

## Global Citizen Education for future Generations

I will present my reflection by offering some personal insights and comments stimulated by the questions, which the organizers posed to us speakers of this session. I do not necessarily follow the same order by I keep the same questions as I found them very relevant for my reflection on the topic.

### 1. What is global citizenship for me?

Global citizenship is a reality that we are all called to live if humanity is to survive. It is linked to two fundamental aspects: education and peace, the first can provide a proper format and method for living as true global citizens, the second is the goal. With no education and openness to others without any kind of discrimination, it is impossible to be a world citizen. Yet, even without peace, we will never be able to be one. Indeed, today the risk is that soon the world will no longer exist. However, to begin with, let me define the idea of 'global citizenship' with the help of four great men and women of the last century who, with their lives and thoughts, have shaped the personalities of millions of people, including me, who believe in the possibility of global citizenship. They were all, in their own way, educationists and somehow paved new paths towards a true formation of global citizens.

Rabindranath Tagore, was the Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1913, founder of the Shanti Niketan School in Bengal not far from Kolkata. Tagore's 1918 article 'The Centre of Indian Culture' presents his project of a university as a centre in direct connection with Indian life, first establishing a link with the whole of Asia and then opening up to the whole world. Tagore founded such a university in the same year and officially inaugurated it in 1922. Its name 'Visva-Bharati' expresses the link between India and the world, and its motto *yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam* means 'Where the whole world comes together in one nest'. It is in such an environment that one can train people for global citizenship.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: *"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. However, I refuse to be blown off my feet anyway.<sup>1</sup> Nothing can be farther from my thought that that we should become exclusive or erect barriers. Nevertheless, I do respectfully contend that an appreciation of other cultures can fitly follow, never precede, an appreciation and assimilation of our own".<sup>2</sup> "I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, fellow citizens and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians and Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinction.<sup>3</sup> We must widen the circle of our love until it embraces the whole village; the village in its turn must take into its fold the district, the district the province and so on until the scope of our love becomes co-terminus with the world.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 01.06.1921.

<sup>2</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 01.09.1921.

<sup>3</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiographi or The Story of my Experiments with the Truth*, 204.

<sup>4</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 27 gennaio 1929, 214.

Chiara Lubich, an Italian woman, in 1972, speaking to several hundred young people, launched the category of the 'world man/woman', a prophetic definition of the 'global citizen'. She stated: "*We are in the age in which it is necessary for young people to be formed with a mentality that is no longer only Western or Muslim mentality or Buddhist mentality or Oriental mentality. [...] young people need to be formed with a world-mentality: a 'world-man/woman'*". A few years later, an Italian Catholic priest, Ernesto Balducci, insisted on this very concept with a new definition. '*The true man to whom we must now turn does not lie within the perimeter of existing cultures, he stands higher up, and he transcends us. [...] fidelity to the culture of which I am a son obliges me to project before me a strategy of planetary man/woman'*'.

I think that these prophets of the '*global man/woman*', or of the '*world-man/woman*', or even of the '*planetary man/woman*', show us precise directions to realize this dream, which is also an unavoidable obligation for the man and woman of today. On one side, it is necessary to be conscious sons and daughters of our own cultures, but at the same time to be open to the whole world in order to embrace it and be its citizens. On the other, today, it is ever more essential and crucial to provide educational programs and to work on research projects capable of orienting towards the shaping of paths, which can lead to achieve peace. In order to do so, it is essential to ensure the formation of a new culture of citizenship. This requires a cultural change. We need a 'movement of ideas', which through the tools of education does not limit itself to propose only a vague aspiration to peace and global citizenship. Neither do we need only theories. Rather, the world requires young people to be formed through programs, which can combine theory and practice, where students can experience in a multicultural, multi-religious environment what they study. These become small laboratories for future protagonists – as global citizens – of peace processes in the world.

## **2. How do I realize this in my life?**

To struggle for being a citizen of the world is a daily commitment that constantly calls me not to fall into the temptation of self-referentialism: for instance that of my culture and of my religion. It is a commitment to give the other(s) the chance to be 'other', to not want or expect them to be like me and like those of my culture and religion. Personally, I am grateful that life has given me many opportunities to confront 'others', other cultures, other religions and groups with socio-political positions different from my own. Fundamental was my moving to India at the age of 26. Straight way, I was confronted with another culture and many religions. I encountered ways of thinking, believing, living that were completely different from my own. Initially, I struggled with all this, but I soon realized that it was a great opportunity for me. At the same time, I realized that this experience offered a unique chance so that I could give my own contribution to humanity by forming myself to be a global citizen open to other ways of thinking and living. Surely, mine was just a drop in the ocean. Yet, the ocean is made of drops. A long journey began for me, not always easy, but very rich and new. It lasted for years, until one day I realized in the depths of my being that it was right that there were people different from me, people who think, live and believe in a way that is far from mine. This diversity is not a threat, but a chance for being

enriched. This understanding was not superficial, just a coat of paint. It was deep in my spirit and in my mind. Since then, travelling the world, meeting people who are different from each other, I have always found myself enriched, realizing that it is I who must accept diversity and that together, we can build a sustainable and fraternal society. I committed myself to work in forming people to this new culture.

Above all, over the years, I have become convinced that in order to contribute constructively to global citizenship I myself can and must live as a global citizen. It is a personal commitment, beforehand, and I myself have to give a credible and imitable image of this, every day of my life, in my environment. Today, for instance, in practice, I must realize it in my university. For instance, I wish my courses were not informative, but transformative. If they are informative, it means that I have filled the students with notions, with my knowledge, which normally come from my culture or how it reads reality. If they are transformative, it means that, in the course of the year, the students asked themselves questions to which they had to seek answers. I myself go through the same process. Nevertheless, the students have to find answers to the questions, which constantly emerge and we work together in the process that, over the months, transforms them. I am fortunate to have students from all over the world, from different cultures, ethnic groups and, sometimes, even different religions. The courses deeply engage them; the differences become a reason for discussion, and for mutual knowledge and enrichment. Very often, none of us knows how a lesson will end, where it will take us. I myself discover things, aspects I would never have imagined. I have to let myself be carried along, take risks with them. It is a common journey towards a 'global citizenship'. On this path, I pick up the dimension of other cultures and religions, and so do my students, and together, I might say, we form ourselves to be '*citizens of the world*', constantly renewed and open to difference, to the other and to others. It is a very rich experience, because it does not deny anything of what each person is, but opens it up to a universal dimension. '*Global citizenship*', in fact, must not lead us to deny our cultural (or religious) roots, but rather to prevent them from closing in on themselves. For this, a true awareness of one's own identity is essential. However, this identity must be 'inclusive' and open to the possibility of welcoming other 'identities'.

### **3. How is global citizenship experienced today, or how should it be experienced?**

Very often - dare I say it - '*global citizenship*' today is confused with '*globalization of citizenship*'.

What is the difference between the two definitions?

The globalization of citizenship is a typical consequence of the globalization phenomenon that homogenizes everything by flattening specific characteristics and differences. This globalization obscures one's identity in the name of a universalism where specific cultures or expressions no longer exist. It is a progressive flattening that is often referred to with a meaningful term *Macdonaldization*. This is the great challenge today: not to fall into this trap. We are constantly connected and interconnected through internet, *tiktok*, *whatsapp*, AI, yet we remain people with our own characteristics, sons and daughters of our own cultures. Being citizens of

the world does not mean losing our own riches, but rather accepting those of others and together contributing to a different and better humanity: this means to build '*global citizenship*'. On the other hand, true '*global citizenship*' runs the risk of being suffocated by the multiple polarization that stems precisely from the '*globalization of citizenship*', which generates a resurgence of individualisms that are often violent and, in any case, intransigent and exclusive.

Today we need the courage of '*global citizenship*', capable of embracing difference, promoting it, appreciating it in order to contribute to peace and the common good in general, both locally and globally. However, to achieve all this it is necessary to ensure educational processes capable of forming '*world-men* and '*world-women*' or '*planetarian-men* and '*planetarian-women*', as Chiara Lubich and Father Ernesto Balducci predicted half a century ago. We need educational processes capable of composing a connective tissue that knows how to help to become 'us'. This allows us to move from extraneousness to proximity, through the encounter with difference, building reciprocity. Being global citizens, in fact, requires an education to an encounter with otherness that is always problematic. Faced with the other there is always a high margin of problematicity. Any educational relationship must take into account this potential encounter-clash, and accustom, and train to openness, research and an interpretation that is never definitive.

Moreover, it seems to me fundamental to recover an uncomfortable category for today's world: what Pope Francis calls '*incomplete thinking*'. Today, we live in a society where we are driven to more and more access to notions, thinking that each of us with google, wikipedia, AI can come to possess knowledge of everything. Instead, to work on educating for global citizenship, it is necessary to form the conviction that we cannot know everything. In fact, working to educate for global citizenship requires training in the conviction that our thinking inevitably remains incomplete. Being aware that no one can possess the Truth completely and definitively helps us to listen, to always be open for learning, especially from others, from those who are different from us. Therefore, we build day by day a global - not globalized - personality capable of containing - not possessing - other cultures, religions and values. Hence, a true global citizenship is born and takes shape. This approach is only possible if we place peace and citizenship at the end of a path that respect human dignity and the respective situations arising from it, with patience, never breaking the thread which runs through them. In order to be able to do so we need the courage to look ahead towards the future, while being fully aware of the past. This means to bet on initiating processes while responding to challenges.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See V. Bonomo, "In Search of a New Model of Peace and Citizenship. A Focus in Light of the Global Compact on Education" in Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Future for Education. The Global Compact on Education. Guideline.*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2021, 62-87