

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

(Assagioli Archives – Florence)

Dott. Roberto Assagioli

In order to establish proper relations between human beings and human groups, it is necessary to understand, accept and practice a great principle or truth, which is at the basis of life itself in all its manifestations: that of

UNITY IN DIVERSITY.

Life is essentially, inextricably ONE.

This was intuited by all the great philosophers, who put a single principle at the basis of reality, even though conceiving it and naming it in different ways. This was the revelation of the higher religions, which can be summarized in the words "the omnipresence of God". This is the inner experience experienced by all the great mystics, who in their unitive states of consciousness have seen and heard: "God in all and in all, and all and all in God". This is ultimately the last conclusion of scientific investigation that is discovering and demonstrating how all material things and all the forces of nature are different appearances and modalities of a single, all-pervading energy.

But the true nature of this unity must be well understood and applied. Unity should not be understood as uniformity and absence of any differentiation, but in a functional, dynamic and organic sense.

The essential unity of reality and life is poured out and expressed in an infinite richness of beings and forms that together constitute the grandiose

Understanding them will be facilitated if we examine how they operate in that exact compendium of the universe constituted by the human body.

1) - Physiology and Biology have shown how organic life is essentially based on Polarity. The fundamental polarity is the play of the opposing functions anabolic or assimilative, and catabolic or dissimilative. Through the first, the organism feeds, absorbs, transforms and stores substances and energy; through the second it releases them, uses them and consumes them, both to maintain its internal life and to defend it from the outside, both to affirm it in the environment, and finally to propagate.

In the human body these functions are performed by different organs and groups of organs; there are some glands with internal anabolic secretion and other catabolic; the parasympathetic nervous system is anabolic, the sympathetic nervous system is catabolic. These functions are antagonistic, that is, apparently "inimical", yet one would not make sense without the moderating and compensating action of the other. In fact, excess of anabolism produces obesity and autointoxication; excess catabolism produces wear and tear; if they go to the extreme they both lead to death.

2) - The necessity or the purpose of the diversity of functions are obvious. The more the living organisms have evolved and perfected, the more these differences have increased, moving from the simplicity of the single-celled Amoeba to the complexity of the human body. In the latter, the unitary life that animates it requires the harmonious co-operation of well-differentiated organs, such as the heart, the lungs, the liver, etc., and coordinated in functional processes, such as the digestive, circulatory, respiratory, etc. Here too there is a clear anatomical structural distinction and a strict necessary functional solidarity.

Let us now apply the fundamental truth of unity in diversity, and the principles that govern it, to the life of humanity and to the relationships between people.

It has been said very well that "the spirit of humanity is an indivisible whole". To this we must add that the life of humanity is - or should be - analogous to that of a human organism, with its apparatuses, its organs and its cells, constituted by various groupings of individuals.

I will not dwell further on the principle of polarity since I have dealt with it extensively on another occasion (see: The balancing and synthesis of opposites). I will examine only one example that is very current, and one of the most acute problems afflicting humanity: the conflict between conservative conservatives on the one hand and revolutionary innovators on the other. It is not difficult to recognize - for those who can observe "from above", without passions, fanatisms and preconceptions in one sense or another that the excessive and undisputed preponderance of both the one and the other tendency would be harmful. The first would lead to fossilization, arrest and death; the second to disorder, to anarchy and to dissolution.

Because living humanity requires at least a mutual adjustment of the two tendencies. I said "at least", because "the balancing of the opposite poles" is not accomplished only through their mutual moderating action "horizontally", on the same level, so to speak. In many cases it can be implemented even better by the intervention of a regulatory principle operating from a higher plane and with higher and more powerful energies than those in play and in conflict.

In the present case, this Higher Principle consists of a synthetic and spiritual conception of history as the unfolding of human evolution towards a higher Goal, from the intuitive vision of a divine Plan. In this conception the intellectual, moral, aesthetic and social "values" achieved in the past are not disowned but are freed from old forms which are no longer adequate, are re-experienced and re-expressed in different ways and adherent to the present, and integrated with the new "values" conquered by the progressive consciousness of humanity.

It can also be said that the proportions between conservative forces and innovative forces must not always be the same, but can and must vary according to historical periods. In the transition periods and at the beginning of a new cycle (as in the present moment) it is good that the revolutionary and innovative forces prevail, while in the middle period, when the parabola of a civilization is at its highest point, it is good that the stabilizing forces operate in such a way as to give the time and ease necessary for the specific qualities of that era to flourish in beauty and to bestow their precious fruits.

2) - Diversity of functions. In this field, as in the previous one, it is unfortunately clear that "the organism of humanity" is still far from having achieved the development and balance of a healthy and normal body. Its cells,

tissues and organs are still in a state of disorder. Men still do not know - or do not want to - understand and appreciate individuals and groups different from them by nature, quality and function, and this prevents collaboration and mutual integration necessary for the good of all.

A great help in implementing that understanding and appreciation is given by the knowledge of the various psychological types and their respective functions.

We do not realize enough how big the difference is between these various human types. Although they exist materially side by side, they actually live in different worlds and have almost no psychological contact with each other. Consider for example the four basic psychological types described by Jung: the sensory or practical type, the emotional, the mental and the intuitive. Imagine that four people, each belonging to one of these types, respectively, are observing the same landscape from a height. The man belonging to the practical type will turn his interest to the agricultural and commercial aspect of what he sees; he will try to calculate the area of the fields lying beneath his eyes, the profit they can make and what those lands can be worth.

The second person, a musician, in contemplating the play of lines and masses, the contrast of lights and shadows, the various dissonances, will feel the soul of that landscape, will be pervaded by a particular emotional tone. Thus, while the result of the observation of the first can be a purchase contract, the contemplation of the second can give rise to a symphony.

The third observer will turn his attention to the natural factors that have been at stake here: the climate, the geological constitution of the soil, the fauna and flora and the various scientific problems deriving from it. A geological and zoological monograph could therefore be derived.

The fourth, on the other hand, will be induced by the beauty of the landscape to turn his soul to God, to contemplate the glory of his visible and invisible creation; he will feel the unity of life, communion with God, and the effect could be ecstasy ...

If each of these four people then wrote what he perceived, felt, thought or intuited, in their writings there would perhaps be few equal phrases, and those who read could hardly believe that they had been inspired by the observation of the same scene.

This observation of the fact that men live side by side, but in fact in different and almost separate worlds, is of great importance.

This fact reveals to us the true cause of many fundamental misunderstandings, of many unjust criticisms, of many antagonisms which complicate our lives and which create an incalculable quantity of unnecessary suffering. Thus, for example, for a practical, simple and positive man, a complex and changeable female psyche remains an incomprehensible mystery, and for her part the woman of this kind will not be inclined to appreciate the simple and solid virtues of that man.

The artist is often considered, by practical men, as an oddball and somewhat ridiculous. When Ariosto presented his Orlando Furioso to a cardinal, he had the following answer: "Messer Ludovico, how did you manage to put together so much balderdash?" ...

And many consider the poet, as Carducci said:

"A loafer who
Goes around acting the boss in the cantons
With his eyes turning
From the angels to the swifts."

On the other hand, the artist often shows an exaggerated contempt for the modest, but often necessary bourgeois virtues, and does not feel the dignity and the value of the constant search for the truth accomplished by the scientist, the thinker.

To eliminate these barriers of misunderstanding that sadly separate men from each other, a serious study of individual psychology is needed, done as early as possible, when the character is not yet fully formed and crystallized within rigid limits.

Such a study can make us understand and appreciate the different types from the one to which we belong - it reveals the necessary social and spiritual function, shows us the gifts that can come to us and that even bring us

continuously without realizing it. Thus, the foundations of a better evaluation and of a true fraternity among men are created.

We should not be surprised that individuals and human groups so different from each other do not understand and appreciate each other, and that when any reason for dissension arises they fight bitterly. Yet they are all necessary to form a truly human civilization.

A world composed entirely of "practical" types would be a very dry and grey one; a humanity composed of pure artists could hardly survive; a community made up of scientists alone would be too one-sided; the strong-willed ones, desiring domination and isolated from each other, would destroy each other, and the same would happen for every other kind, without the integration brought about by others.

It is therefore clear how appropriate, indeed necessary, is the knowledge, understanding and cooperation among the various human types - based on the recognition that they are part of a living and inseparable unity.

Roberto Assagioli
(Translated by Gordon Symons)