

Multiculturalism and Convergence Towards the Universal Human Nation

By Eduardo Gozalo

In the current crisis, the factor of perhaps greatest concern lies in the clashes between different cultures. Until only recently, the great civilizations developed separately, based primarily on endogenous factors, and they would interact in more profound ways only occasionally through trade, cultural and religious influences, migrations, or wars.

Today, in the global village, everyone interacts with everyone. Through the mass media, different visions of the world, contrasting values and purposes, all make their way into our homes and lifestyles.

What is good and what is bad? Everything has become relative.

In the megacities, in limited physical space, people of diverse and even opposite cultural landscapes, points of reference, and models of life, live side by side. What is good and what is bad, if what is good for me is different from what is good for my neighbor? For the Humanist Movement, it is here that the magnitude and significance of the present crisis lies.

I believe it will not be hard for us to agree that, from the present situation of globalization – from which there is no turning back – two different pathways open:

- either a destructive fight among different cultures to gain hegemony, in which one culture will finally prevail over the others with the resulting emergence of a new imperial dimension at the planetary level.
- or, the creation of a universal human nation, where the diverse cultures can coexist, each one contributing its own experience, its own identity, its colors, its music, and its way of approaching the divine.

Here is a point that it would be interesting for us to discuss: How can the Humanist Movement contribute to building the Universal Human Nation?

From our perspective, the humanism that emerged so strongly in Europe during the Renaissance and that places the human being and human dignity at the center of everything, is not an exclusively European phenomenon. Indeed, it had already existed in other cultures, such as Islam, India, and China -- under other names because their cultural parameters of reference were distinct -- but implicitly placed under the form of an “attitude” and “perspective in facing life.”

In this way, in our conception, humanism is a phenomenon that emerges and develops in different parts of the world, at different historical times. And it is for this reason that it is possible to give a convergent direction to those diverse cultures that today find themselves forced into contentious contact.

But...

Based upon what historical indicators are we able to speak in these terms and to develop this interpretation?

In what historical period can we speak of “humanism” for those cultures that have had such complex and extremely varied histories?

To our way of thinking, in all the great cultures of the Earth it is possible to recognize certain moments that we call “humanist,” which have precise indicators. In such moments, the human being occupies a central position in terms of value and concern; the equality of all human beings is affirmed; personal and cultural diversity are recognized and valued;

there is a tendency to develop knowledge beyond what is accepted as absolute truth; the freedom to profess all ideas and beliefs is affirmed; and, violence is repudiated.

The Humanist Movement locates the human being in the dimension of freedom. In this conception, human consciousness is not a deformed and passive reflection of the material world, but fundamentally an intentional activity, a ceaseless activity of interpreting and reconstructing the social and material world.

Although human beings are part of the natural world, inasmuch as they possess a physical body, they cannot be understood simply as a zoological phenomenon, they do not have a nature, a defined essence. Rather, human beings are a "project" of transformation of both the material world and themselves.

For the Humanist Movement, the collective human project is to humanize the Earth. In other words, to eliminate physical pain and mental suffering and, consequently, to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination, which deprive human beings of their intentionality and freedom, reducing them to things, to natural objects, to mere instruments of the intentionality of others.

The Humanist Movement synthesizes all of this in the maxim: "Nothing above the human being, and no human being above another."

Yet it could be objected that:

Is not God above the human being?

Is there not, perhaps, a divine spark that makes the human being free and radically different from all animate beings?

Why, then, are not God, God's words, God's commandments, placed above the human being?

Is not God the center of all things, as the great religions teach?

For us, it is very important to distinguish between *religions* -- with their sacred books, their theologies, their rites and cults -- and the *religious spirit*.

The religious spirit has been expressed in history in ways that have not necessarily agreed with the canons established and accepted by religions.

We respect religions and understand them as paths to approach the ineffable, and yet we understand that the luminous, the divine, cannot be reduced to words or human images.

We also know that faith -- which can move mountains -- cannot be imposed, and that it can appear or disappear at different moments of life. That is why we accept among us atheists and believers of all religions.

I would like to conclude with the words of Silo, the founder of the Humanist Movement, from his speech: "Meaning of Life."

"...I declare before all of you my faith and my certainty of experience that death does not stop the future, that death on the contrary modifies the provisional state of our existence to launch it toward immortal transcendence.

And I do not impose my certainty or my faith upon anyone, and I live in harmony with those who find themselves in different states with respect to meaning in life. But I am obliged in solidarity to offer this message—a message that I recognize makes the human being happy and free. For no reason will I evade my responsibility to express my truths, though they may seem doubtful to those who experience the provisional nature of life and the absurdity of death.

Furthermore, though I clearly define my own position with respect to this point, I never ask others about their personal beliefs. And I proclaim the freedom of all human beings to believe or not to believe in God and the freedom to believe or not to believe in immortality.

And so, among the thousands upon thousands of men and women who, shoulder to shoulder, work with us in solidarity, there are atheists and believers, people with doubts and people with certainties, and none of them are asked about their faith. Instead, everything is given as an orientation that may help each of them decide for themselves the path that best makes clear the meaning of their lives.

It is less than courageous to refrain from proclaiming one's truths, but it is unworthy of true solidarity to try to impose them upon others."

Nothing more. Thank you very much.