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Free to Seek and to Love the Creator: Fundamental Principle of Christian Education

Wolni w poszukiwaniu i kochaniu Stwórcy: fundamentalna zasada edukacji chrześcijańskiej

Abstract: The education of the person supposes the formation of his freedom. Maritain says that 'man is born free but is called to conquer his freedom'. To educate is to help the person to be more perfectly free. However, in our times, freedom is often misunderstood and is reduced to simple choice. For this reason, in this article we will reflect, following the teachings of Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II and the *Gaudium et Spes* Constitution, on the most profound sense of freedom that should guide true educational action.

Keywords: education; freedom; person; God; personalism; choice; Wojtyla.

Abstrakt: Wychowanie osoby zakłada formację jej wolności. Maritain twierdzi, że „człowiek rodzi się wolny, a równocześnie jest powołany do zdobywania własnej wolności". Wychowanie jest pomocą osobie w osiąganiu doskonałej wol-

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ności. Równocześnie, wolność jest obecnie często źle rozumiana i redukowana do prostego wyboru. Z tego względu w niniejszym artykule – w oparciu o nauczanie Karola Wojtyły/Jana Pawła II oraz Konstytucję *Gaudium et Spes* – podjęta zostanie refleksja nad najbardziej podstawowym pojęciem wolności, które powinno wyznaczać kierunek działalności wychowawczej.

Słowa kluczowe: wychowanie; wolność; osoba; Bóg; personalizm; wybór; Wojtyła.

1. Introduction

Educational activity is a personal action: it is carried out by people, for people with the aim of allowing those people to reach fulfilment. It is evident, therefore, that if reflection on educational activity is to be rigorous and profound, it cannot ignore the nature of the personal being. In fact, the essence of education cannot be adequately understood without having solved the anthropological problem. Thinking about education in an abstract way or as disconnected from the nature of the educational subject can lead not only to errors in theory, but also to practical mistakes of significant consequences. In this sense, it is an obligation for the educator to take on their task not only considering the concrete goals that society or the current educational system expect of their activity, but, rather, they should do so as a result of a reflection on the goals that derive naturally from the very condition of personhood of the children and young people entrusted to them. To put it more simply, it is the 'personal fulfilment' of the learners that should guide education.

Sadly, however, it should be acknowledged that much of contemporary thinking on education has neglected this aspect of fulfilment and has focused on the consideration of the means of education, forgetting the ends. In neglecting the 'what for?', it has focused on the 'how?'. Neil Postman, in his work *The End of Education*, states:

> It is striking that in most of the open debates in our society about education, the questions raised almost always revolve around the means (didactics, programming, curricular design, audiovisual and computer media, etc.), instead of focusing on the fundamental ends. Certainly the means and instruments are very important and must be taken into account, but what is essential in the work of education, today as in the past, is the clarification of the aims and goals to be pursued (Postman, 1999, p. 18).

This is not, however, a recent concern. Jacques Maritain, in his well-known text *Education in this crucial time*, already denounced this in the 1950s, when he claimed that one of the two greatest errors against which education must fight was ignorance of the aims. He went on to explain the danger of mistaking the means for ends:

> If the means are sought and cultivated for the love of their own perfection, and not merely as a means, then they cease to lead to the end, and the art loses its practical virtue; its vital efficacy is replaced by a process of multiplication to infinity, as each means develops for its own sake and occupies an ever-widening field on its own account. This supremacy of the means over the ends, and the resulting absence of any concrete purpose and of any real efficacy, seems to be the main reproach that can be made against contemporary education (Maritain, 1965, p. 13).

This loss of the sense of the purpose of educational activity appears to Maritain as the main criticism that can be made of education. This is not to say, of course, that the means are not important, but that they should not outweigh the ends, as it is the ends that give meaning to the educator's action. The French philosopher added:

> The scientific improvement of pedagogical means and methods is evidently progress in itself; but the greater its importance, the greater the need for a simultaneous increase in practical wisdom and a dynamic impulse towards the end it pursues (Maritain, 1965, p. 13).

So, the more the means are perfected, the more wisdom about the ends must be cultivated. Much has evolved and the means have been perfected since Maritain's time, but it does not seem that the reflection on the purpose of education has evolved to the same extent. It is this concern for the meaning and purpose of educational action that moves us to make this reflection, and to ground it, as we said at the beginning, in an adequate consideration of the nature of the personal being. In our opinion, this obscuring of the ends is due to the fact that in the cultural environment of our society there prevails a reductionist vision of the person and of their freedom that prevents us from offering them the appropriate help so that they can reach fulfilment. In fact, freedom in our times is often reduced to pure choice, affording people autonomy that is contrary to any rule, authority or external action that tells them

how to live, all of which places obstacles in the way of the action of educators looking to make students more fulfilled and more fully free.

Hence, this work proposes reconsidering the meaning of human freedom and its intimate relationship with the person in order to be able to establish certain fundamental principles to inform educational action. We will make particular use of the contributions by various Christian personalist philosophers, as well as the reflections contained in the Magisterium of the Church, especially Pope John Paul II.

2. Starting point: Vision of the person

To educate is always to educate the person and this appears in the personalist tradition as 'a substance whose substantial form is a spiritual soul, and which lives a life that is not only biological and instinctive, but intellectual and voluntary' (Maritain, 1982, p. 104). Closely related to the classic definition of Boethius, completed and perfected by Thomas Aquinas, the person is understood by various personalist authors as a being who participates in the spiritual nature. It is this spirit that distinguishes it from the animal world, from the simple order of species. As Fernando Moreno points out, following Pope John Paul II:

> Although the body with the spiritual soul constitutes the nature of man and his personal subjectivity, it is the spirit that makes man properly a man, a human person, as the Pope points out, specifying that he understands spirit to be that which enables us to understand, to want and to love (Moreno, 1990, p. 13).

Without denying the corporeal dimension, much less excluding it from human nature, it is the spirit that truly makes of the person that which is most individual and singular in the whole universe, an absolutely unique, unrepeatable person, open to all reality. It is this spirituality that 'reveals the vast gulf that separates the world of people from the world of things' (Wojtyla, 1991, p. 14). While things are also individual and singular, the participation in the spiritual nature that the person enjoys gives them a superior, more perfect singularity insofar as it confers interiority. In man, Wojtyla tells us: 'knowledge and desire take on a spiritual character and thus contribute to the formation of a true inner life' (1991, p. 15). This interiority is that most intimate place of the human being, which no one can take away from them

and which constitutes them as a unique being, with their own ideas, desires, dreams, fears, hopes, etc.

The foundation of this radical singularity, as Thomas Aquinas stated, lies in the fact that rational substances 'master their acts, being not only moved, like other substances, but also acting on their own' (Aquinas, 1994, I, q. 29, a. 1, in c). In fact, unlike animals that are worked or, if you will, 'lived', personal beings, having possession of their own being as spiritual beings, live their lives in the full possession of themselves, without being coerced from without. This possession of self is what makes it possible for the human being to project themself, to orient their life, to propose goals and challenges that lead to the fullness of this interiority. Human action is not determined, but rather the openness of the personal being opens up infinite possibilities.

In this sense, 'the personal self is not a mere plaything of the forces of nature. Spirituality makes the person transcend the material universe and, therefore, renders it alien to the determinations of the environment or other forces that determine from the outside' (Seifert, 1983, p. 178). In fact, the spirituality of the personal being means that it is not subject to any external determination, but works from itself and with possession over itself. This possession, proper to the person, is what allows us to affirm that the person is a free subject. Freedom and personhood are two intimately linked realities, because being a person is the intimate possession of one's own personal being, it is to be a master of oneself. This same identification between spiritual nature and mastery of oneself is what leads Maritain to define the person as 'a universe of spiritual nature endowed with rationality, free will' (Maritain, 1982, p. 55). Freedom is not only a characteristic of the person, it is not just another accident of the personal being, but it is its very way of being. Therefore, we share Maritain's vision that explicitly includes freedom in the very definition of the person. To be a person is to be free, to be in possession of oneself, an inexhaustible centre of knowledge, love and freedom.[1]

[1] This identification between personal being and freedom should not be confused with Sartre's existentialist pretension of making freedom an absolute. The identification made by personalism and the classical doctrine of the person does not ignore the reality of human nature. While Sartrean freedom is the cause of the essence of the human, such that there are no limits to freedom, the personal self as we understand it, is founded on a specific nature with its own inclinations and desires, which must be taken into account in due course in order to properly understand freedom and its limits.

3. Education as an aid to human fulfilment

The human person is not born, however, with all that is required to live a full human life, but rather, as a person from the very moment of conception, they are not yet a perfect person, do not yet live as they should. Unlike animals, which are born and have their lives already resolved, since 'everything they do is already fixed in the genetic endowment with which they enter into existence' (Barrio, 2010, p. 32), the human person is charged with realising their being. As Thibon argues:

> It could be said that the animal or plant receives its essence in a single blow; they are fatally what they should be, except for external hindrances. The spirit opens up in man in a slow, painful way; the intellectual and affective unfolding of the spirit depends to a great extent on man's choice and efforts. There is no merit in being a stone, beast or angel, only in being a man. All other beings are what they are: man must become who he is (Thibon, 2010, p. 23).

In fact, in one sense, man is a being that is born, but in another, he is a being that is made. In the order of being, he possesses a determined nature which is human, but in the order of ultimate perfection, of development and unfolding of his possibilities, he must be able to confirm his humanity, he has to manifest with his actions the greatness of the human. As Ortega y Gasset put it: 'Man must carry out the programme in which his life consists' (1965, p. 42).

But he must do it himself. No one can take his place in this task. However, given his imperfection, his natural fragility, his total lack of knowledge and instincts, he needs help. He needs to learn to be what he is, he needs to know what it is to live humanly. And this knowledge is not given to him by instinct, it is not contained in the inclinations of the species, but he must learn it, he must receive it from others. So, although it is true that human perfection is a task of the person themself, they cannot carry it out in solitude, but only in union with others. Because of our special nature, we require help to reach this perfection, because it is possible not to reach it, we are able to act in a way contrary to what our nature inclines us to. The human being must 'seek ends that are true, that is, true good that will be the ends of action, as well as to find the paths that lead to them' (Wojtyla, 1991, p. 21). For this, the human being necessarily requires help. That help which leads a person to reach the perfect state of man as a human is what we call 'education'.

Personhood and education are also two closely linked realities, insofar as education is a requirement proper to the perfection and fullness of a person. In the words of Benedict XVI, education is 'the formation of the person in order to enable them to live fully and to contribute to the good of the community' (Benedict XVI, 2008). As can be seen, education is not only ordered to the good of the person, but personhood being as it is, educational activity cannot be understood as perfecting from the outside, as if it were an action similar to that of sculpting, but rather it is a matter of enabling the person, as master of themself, to order themself to their rightful fullness.

Given the intimate relationship between personhood and freedom mentioned above, it is easy to understand that this full life, this full living, is closely related to the perfection of freedom. Education, which is that help to others to reach their personal fullness, appears to us in a more concrete way as the action by which a person is helped to be more perfectly free. As Barrio points out, education can be understood as 'enabling freedom' (Barrio, 2010, p. 156). Maritain speaking about human perfection told us that man, who is born free, is called to 'conquer his freedom' (Maritain, 1965, p. 47). But is this not a contradiction? How is it that man is born free, but must become 'freer'? Is this possible? And what exactly does it mean to be 'freer'? To be able to choose what one wants or what one spontaneously desires? It is clear that, if education is to help a person to be more of a person and, therefore, to be more free, the answer to these questions is urgent if we are to give direction to educational activity. For this reason, this work will now attempt to clarify what human freedom consists of.

4. The nature of freedom according to the *Gaudium et Spes* Constitution

In order to answer our question about the nature of freedom, we must take into account that it is not only a difficult concept to understand, but also that in our days it is used without much precision. Certainly people today have a particularly strong sense of freedom, however, it is not always well understood. In fact, there are several fallacies that are very widespread today in relation to freedom that can have important consequences for educational action and which need to be taken into consideration.

St John Paul II, whose work we will look at in particular here, reflected on this topic. In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, the Pope refers to two of the most important fallacies concerning freedom.

Firstly, he points out the error that consists in the denial of freedom. In fact, certain materialistic and deterministic currents have contributed to spread the idea that human beings are not free, or if they are, they explain human acts with so many conditioning factors (psychological, physical, cultural, etc.) that they end up reducing freedom to pure extrinsic determination (cf. John Paul II, 1993, no. 33). Human perfection would not involve the perfection of freedom.

Secondly, he points out the error in exalting freedom and holding it as an absolute. This second fallacy appears more widespread in our current culture, which makes it more dangerous. In some currents of modern thought, the Pope highlighted, 'freedom has been exalted to the point of being considered an absolute, the source of values' (Ibidem, no. 33). This thinking holds that freedom is such a broad concept that there are no limits on what a person can do in order to achieve fulfilment. Freedom is so absolute that whatever a human chooses can be deemed to be good. Human perfection is not found in adherence to what is good, but rather in the simple fact of being able to choose, and is therefore the source of good and evil. As Mateo-Seco (1980) comments:

> Human freedom is understood as the uncontrolled capacity to choose, as autonomy not subject to anything or anyone: neither to one's own intelligence, nor to the nature of things, nor to God himself. Hence, emancipation from religion is considered a condition and the first precondition for human self-realisation (p. 546).

In this regard, John Paul II adds, 'doctrines that ignore the sense of the transcendent or those that are explicitly atheistic are oriented in this direction' (John Paul II, 1993, no. 33). Indeed, if there is neither God nor any transcendence, there is no human nature that is ordered to a Good or which acts as a criterion of what is right and what is wrong, of what is just and what is unjust, but rather it is the subject themself who acts as the absolute criterion of morality. This means the prerogatives of a supreme instance of moral judgment are transferred to the individual conscience, and that same conscience constitutes the sole and ultimate judge of right and wrong. As such, the moral judgment would be true simply because it comes from a given conscience. However, as John Paul II concludes, 'the necessary requirement of truth is replaced with a criterion of sincerity, of authenticity, of "agreement with oneself", arriving at a radically subjectivist conception of moral judgment' (Ibidem, no. 32).

It is easy to see that both this idea of freedom, as well as the first one mentioned above, would make any educational activity impossible. Any attempt to form the person in truth and goodness would be an unjust and undue imposition. Any attempt to communicate to another what it means to live as a human would be a violation of their own moral judgment. And yet experience shows us that educational action is natural, that such action enables others to achieve true happiness, as we have discussed. The problem is not that education is impossible, but rather it is a case of a false vision of freedom. Therefore, after noting these fallacies, we now turn to the reflection on the true nature of human freedom.

For this we will focus our attention on part of the *Gaudium et Spes* Constitution in which Karol Wojtyla played a special role (cf. Izquierdo, 1985), and which expresses, in a way that is as profound as it is synthetic, the personalist and Christian vision of freedom. The text states:

> Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain 'under the control of his own decisions', so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him (Documents of the Second Vatican Council, 1965, no.17).

Here we see, in our opinion, a perfect synthesis of the deepest and truest meaning of human freedom. First of all, it can be seen that far from being a univocal concept that can be reduced to an empty unit, it is a concept that in its analogical sense contains a richness worthy of being contemplated and admired. Indeed, freedom is said in many ways, to paraphrase Aristotle. The Council distinguishes here three different meanings of freedom, one referring to being and the other two referring to human action. They are meanings which, despite their ultimate foundation in the Christian faith, can also be understood and discovered through reasoning. We must delve deeper into these meanings in order to understand education more fully as the formation of freedom.

4.1. First sense: Ontological freedom

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* begins by affirming the following: 'Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man …' (no. 17). The first meaning is that which, as stated by Millán

Puelles (1995), we can call 'ontological freedom',[2] that is to say, freedom that is identified with the personal being. The Council Fathers speak of this freedom as 'authentic and true' in order to distinguish it from the erroneous conceptions that absolutise freedom, while showing it not as an action, not as a choice, but as a sign of the divine image of God in man. To be free is to be the image of God, to participate in his spiritual nature radically open to all reality through knowledge and love. Indeed, personhood, as we have pointed out, is not enclosed within the narrow limits of physical nature, nor reduced to the purely material realm, but is oriented towards reality, towards being in itself, towards the world in its totality. Aristotle rightly said that 'the soul is in a certain sense all things', since by its intelligence it can know all reality and by its will it can will all things. This union with reality, however, takes place in different ways. This is because while through knowledge we bring reality in towards ourselves, possessing it; through love we leave ourselves to become more like what is loved.

These teachings are also developed in the anthropological thinking of John Paul II who has repeatedly taught that 'man as the image of God is a person' (1981b, no. 6), a subject, not an object, let alone a thing. It is this personal being that makes man a reality 'irreducible to a simple parcel of nature, or to an anonymous element of the human city' (John Paul II, 1979b). Man is never a part, never a reality subjected to another, but a whole unto himself, a certain absolute. This absolute nature, which comes to man because he is the image of God, is the basis of his special human dignity. Melendo, following the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, defines dignity as the superior goodness that corresponds to the absolute (Melendo, 1996, p. 46). Such dignity, as Spaemann points out, is intimately related to freedom insofar as it is 'the expression of resting-in-oneself, of an inner independence'. This withdrawal into oneself, this independence or inner autonomy of a personal being who has himself, is what defines ontological freedom. Thus, dignity and freedom appear to be intimately related, and a human being does not have these properties because of something they do, but rather due to the simple fact of being what they are: a person.

John Paul II refers more clearly to this relationship between the image of God and the person in his encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*. There he says: 'The "image of God", consisting in rationality and freedom, expresses the

[2] It is also called metaphysical freedom (García López, 2006) or transcendental freedom (Barrio, 2010).

greatness and dignity of the human subject, who is a person' (1986, no. 36). In fact, the dignity of personhood resides in being the image of God, but this image of God 'consists of freedom', which is evidently not understood as an act, but is identified with the personal being itself. We can see, therefore, how, before any other significance, and deeper than the external appearance of acting freely, there is a freedom that cannot be seen, a freedom without which other freedoms would not exist and would not manifest: it is the concept of freedom in which we use the word free to describe subjects who are the image of God, capable of ordering themself to their own fulfilment, rising above instinct and specific determination.

4.2. Second sense: Free will

After grounding freedom in the very being of the person, *Gaudium et Spes* continues with a reference to actions: '… For God has willed that man remain "under the control of his own decisions …"' (no. 17). The second sense of freedom is that which we can call free will or psychological freedom, that is, the ability to have control over one's own decisions. In his work *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyla says, in reference to freedom: 'Human nature includes the faculty of self-determination based on reflection and manifested in the fact that man, in acting, chooses what he wishes to do. This faculty is called free will' (1991, p. 16). Put more simply, free will is the ability to choose. We could not, in any way, say that we are free if we did not have this ability to choose. Indeed, this is how freedom is presented to us in the first place: the ability to decide without external coercion. Each of us perceives in ourselves that we want, we want things that we desire, but also that we want things that we do not desire or do not like, but that, without any external pressure or conditioning, we choose to do. One perceives that one is acting freely when there is nothing from the outside that prevents one from doing what one wants to do. Hence it is not entirely wrong to think of freedom as being able to do whatever one wants. But this is insufficient, even to understand free will itself.

For as Karol Wojtyla teaches, while free will is the capacity to do what one wants without coercion, more properly it presupposes the self-determination of the will (cf. Burgos, 2007). Indeed, freedom is the ability to self-determine towards something that intelligence presents as good. Unlike sensitive appetites that are driven by good, free will presupposes a certain indeterminacy without which it would not be possible to 'do that which I want'. Animals

cannot do ‘what they want’ because they are completely determined towards what their instincts incline them to do. They do what is contained in the inclinations of their species. The person, on the other hand, because of their spirituality, possesses that openness of which we spoke earlier and which does not incline man towards specific or determined goods, but enables them to know and love all things. While the hungry animal is drawn by its prey to eat, the human being possesses an indeterminate will so he does not move to eat if he does not want to. Food has no power to determine the will to act.

However, although indeterminacy is a condition for psychological freedom, it is not sufficient, since freedom is much more than indifference to all good, rather it is the capacity of the will to determine itself towards one good or another. It is this aspect that gives free will its specific nature. Because freedom is not opposed to determination, rather it is opposed to external determination, to being moved by someone other than oneself. This is explained by Barrio when he says: ‘What excludes freedom of will is the free subject being determined from outside, but freedom itself consists in determining oneself towards something. Freedom, therefore, is not heterodetermination, but self-determination’ (2010, p. 172). By virtue of his freedom, therefore, man is self-determined to act and has the capacity to direct himself to the good. God has left man ‘in the hands of his own decisions’: man, without the interior or exterior intervention of God himself, or of any other reality, decides to act in one way or another, or simply decides not to act, but always moved by his own will. As Izquierdo points out, it is from this freedom understood in this way that we see ‘greatness and misery, good and evil, heroism and wickedness... It resembles a fountain that gushes both sweet and bitter water at the same time without knowing the reason for it’ (Izquierdo, 1985).

This sense of freedom is undoubtedly the most widespread in today’s culture, although it is often misunderstood and reduced to the simple absence of coercion to act in any given way. Freedom is presented as ‘doing what I want’, without any restriction or limitation, without external coercion. The Second Vatican Council itself warned that today freedom is too often seen as ‘pure licence to do anything’ (1965, no. 17). In the same vein, the *Libertatis conscientia* Instruction, published during the pontificate of John Paul II, states even more explicitly that, if one were to ask today about the nature of freedom, the spontaneous answer would be:

> He is free who can do only what he wishes without being hindered by any external coercion, and who therefore enjoys full independence. The opposite of

> freedom would therefore be the dependence of our will upon the will of another (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986, no. 25 [CDF]).

This widespread vision is one that leads to the exaltation of freedom, turning it into absolute freedom. However, the very examination of free will that we have described shows the limitation that accompanies this sense of freedom. Indeed, the ability to choose and self-determine a good from within oneself presupposes, in the first place, the very fact that the person has not chosen to be free. It is given to us and it is necessary to accept it along with the difficulties that are often involved in facing certain decisions that no one but oneself can make.

Secondly, we cannot choose everything. This is a fact. We can decide to do this or that, but we cannot decide everything. We cannot choose everything that is eligible. And when we choose something, we fail to choose something else, and this in itself is enough to prove the intrinsic limitation of freedom itself.

Thirdly, we cannot choose pure evil, since what moves free will is good. If something of goodness is not presented to the will, it will not move, since its object is good itself. Evil is repulsive to will, so evil cannot be chosen. However, it is possible to choose evil, which, as we shall see, implies the choice of a good that is not suited to our nature. As such, Barrio (1999) points out that

> freedom is not simply limited by external factors, but is itself limited by its very nature. And this fact denies the alluded romantic image of an absolute freedom which, in the last analysis, could only be verified in an absolute person, in an absolute personal being. This is certainly not our case (p. 27).

The question that can be posed is, does free will, by which the human subject is self-determined to the good, represent the fullness of human freedom? Is man's free action reduced to choice? For if freedom can be 'to determine for oneself the good that one wants', it is also true that man does not always know what he wants, or that he does not always want the same thing, or even that he wants things that harm and damage him. What, then, is true freedom? Does it consist of this freedom of choice? Pope Francis helps us answer this question:

> Certainly choice is a part of freedom and we pledge to ensure that it is secured for every man and woman. But we know well that being able to do what we

> want is not enough to be truly free or even happy. True freedom is so much more (2018).

In fact, it is not enough to choose and self-determine in order to attain fullness; to be free is much more and, for this reason, the text of *Gaudium et Spes* concludes by showing us the fullness of this true freedom, by giving the reason why God has left man in the hands of his own decision: 'So that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him' (no. 17).

4.3. Third sense: Human or moral freedom

A third sense of freedom appears here, which we can call human or moral freedom and which constitutes the perfection and fullness of human freedom. God has left man at the mercy of his own decisions, not simply for him to decide, nor to decide anything, but to seek out his Creator and to freely adhere to Him and thus attain happiness. Freedom, in this sense, is not a capacity, but a good choice. In choosing what the human being is called to.

Certainly freedom is choice, but it cannot be reduced to choice. But why? Why is it that it is not freedom to simply choose whatever good you want? Why is it that human freedom is not exhausted in the simple fact of choosing? We find the answer by looking again at the being of the person in accordance with all that they are. Because, although it is true that the person is not determined towards a specific good like animals, this does not mean in any case that they are not oriented towards some good. In fact, human nature itself makes man tend with all the strength of his being to the good in himself, to the good which is the fullness of all good, that is, to God. 'You have made us, Lord, for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you', St Augustine teaches us in his *Confessions*. And Leon Bloy also taught us that 'man is a pilgrim of the absolute, whose exercise of freedom should lead him to the uncreated good' (cf. Moreno, 1990).

Therefore, although it may seem strange or paradoxical, it is this ordering to the infinite and full Good that founds and gives reason to the entire dynamic of the free act, including the very capacity to choose. This is so because no finite good is capable of determining the movement of the will from without. Because a person is made for an infinite Good, it is possible for them to choose from among finite goods, since none possesses all the fullness that moves their will. When a person desires, what they ultimately de-

sire is their fullness, which consists in the possession of the full Good, which is God. Even if they do not believe in God or firmly deny His existence, their heart yearns for that Good and inevitably seeks it, and by not confessing it, in order to order their own life and their own appetite, they will have to bestow some creature with that divine dimension. Thus, for example, they may deify money or pleasure or success or any of the created goods that try to take over the totality of our being in our present society.

Therefore, it is clear that in order to fully understand the essence of human freedom, it cannot be separated from the truth of the personal being and its highest good. Human freedom, insofar as it is the freedom of a personal being, is not only the capacity to choose, but rather it is a radical inclination to order oneself, not to any good, but to the good that constitutes the ultimate fulfilment of the human being. Put more simply, the person is free to seek one's own fulfilment and happiness. They are free to seek God. There is no human fulfilment in just doing what we feel like doing, because the end and the meaning of our life is not in doing 'what we feel like doing', but in possessing a full and perfect good through knowledge and love.

Undoubtedly, freedom is manifested in choice, but choice as such cannot constitute the essence of the free act, because the person is made for God. The *Libertatis Conscientia* Instruction summarises this teaching in these words: 'Freedom is not freedom to do anything, but freedom for the Good, in which alone lies Happiness' (CDF, no. 26). Without this consideration, not only is freedom not understood, but the very idea of personhood and, therefore, the true nature of education is lost. As John Paul II taught us (1979a):

> In our times it is sometimes wrongly considered that freedom is an end in itself, that every man is free when he uses it as he wishes, that this is what we must strive for in the life of individuals and societies. Freedom is a great gift only when we know how to use it responsibly for all that is truly good. Christ teaches us that the best use of freedom is the charity that is realised in giving and in service (no. 21).

Educating for freedom, understood as an end in itself, simply supposes that what is relevant for human growth is pure choice, but properly speaking, this is not something that should be educated, because each person, being what he or she is, possessing intelligence and will, has this capacity. Education only makes sense when freedom is understood as freedom to love, freedom for gift and service, freedom for the Good. In this case, we cannot say that the person, being what they are, is capable of loving and serving the

good, but that they must learn it, make an effort and carry out those acts that make their action connatural to the good. For this reason, the Pope affirms that freedom is only a great gift when 'we know how to use it responsibly', for which we need the loving and invaluable help of the educator who guides the student towards fullness through virtues, since it is these, as St Augustine taught, that make the order of love possible.

5. Freedom and true virtue

As Thomas Aquinas teaches us, 'the sure way to happiness is virtue' (Aquinas, 1999, Ch. 172). Virtues are those good habits that enable a person to generate in oneself the most humanly perfect works and give them fullness in life: habits that perfect the human faculties in the interior so that they perform the actions that correspond to them by nature in order to reach their perfection. Hence, they only make sense if they are understood and educated in intimate relation with that human perfection attained through freedom. Freedom, happiness and virtue thus constitute three realities which, in the human order, cannot be understood in isolation or separated from one another.

It is not strange that in recent times the meaning and significance of virtue has been lost, to the same extent that the concept of freedom as the search for and love of the Creator has been obscured. The absolutisation of freedom, as we have described it above, implies understanding virtue as something that limits and enslaves, instead of enhancing the breadth of choice. If freedom is understood as being founded in itself, as an end in itself, it is reasonable to conclude that any pretence at moderating it, channeling it or even using it in a certain way (responsibly), can be considered a restriction and, therefore, an annulment of freedom itself. This is what happens when, forgetting the purpose and meaning of life, human action is reduced to obedience of the law. Any view of freedom as absolute independence or autonomy will regard the law as an evil to be endured, an undue constraint. It is understandable, then, that educational currents promoting free education, without norms, nor authority, nor virtues, have proliferated; currents that promote the self-education of children in the direction initiated by Rousseau's *Emile* in the 18th century.[3]

[3] The various constructivist currents that appeared in the twentieth century are an example of this.

Freedom, understood in the order of the divine plan according to which, God, the Infinite Goodness, seeks to communicate that goodness to creatures, giving them the motion to reach their perfection and ultimate end, finds in virtues the strength and adequate help to unfold the potentialities of human nature itself in their path to God. The rational creature is the only creature that has received, together with its nature, the capacity to discover that ordering towards its end and the possibility of freely seeking it in its works (Areitio, 1982, p. 890). Hence, far from supposing a limitation or restriction of their being, virtues are the adequate perfection of freedom that confers on man, as pointed out by John Paul II, 'that deeper and more mature spontaneity in the discovery and love of the divine Will' (John Paul II, 1980). Through virtues, a person can habitually perform those works that lead to their beatitude. According to García de Haro, virtues designate 'the capacity that someone has to do their works correctly, with constancy and ease: it is the capacity of the human spirit, of the human will and even of the heart, inner strength to act' (García de Haro, 1980, quoted in: Areitio, 1982, p. 890) in order to freely achieve their own happiness.

Virtue thus takes on a special beauty and excellence insofar as it is the principal means of forming freedom and leading those being educated to their own happiness and beatitude, and thus conforming them more fully to the image and likeness of God which they bear imprinted on their being. It is not only a matter of carrying out certain external acts, it is not only a matter of obeying a norm, nor is it simply a matter of the student becoming orderly, generous, humble, sincere, etc., but rather, through these acts, they may have a greater possession of themself, becoming freer, thereby enjoying greater participation in the infinite Good to which they are destined. As Areitio (1982) pointed out:

> Man's good works must be the fruit of a right choice of the good on the part of the will and not merely the fruit of the impulse of passion. Since choice is about the partial ends and means that lead to the ultimate end that is sought, for a choice to be right, the ultimate end must be good and the partial ends and means must be adequate to be ordered to it (p. 894).

Without that ordering to the ultimate end, the choice would be flawed and the virtue would be only in appearance. Attempting to achieve more money, being generous to gain more individual success, etc., do not bring man closer to his ultimate destiny. That is why it is not possible to understand true virtue as something that is detached from the proper end of human life.

St Augustine's example of the virtues of the miser that are not true virtues is a classic one.

> There is no true virtue in the prudence of the miser, with which he seeks different forms of profit; nor his justice, by which he despises the goods of others because they do not cost him money; nor his temperance, which restrains his lustful appetite as wasteful; nor his fortitude, which flees from poverty across seas, mountains and fire (Augustine, quoted in Areitio, 1982, p. 893).

True education cannot be satisfied by achieving certain external practices in the learner, but rather they must enable one to have sufficient moral energy from within oneself to order oneself towards God, manifesting in one's actions the dignity that comes from being a person. To put it more simply, and in line with what we have been saying, true education must seek the formation of true freedom understood as the search for and love of the Creator.

6. Conclusion: Human freedom as a fundamental principle of education

Having examined the nature of human freedom according to Christian thought, and having seen that, far from consisting of the capacity to choose, it presupposes, instead, adherence to the Good to which we are called, it is possible to appreciate more clearly the innermost nature of the educational act. In fact, the education of a person consists in forming their freedom, in making them freer, more in control of themself, so that by themself, and from their deepest interiority, they may direct themself to their own fullness, not to where their passions, desires or choices lead them, but to their ultimate end. As such, human fulfilment is not in choice, but in freely uniting oneself to Good. It is the Good that gives fulfilment and joy to the human subject, not the simple action of choosing. In the words of Benedict XVI (2009):

> Our freedom is originally characterised by our being, with its own limitations. No one forms one's own consciousness in an arbitrary way, but everyone constructs their own self, on the basis of a self that has been given to us. We must therefore strengthen our appreciation of a freedom that is not arbitrary, but truly humanised by the recognition of the good that precedes it (no. 68).

Freedom is humanised to the extent that it recognises and desires the good that fulfils human nature. This 'good that precedes us', and to which the person tends by their very nature, is an infinite and full Good which is God, it is He who has given being to man, it is God Himself who has made man in His image and likeness and who has called him into existence out of love, so that he may freely know and love Him. Therefore, the freedom enjoyed by the human being is not arbitrary, but a gift of God the Creator himself 'who has revealed himself as omnipotence which is love' and who at the same time has called the human being to love. Love is, as Pope John Paul II teaches, 'the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being' (1981a, no. 11). The human person is free, but he is free to seek and love his Creator. Far from being an annulment of freedom, this is its proper and most appropriate culmination.

The education of the person can only be carried out in freedom and for freedom, but it is very difficult to carry out such a noble task without the deepest understanding of freedom understood as the search for and love of the Creator. This must be the principle and foundation that guides Christian educational action. Of course freedom is also self-control, of course it is also choice, but first and foremost it is adherence to the Good. This consideration poses to the educator a fundamental obligation which must be the guiding norm of their own action: to lead the person to their Creator through virtues, through those habits which, following the inclinations of nature, make it easier for the human being to acquire that good for which they are destined; they dispose them to do those works which manifest the nobility of their being; more simply, they enable them to open their heart so that they become ever more capable of loving God and their neighbour, because only in this way do they find the perfection of their freedom and of their own person.

As such, it becomes clear that the education in freedom, according to what we have explained here, does not in any way mean favouring independence or arbitrariness in the actions of those being educated, but rather implies moving them to achieve an authentic, profound, serious and responsible freedom, with God as its source and the reason for their happiness.

A good example of education that seeks to form true and authentic human freedom is given to us by St Francis of Assisi, who, like Pope Francis, teaches: 'he did not wage dialectical warfare by imposing doctrines, but communicated the love of God' (Francis, 2020, no. 4). To educate is not to impose, but to communicate with words and examples what the educator himself has in their heart. And what did Francis of Assisi have in his heart?

'I had understood that God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God' (Ibidem, 2020, no. 4). That is precisely why he becomes a true educator:

> In this way he was a fruitful father who awakened the dream of a fraternal society, because 'only the man who accepts approaching other beings in their own movement, not to hold them in his own, but to help them to become more themselves, becomes truly a father' (Ibidem, 2020, no. 4).

To educate is to help people become more fully themselves, more human, more free to seek and love the Creator.

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