other forms of communication of meaning that are *not* education: Christian nurture, preaching and indoctrination. Moreover, he has

<sup>67</sup> A bio-bibliographical account of John M. Hull's career and production is available on his personal web page, at the following URLs: [http://www.johnmbull.biz/about\\_jmb.html](http://www.johnmbull.biz/about_jmb.html), <http://www.johnmbull.biz/Articles.html>, <http://www.johnmbull.biz/Covers.html>, <http://www.johnmbull.biz/OnReligiousEducation.htm>, in Michael Richer, *Professor John M. Hull*, 2008, <http://www.johnmbull.biz/> (accessed September 28, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> This article, originally published in the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, XXIV (1976), 127-143, is part of a volume of collected articles by Hull: John M. Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education* (London and New York: The Falmer Press, 1984), 229-247. This article is intended as a response to Paul H. Hirst, *Moral Education in a Secular Society* (London: University of London Press, 1974).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. John M. Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education* (London and New York: The Falmer Press, 1984), 249-271. This essays first appeared in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 30 (1977): 3-29.

<sup>70</sup> Leslie J. Francis and Adrian Thatcher, eds., *Christian Perspectives for Education: A Reader in The Theology of Education* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1990), 1. This quotation is taken from the introductory notes of the editors to the reprint of Hull's essay in a volume of collected works on the issue of theology of education.

<sup>71</sup> John M. Hull, "What is Theology of Education?," 249.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.



postulated that his model of theology of education is just *one* possible model among others, depending on previous theological/methodological assumptions, and has implicitly evidenced a fact that is typical of contemporary theology, namely that theology requires an *interdisciplinary* approach.

Hull's option is to begin his discourse by observing that theology of education will be the result of the interaction between what is *theologically* significant (and not just significant as historical or scientific data) and what can be borrowed from non-theological discourses (science, history, sociology, philosophy etc), in order to influence the applied field of theology of education. He finds an example in St. Augustine who, in his reflections about the learning process, in *On the Trinity*,<sup>73</sup> integrated materials that "at first sight might seem readily distinguishable into 'intrinsic' and 'applied' or into theological and non-theological data."<sup>74</sup>

In the last analysis, Hull deems that in order to understand what theology of education is, the first question to raise is, "What is theology?" The answer to give, if one wants theology of education to be a legitimate discipline, is that theology is *a form of thinking*, *a kind of rationality* whose distinctiveness lies in *the subject matter* (religion), and in the appropriateness of a certain *kind* of religious thinking by which to communicate it: *critical* and *systematic* thinking on matters of religion. Ultimately, Hull defines the subject matter of theology as "the contents of religious consciousness, that is, the characteristics of the self-awareness in so far as these are knowingly influenced or formed by participation within a religious tradition."<sup>75</sup>

Understanding the foundations of this definition of theology will help us comprehend the tasks of *theology of education*. The distinctive nature of theology of education, according to Hull, is grounded in his idea that *theologizing* takes place *within* the community, and its subject matter is the *experience* of the faithful. Hull clarifies these important concepts with some examples. First, the subject matter of theology (of theologizing, to be conceived as *doing theology* and not just *studying theology*), is not the New Testament, but "the Christian religious experience in understanding and interpreting the New Testament."<sup>76</sup> Secondly, the subject matter of theology is not initially God, but "the religious apprehension of God."<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> On the important contributions of St. Augustine to education cf. also John M. Hull, *The Holy Trinity and Christian Education in a Pluralist World* (London: Church House Publishing, 1996); Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes, eds., *Augustine and Liberal Education*, (Hants: Ashgate, 2000). Some other interesting references are available online. Cf., for example, <http://www.leithart.com/archives/001376.php> (accessed 28 September, 2008); <http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst;jsessionid=LZrBLDQScMGLgt20QGfyMTGvJpQlkmDs22Y1Vj0Jmy7rphpGWbLx!-1389437149?docId=5000501108> (accessed 28 September, 2008); [http://books.google.com/books?id=LhNmX63PJvsC&pg=PA91&lpg=PA91&dq=augustine+process+of+learning+on+the+trinity&source=web&ots=g4GWJ9EEaT&sig=FfMXv18tnA8kp8oV1LbZb9Gxftw&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=3&ct=result](http://books.google.com/books?id=LhNmX63PJvsC&pg=PA91&lpg=PA91&dq=augustine+process+of+learning+on+the+trinity&source=web&ots=g4GWJ9EEaT&sig=FfMXv18tnA8kp8oV1LbZb9Gxftw&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result) (accessed 28 September, 2008); <http://www.google.com/search?rls=en&q=augustine+process+of+learning+on+the+trinity&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8> (accessed 28 September, 2008);

<sup>74</sup> "What is Theology of Education?," 251.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



Hull – as we can see – has a notion of theology that is essentially and primarily *hermeneutic*, that is, it has to do with the systematic conceptualization of the religious *consciousness*. Moreover, according to Hull theology is a discipline whose subject matter has so high a level of personal significance that it cannot just be studied, but must be *done*. It is an “existential activity which demands commitment,” and this commitment “springs from its home in the religious self-awareness.”<sup>78</sup> *Studying* theology is therefore a complementary activity to *doing theology*, and Hull deems it crucial to distinguish between these two notions in order to provide a rationale for the place of theology in relationship with education.

After having defined the epistemological distinctiveness of theology as a discipline and a way of living, Hull steps into a more detailed examination of the nature of theology of education. He states that theology of education has to do with certain – and only certain – problems that arise in theology: not with problems of the internal or external coherence of a theological system, but with a certain series of problems regarding the *applicability* of theological concepts *beyond* the community of faith. So, the goal of theology of education is to respond to the desire of *comprehending and uniting all experience*. Hull suggests that such a desire legitimately belongs to religious consciousness also when it deals with aspects of human experience that resist to it. For example: there may come a new style of art, a new kind of novel, which has not been understood theologically because it is too new; or other aspects of experience which pose a mild problem because they seem to be lacking in religious or theological significance, such as the areas of pastimes, play and sport. Or this could even be the case with some scientific or political theories, or apparently ‘rival’ worlds of meaning, such as humanism or communism.<sup>79</sup> All of these areas raise problems of applicability of theological meaning beyond the community, that is, of interdisciplinarity – and as a matter of fact, this happens every time a new doctrine is presented to public debate, as was the case for Darwinian doctrine and the applicability of Christian faith to biology. Theology of education has to do with problems like these. Hull describes in similar terms all the forms of theological inquiry that arise as a response to attacks from an external sphere, or as an effort to bring out theological significance to alien but not hostile spheres: theology of culture, of history, of the arts, of play, etc.<sup>80</sup>

Once Hull has defined the nature of *theology* of education, he begins to delve into the nature of *education* itself. First of all, Hull defines education as a discipline that does not in itself constitute a form of knowledge (unlike mathematics, biology, etc.).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 255-256.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 257: “Theology of education is one such branch of theology. Its work and the problems it encounters fall within an attempt of theology to apply itself to areas which lie mainly beyond the community of faith. Some of its concerns will, however, be related to the attempt of theology to apply itself within the community of faith, and here we would find catechetics and religious nurture.” We could ask ourselves, today, if theology is intrinsically an interdisciplinary discipline or, more in general, if in our contemporary world can a non-interdisciplinary discipline exist.



Instead, the nature of education is studied in different disciplines that converge to determine its theory: the main contributory disciplines are *sociology*, *history* and *philosophy*. Hull is adamant that *theology*, together with the aforementioned disciplines, can legitimately play its part. In fact, theology too “claims to offer a fundamental appraisal of education.”<sup>81</sup> Here Hull adds a further specification: theology can give its scrutiny of education only from *within* the belief structure of a particular theology; so “there are well-developed Islamic and Jewish theologies of education, and within Christianity there are confessional (denominational) theologies of education such as those of Lutheranism or Catholicism.”<sup>82</sup>

This is a specificity that distinguishes theology of education from philosophy of education. According to Hull, philosophy and theology are similar in that both of them involve *critical thinking*: even though theology is not as ‘secular’ as philosophy, it is not less critical of its subject matter. But the main difference between philosophy and theology of education is that the latter allows a distinction between *doing* and *studying*, which the former does not. This is tied to what Hull had already observed: theology “is working deliberately within the religious tradition which has moulded the consciousness in question.”<sup>83</sup> The implication is that theology of education always begins *from* theology, and thence moves out toward education. Philosophy of education, instead, “is not applying coherence from another realm (‘philosophy’) but it is seeking coherence within education with philosophical means.”<sup>84</sup> Theology of education is, by definition, interdisciplinary.

These differences make clear the peculiarity of a discipline like theology of education, and help us understand Hull’s complete definition of it. He asserts that theology of education is a “frontier discipline in that it seeks to *extend* the theological system beyond its border.”<sup>85</sup> This distinguishes theology of education not only from other critical approaches to education, but also from other theological disciplines that tend to give a better rationale of parts *within* the system, such as theology of the sacraments. In this sense, theology of education is more peripheral to theology than philosophy of education is to philosophy.

Once he has defined what theology of education is, Hull has elements to go deeper into what makes theology of education different from philosophy of education. He takes the difference between two qualifying attributes of man: ‘being rational’ and ‘being religious.’ Hull observes that the latter implies much more than the first, inasmuch as it embodies a special form of *engagement*, or *commitment*, which makes *studying* theology different and less important than *doing* theology. An example will clarify Hull’s conception: it is, for students, intellectually legitimate to be *rationally* engaged in the *study* of theology, even if they are not *religiously* engaged. But, if one is religiously engaged in the theology he ought to study, here we are dealing with a person whose *particular form of*

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 259.



*life* is engaged, and at this point such a person is no longer ‘studying’ theology, but ‘doing’ theology.

The previous observations lead Hull to look for an answer to what seems to him the crucial dilemma about the legitimacy of a discipline such as theology of education: how is it possible for a discipline (theology) that is characteristic of a *particular form of life*, to scrutinize one (education) that is universal? Hull observes that two possible answers to this problem are mistaken, and a third one is correct. The first possible answer simply denies that education is endowed with a kind of rationality that is independent from that of religion: *all* education, rightly conceived, is *religious education*, because all education ought to make people religious.<sup>86</sup> Hull condemns this conception because it involves an illegitimate invasion of religion into education inasmuch as it specifies the terms of education’s rationality and its goals, thus causing education to lose its existence as a ‘critical discipline.’ In such a perspective, education appears to be conceived of as the “nurture into one of the particular religious traditions.”<sup>87</sup> Many Christian theologies of education would fall in the mentioned conception. Hull overtly states: “the theological writing from previous centuries about ‘Christian education,’ as it is normally called, is more correctly described as being about Christian nurture,”<sup>88</sup> and he declares that in that former mentality the problems of theology of education were removed from the area of application *beyond* the community of faith, and placed *within* the community of faith. Hull suggests that in such a perspective we would cease to have a good theology of education, or at least one that would fit our secularized world.<sup>89</sup> Hull strongly argues that we must take seriously secularization and ‘modern education,’ and that the main shortcoming of the ‘Christian nurture–theology of education’ idea is that it offers a model in which theology refuses to ‘scrutinize’ education, but merely tells education it should be something else.

The second wrong answer to the question of how it is possible that a discipline strictly related to a specific tradition (theology) can scrutinize a universal one (education), would be to deny the assumption that the kind of rationality involved in theology is different from that involved in education, and to claim that religion, as well as any other form of rationality, is *constitutive of humanity*: all education is religious because all

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 260.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* As we can see, such a form of education corresponds to the one Tillich calls ‘inducting education,’ which we have already analyzed in the previous chapter of this Introduction. Both Tillich and Hull claim that such a notion of education is a more primitive form of education imparted in the past by Christian educators, and no longer apt to contemporary secularized societies.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *ibid.* However, it must be noted that Hull strives to build a model where theology of education has its legitimate place and function in a system of secularized education. To this regard, it is interesting to note the extremely sharp critique that Hull makes – dedicating only to this point his parallel article to the one here in analysis – to Paul Hirst, an important educational theorist who claimed that in a context of secularization “there has now emerged in our society a concept of education which makes the whole idea of Christian education a kind of nonsense.” Paul H. Hirst, *Moral Education in a Secular Society*, 77, quoted by Hull in “Christian Theology and Educational Theory: Can There Be Connections?” in *Studies in Religion and Education*, 229.





people are already religious. Hull thinks that this would be the perspective endorsed by philosophers/theologians such as Max Scheler, Mircea Eliade, Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and others. He explains that the mistake in trying to give this kind of answer lies in the refusal to attribute to theology autonomy in scrutinizing education, which results in the reduction of theology to 'pure rationality.' In this way, the fundamental distinction between *studying* and *doing* theology – which in Hull's arguments is the *proprium* of theology of education as a discipline – would be blurred.

Hull suggests a third perspective, which he deems could work better than the other two in furnishing a good answer to the crucial question addressed. He argues that theology can legitimately scrutinize education – in a paradigm that takes secularization in serious consideration and that keeps the distinction between studying and doing theology – only if it can prove to be *one*, but not the only, possible source of understanding for education. In this way, "the dignity of education as a secular sphere of human expertise is secured, but it is made clear that such secularity does not carry with it immunity from criticism from other forms of life such as religion or art."<sup>90</sup>

In the last analysis, Hull is convinced that not only religion, but *any* form of life that determines one's outlook on life, is legitimate and integral to shaping the existential meaning of the work of an educator. Hull deems that in such a way the integrity of the educator is preserved: "if he is a communist, he will develop a communist understanding of education."<sup>91</sup> Hull defends all denominations and minorities' right to scrutinize education, in harmony with the acceptance of contemporary society's principle of secularization. He claims that theology of education is justified as a discipline of study (insofar as it is *studying* theology), and as a "minority activity,"<sup>92</sup> insofar as it is a way of *doing* theology for those who are religious and wish to articulate their participation in education in a way that is consistent with their religious consciousness. This form of 'activity,' according to Hull, should be conducted in theological schools and Christian colleges, and by various churches and other religious communities, in service to the many Christians involved in education, to help them reflect on their professional work in light of their faith. Such an activity would help Christian educators have a broader foundation and more sophisticated tools for reflecting on their critical educational tasks.

In Hull's perspective, due to the particular epistemological status of theology and to its own interdisciplinary nature, theology of education can legitimately scrutinize education without losing respect for the secular nature of education. "Secularization is a theological category, but that does not mean that the items within that category are not genuinely secular."<sup>93</sup>

Once Hull has proved the legitimacy of theology of education as a discipline and has given information on where and how it is possible to study 'theology of education' in college or graduate programs in Continental Europe, Great Britain and the US, he affirms that, in giving a complete account of theology of education, there still are *problems of*

<sup>90</sup> "What is Theology of Education?," 261.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 263.



*method* such as the following ones: how does one work on this subject? By what criteria are areas of education selected for theological study? How does one elucidate the insights for education offered by a certain theological doctrine? Can a theological problem in education be solved? Is it any different when it is solved?<sup>94</sup>

Besides problems of method, Hull contends that also *problems of resources* arise. Regarding this last concern, Hull remarks that scholarly work on theology of education is available mostly in the form of unpublished dissertations or theses, or is not accessible in English (Hull refers to the theology of education of F. Schleiermacher, at the time of Hull's article not yet translated from German into English.)<sup>95</sup> He therefore proposes to sketch out a list and, if possible, a *taxonomy* of problems, as the first step in building the outline of a viable theology of education. Hull offers his own list – incomplete and fragmentary though focused on problems related specifically to theology of education – as a “conceptual map of the area,” as “an indication to research workers of the range of subjects requiring investigation,” and as a “syllabus for those involved in teaching theology of education.” He finally specifies that his list is “a guide to the study of theology of education for everyone, and to the *doing* of theology of education for Christians.”<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusions

Paul Tillich and John M. Hull's approaches to theology of education provide us interesting insights and systematic reflections; however, one can at first sight notice that Carlo Maria Martini's model stands out as a radically different one. Martini, differently from Tillich and Hull, proposes a 'theology of educating' focused on the analysis of that special educational model we find in God's way of educating His people. In a certain sense, we can say that such a model of theology of education is really theo-logical. With many references to Scripture, Martini intends to show the characteristics of the loving and patient procedures God uses to educate His people, and offers this process as the inspirational source for every educational enterprise, and especially for Christian education at any level (Catholic schools, catechesis in parishes, other educational initiatives in the diocese). Martini formulates his theology of education in a very original and fertile way: instead of postulating an abstract definition of education, curriculum, etc., he begins his reflection on education by pointing to *educational processes* displayed by Scripture throughout the 'history of salvation,' by means of which God personally educates his people. Martini offers God's way of educating His people as a model to keep in mind when we undertake our own educational endeavor, and he builds a theology of 'educating' that the church, as an educational subject, should consider before devising her 'educational itineraries.' God's educational *style* comes *before* the specific human edu-

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> The time to which Hull refers is the late seventies, but I do not think things have changed much in the last few decades: still it is very difficult to find extensive and exhaustive literature on theology of education.

<sup>96</sup> “What is Theology of Education?,” 264 ff.



cational itineraries. With regard to the theology and ecclesiology embraced, we can see that Martini is extremely ecumenical. He relies on an ecclesiology that conceives of the church as the 'uninterrupted stream of the living tradition' beginning *before* God's revelation in Jesus Christ: a church that is holy, but that in history continually makes mistakes and continuously needs God's correction; an imperfect church, always listening to God in order to be consoled by him, so as to become the consoler of others;<sup>97</sup> a church open to being educated *even* by the good influences present in contemporary pluralistic societies.<sup>98</sup>

At a deeper level, I suggest that one can find in the spiritual experience of St. Ignatius Loyola the source of the uniqueness and practical effectiveness of Martini's model. Martini's idea of beginning not with an abstract definition of theology of education but by showing God's *attitude* in educating His people has an echo of the second and third point of the 'Contemplation to gain love' in St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*:

"Second Point. The second, to look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in men giving them to understand: and so in me, giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation and making me to understand; likewise making a temple of me, being created to the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty; reflecting as much on myself in the way which is said in the first Point, or in another which I feel to be better. In the same manner will be done on each Point which follows.

Third Point. The third, to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth — that is, behaves like one who labors — as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc. Then to reflect on myself."<sup>99</sup>

Moreover, in a very important passage in St. Ignatius' *Autobiography* we can read that

"God treated him at this time just as a schoolmaster treats a child whom he is teaching. Whether this was because of his lack of education and of brains, or because he had no one to teach him, or because of the strong desire God himself had given him to serve him, he believed without doubt and has always believed that God treated him in this way."<sup>100</sup>

In my opinion, it is Martini's theology of education being deeply rooted in Ignatian spirituality that makes his model more flexible and apt to be applied in different societies with different levels of secularization and pluralism. This feature is not present in Tillich and Hull's models. These two models are designed to face the challenges that post-modern, pluralist and secularized societies offer to theology in scrutinizing education (Hull), or to show how a redefined educational pattern can shape our contemporary culture in order to help it overcome its main shortcomings (Tillich). Martini's theo-

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Dio educa il suo popolo*, 56-57.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 66-68.

<sup>99</sup> Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 235-236.

<sup>100</sup> Ignatius Loyola, "The Autobiography," no. 27, in *Ignatius Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991), 79.



logy of educating, instead, provides a framework centered in the Bible<sup>101</sup> and rooted in a spiritual experience, so that it can open new perspectives to every educator of every society by inviting him or her to verify not only his or her educational skills, but mainly his or her *spirituality* in approaching the task and mission of educating others.

This is the novelty I see in Martini's theology of education. In a certain sense, I can summarize Marini's work by saying that his 'theology of education' is a way of showing 'God's pedagogy' in action, drawing it from Scripture and from spiritual experience, so that it permeates a theology crossing over the fields of systematic theology, exegesis and spirituality (in this specific case, a spirituality stemming from the tradition of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*). The advantages that I see in this model are, first, that it is rich in references to Scripture, the primary and essential source of revealed theology. Second, it draws theoretical conclusions from concrete examples of education, and is therefore less 'intellectualistic,' more easily understandable, and more connected to the actual dynamics of everyone's life. Third, it is more 'universal' than the other two models analyzed, meaning that it is open to further reflections and implementations based on any experience from any geographical or historical context. Therefore, especially for those who work in the Catholic tradition, Martini's reflection – although it only implicitly understands itself as 'theology of education' – seems to me a very suitable model on which to build a good and fruitful theology of education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>101</sup> Martini responds to the recommendations of Vatican II to ground theology in the Bible. Among the documents of Vatican II, cf. especially the *Decree On Priestly Training: Optatam Totius. Proclaimed By His Holiness Pope Paul VI On October 28, 1965*, no. 16, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_optatam-totius\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html) (accessed February 15, 2009).



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*Direttore responsabile:*  
Rossano Zas Friz S.I.

*Caporedattore:*  
Francesco Asti

Via Petrarca, 115 - 80122 Napoli  
tel.: 081-24.60.111  
e-mail: *info@mysterion.it*

