

THE PARADOX OF BEING CHRISTIAN IN GLOBALIZED SOCIETY

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Abstract: Globalization, a phenomenon that initially manifested itself on the economic level, then on the social and cultural one, contributed decisively to the formation of this consciousness by bringing states closer together and strengthening their relations. Thus, we are dealing with an increase in interdependence, of the interaction between peoples around the world (economic, financial, military, tourism, educational) which has subsequently evolved into an accentuated interdependence between people. The Church is called to watch over these problems and to help the states, through the light of the gospel, to solve the truth. Even if some forces manifest themselves against the Church's position in the contemporary world, the values that the Church proposes can help to develop another, more humane globalization that defends human dignity and promotes the progress of people. The Church received the mandate from Christ to carry on her loving work, understanding the salvation brought by Christ as a transformation of the social, political, and economic order. Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the Church recognizes God's plan that encompasses the entire human race and that envisions the union of all, in the paschal mystery of Christ, in the Kingdom of God, proclaimed as the sign of Christ's reign over the entire universe. The mission of the Church is to fulfil the mandate of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and to anticipate its presence amid the community, leading the entire creation to its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. The Church cannot remain indifferent to the problems faced by people's families; therefore, it cannot provide a more telling proof of its solidarity, respect and love for the whole family of people than by establishing with it is a dialogue about these various issues.

Keywords: globalization, society, Church, *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes*, universality, sacrament of salvation, humankind, collaboration, human family.

Introduction

Globalization is a phenomenon that has encompassed our entire existence, whether we are talking about politics, economics or the social field, all these sectors of human life bear the imprint of this complex and diverse process. Interactions between states and peoples have intensified. This fact has led to the creation of such a strong link of interdependence that

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the effects of world events taking place are felt across the planet. In this globalized and united world, the Church is called to intervene and to be a true witness and worker in order to promote the common good and solidarity between people. However, this mission of the Church is not without challenges, especially since in the process of globalization, religion and faith have often been neglected, being considered aspects related to the private sphere of man and his subjectivity.

1. Globalization and religion

Globalization presents opportunities and challenges for religion, especially since faith itself manifests a universal value. Globalization is characterized by a high degree of complexity and interdependence, considered as a whole with all the processes and mechanisms involved. Therefore, the human person must be flexible and innovative in order to accept the confrontation with other ideas and principles that accompany the process of globalization².

Religion is an important element of the phenomenon of globalization, in that there is a harmony between the principles it promotes and those of the community of nations: it is about moral imperatives, with a universal cultural value. Because the idea of a “global state” is not accepted, nation-states reach a high level of authority by establishing cultural models, principles, and encounters that show an interest in humanity, not just the economy. In this context, a balance between faith and reason is needed, even if it is often endangered by certain interests contrary to human dignity³.

The secularized view of globalization emphasizes the role of humanity in history, especially in that it acts as a sovereign actor that controls the nature and progress of civilization. In this scheme of thinking, God is not an essential actor, so a force that can be near or far - has a relative role, being marginalized and insignificant. Therefore, morality becomes an individual property, and the purpose of his happiness is based on real history and not a spiritual one⁴.

Despite the tendency to reduce religion to the private sphere of man and to interpret it as a means of expressing the personality of the individual, religion is a key factor in globalization. This influence manifests itself in the way it manages to mobilize masses of people and change vision, on humanity. This power of influence of religion has a binary value, on the one hand, it can be a positive one, contributing to the promotion and protection

² Cf. G. M. THOMAS, „Globalization: The Major Players”, in G. RITZER (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2007, 36.

³ Cf. G. M. THOMAS, „Globalization: The Major Players”, 35.

⁴ Cf. G. M. THOMAS, „Globalization: The Major Players”, 35.

of the common good of nations and their progress, but also a negative one, through sectarian and violent manifestations. An example of this could be the events of September 11, 2001, when, contrary to the view that religion has no say internationally, the attacks proved how religious the world we live in is, and even if it is about a society that wants to be secularized, however, religion can lead to actions with a global impact⁵.

Globalization calls for a common life in society, which means conflict and interaction. This coexistence and relationship between religion and culture creates a dialogue of civilizations and stability and continuity for cooperation towards the development and support of peace, as the spiritual and cultural values of religious communities, which transcend states, contribute to shaping an effective space for international cooperation⁶.

The positive impact of religion in the context of globalization must be brought by the Church, because, even if some powers challenge its role, however, the Christian vision of humanity has profoundly marked the understanding of communion between people. Minority Christianity comes into close contact with the state, especially during the Middle Ages and in the context of great geographical discoveries when European culture is considered a Christian culture⁷.

The Church can act as a subsystem of modern global society, engaging in economic, political, or social issues. This capacity of the Church to be active internationally is justified by the defence and promotion of the dignity of the human person, which is at the heart of the Church's social mission. Defending human dignity, the Church must use its international structures (especially the communion link that exists between the local Churches and the Universal Church) and fight against the social injustices caused by the globalized economy. Also, in order to promote the common good of societies, the Church is called to build civil societies in states, societies that, once formed, contribute to the proper functioning of the system of moral values and to maintaining a balance in states⁸.

There is an international, or universal, vocation of the Church. This calling is founded on the mandate received from Jesus Christ: to preach the Gospel to all humanity.

⁵ Cf. J. A. REES, „Religion and Culture”, in S. McGlinchey, *International Relations*, E-International Relations Publishing, Bristol 2017, 98-99.

⁶ Cf. J. A. REES, „Religion and Culture”, 103-110.

⁷ Cf. S. M. STUDEBAKER – B. K. BROADHEAD, „Introduction”, in G. L. Heath (ed.), *The Globalization of Christianity. Implications for Christian Ministry and Theology*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene 2014, 3.

⁸ Cf. H. T. SANKS, „Globalization and the Church's social mission”, in *Theological Studies*, vol. LX, nr. 4/1999, 644-645.

2. The universal vocation of Christianity

Christianity is no stranger to the phenomenon of globalization since its beginnings having a universal destiny. In *Mt* 28:19⁹, Jesus Christ sends his apostles to carry the news of the salvation of all people, regardless of place or status, thus marking the unity of all humanity. We are dealing with a double recognition of the unity of the human race: once in Adam, the first man, and then in Christ, the new principle of unity, the true “image of God”¹⁰, in which man finds his fulfilment¹¹.

The event of the Incarnation is the act by which God enters and transforms human history. In *Rom* 5: 12-21, St. Paul joins two types, Adam and Christ, pointing to them as elements of the unity of the human race. There is a solidarity of humanity in Adam, and through this, human history is caught in the tragedies of sin and death. Later, in *Rom* 8: 18-25, Paul shows how the whole creation is affected by Adam’s sin, the remedy for this condition being precisely the entry of God into the history of humanity through the Incarnation, so that through this act, they bring justice and grace to break. the power of personal, cultural and social sin. The Incarnation of the Son of God is the most convenient because it involves the whole spectrum of human nature, even the cultural element. Christ, incarnating, entered and lived in a cultural context, but through his death and resurrection, he transformed this culture, giving it a saving value. Thus, the salvation brought by Christ offers an invitation to humanity to enter into solidarity with Christ in his work of building up the Kingdom of God¹².

“For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh”¹³ and for those who live the new life in Christ, racial and cultural differences are no longer a reason for division. This unity of the whole human race has its roots in the paschal mystery of Christ, whose suffering, death and resurrection acquire a universal value: all men were saved through the sacrificial work of Christ, this being the will of God the Father¹⁴.

God is the one who intervenes in human history, to transform evil into good through sacrifice, that is, to heal. Nevertheless, this intervention of God does not have a political character, being linked to a certain structure,

⁹ “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.

¹⁰ *2Cor* 4,4.

¹¹ Cf. N. ORNEROD, „Christ, Globalization and the Church”, in *Journal of Moral Theology*, vol. II, nr. 1/2013, 98.

¹² Cf. N. ORNEROD, „Christ, Globalization and the Church”, 104.

¹³ *Eph* 2,14.

¹⁴ Cf. *2Tim* 2,11.

but instead has a universal value; the healing power of God is destined for all people. Therefore, the Church has the mission to form consciences, so that, through the action of the Holy Spirit, salvation can reach all peoples. The word has entered history, not above or beyond it, as an element that injects the power of God's salvation through the historical process itself. The means of the fundamental cause of healing is the love of God, offered to all people¹⁵.

The Church received the mandate from Christ to carry on her loving work, understanding the salvation brought by Christ as a transformation of the social, political, and economic order. Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the Church recognizes God's plan that encompasses the entire human race and that envisions the union of all, in the paschal mystery of Christ, in the Kingdom of God, proclaimed as the sign of Christ's reign over the entire universe. This kingdom is one characterized by peace, justice and understanding between God and creation and is open to all people. From the moment of Pentecost, the Church fulfils its mission to confess the unity of all peoples and to proclaim the harmony that must exist between them, since their unity does not mean abandoning their cultural baggage, but involving it. Through his sermon, the Church revolutionized the vision of the world: all men are equal and enjoy full unity in Christ¹⁶.

The Church is sent into the world to bring the good news to all people and thus bring them all to unity, and this mission has inevitably led her to interact with political power. New Testament texts are referring to the relationship between Church members and politics: in *Rom 13*, Paul urges Christians to obey political authority, and in *Rev 13*, Christians are called to patience concerning the state. These indications are not political, but of a pastoral one, and throughout history, these theories have evolved, bringing the Church either in close collaboration with the political power or in different camps. The Christian tradition has always raised the issue of an "anomaly" of the presence of Christians in political life because fidelity to the ecclesial community made him suspicious in the eyes of political society and vice versa; there was a tension between authority and freedom¹⁷.

The change of perspective of the Church on her place in the world took place at the Second Vatican Council, but this transformation of the role of the People of God in human society was prepared by several movements that wanted reformation of the Church, to be with true "light of the nations". With this Council, the individualistic and spiritualist perspective on life

¹⁵ Cf. N. ORNEROD, „Christ, Globalization and the Church”, 100-103.

¹⁶ Cf. H. T. SANKS, „Globalization and the Church's social mission”, 625-627.

¹⁷ Cf. K. R. HINES, „Vatican II and Contemporary Politics”, in P. C. MANUL, *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State*, Georgetown University Press, Washington D. C. 2006, 15-16.

was overcome, but a political vision was not adopted. socio-political, however, new directives were drawn up for better collaboration between the Church and the nations, focusing on the dignity of the human person¹⁸.

Moreover, since in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission. For this reason, the Church admonishes her own sons, but also humanity as a whole, to overcome all strife between nations and race in this family spirit of God's children, in the same way, to give internal strength to human associations which are just¹⁹.

The message of Christianity offers a universal vision of the lives of people and peoples on earth, emphasizing that this unity of the human community must not be the result of terror or abuse of power, but a conquest of morality and freedom. It cannot be about the establishment of the political power of the Church, but about an awareness of the world that peoples aspire to unity not only for economic reasons but also under being part of the same human family, in which they are active members.

3. The Church in the world

The Second Vatican Council, through the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, states that the Church physically embodies the reality of grace. However, the Church does not bring grace into a wholly profane situation but illuminates the presence of grace in situations thought to be profane, but which already enjoyed the presence and blessing of God. The presence of God in the globalized world becomes possible precisely through the social work of the Church.

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this

¹⁸ Cf. L. ALICI, *Catolicii și politica*, trad. L. ROMANESCU, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș 2019, 13-14.

¹⁹ SECOND COUNCIL OF VATICAN, The pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 42: AAS 58(1966), 1060-1061.

work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ²⁰.

Lumen gentium, through this expression “sacrament of salvation”, wanted to define not so much the nature of God’s people, but especially its function, namely the salvation of humankind. Through the Church, God communicates the salvation of all people on earth and of all times, and this mediating function of the Church is essential in understanding the reality of the globalized world. The Church is one, but composed of several members, a characteristic note of which is Catholicism. Through the Catholic, universal character of the Church, one can offer an answer to the problems related to the relationship between the particular and the universal that accompany the process of globalization²¹. The Church is a good example of the particularization of the universal and can promote a better form of globalization.

In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase. Not only, then, is the people of God made up of different peoples but in its inner structure also it is composed of various ranks. This diversity among its members arises either by reason of their duties, as is the case with those who exercise the sacred ministry for the good of their brethren, or by reason of their condition and state of life, as is the case with those many who enter the religious state and, tending toward holiness by a narrower path, stimulate their brethren by their example. Moreover, within the Church particular Churches hold a rightful place; these Churches retain their own traditions, without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly of charity²².

Catholicism is an innate dowry of the Church and has several aspects: it describes the fullness of the divine gift of salvation and its penetration into human existence and its extension into history. The Catholicism of the Church seen as the fullness of faith and the salvation of mankind is closely related to the command of Jesus in Mt 28:19, and the technology of globalization ensures a better realization of communion, contributing to a new deepening of the universality of the Church²³.

²⁰ SECOND COUNCIL OF VATICAN, The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 1: AAS 57(1965), 5.

²¹ Cf. Ș. LUPU, *Misterul Bisericii*, Sapientia, Iași 2016, 261.

²² SECOND COUNCIL OF VATICAN, The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 1: AAS 57(1965), 17-18.

²³ Cf. V. J. MILLER, „Where is the Church? Globalization and Catholicity”, in *Theological Studies*, nr. 69/2008, 424-425.

John Paul II, speaking about the communion of differences that characterize the Church, brings to the fore the urgency for the Church to assume a new role in globalization, to build another globalization, based on solidarity and respect for human rights. The Church is called to deepen its structures and the way of experiencing universality in order to respond to globalizing movements. This answer can be an important source for cultivating an alternative form of globalization²⁴.

In addition to this image of the Church that embraces all people and gives them the gift of salvation, the Second Vatican Council also highlighted another image of the Church as a servant of all humanity. It exists not only for its members, but for the whole family of mankind, like Christ who died for all. The pastoral constitution on the Church in the contemporary world, *Gaudium et spes*, places the Church in the middle of the world as part of the human community²⁵.

The mission of the Church is to fulfil the mandate of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and to anticipate its presence amid the community, leading the entire creation to its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. The Church cannot remain indifferent to the problems faced by people's families, therefore, "it cannot provide a more telling proof of its solidarity, respect and love for the whole family of people (...) than by establishing with it is a dialogue about these various issues"²⁶.

As far as political society is concerned, it is presented by the Council as a necessary integration of the person, because the person is not self-sufficient. Against a narrow conception of society, the Council opposes an organic vision: the doctrine of the mystical body: every man is an integral part of the body which is the human family. This conception of society requires an altruistic ethic, a Christian ethic²⁷.

The Constitution of *Gaudium et Spes* highlighted a theory of how the Church should get involved in the world, namely the theory of indirect participation. Through this vision, the Church and the world are two complete realities in themselves, of different nature: The Church belongs to the supernatural order, while the world belongs to the natural order and aims at the harmonious development of all potentialities. The Church according to this theory has a double relationship, directly and indirectly, therefore, historical and worldly commitment is not foreign to the Church and

²⁴ Cf. V. J. MILLER, „Where is the Church? Globalization and Catholicity”, 426-428.

²⁵ Cf. SECOND COUNCIL OF VATICAN, The pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 2: AAS 58(1966), 1026.

²⁶ SECOND COUNCIL OF VATICAN, The pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 3: AAS 58(1966), 1027.

²⁷ Cf. Ș. LUPU, *Misterul Bisericii*, 424.

Christians, because such a commitment concerns God's plan of salvation. This scheme proposed as the official doctrine of the Church was called into question in the post-conciliar years, by the fact that it promotes weak employment of the Church and its members in time, especially in the political and social sphere. It was pointed out that the distinction regarding the natures of the two realities contradicts the only historical order that embraces everything. Theologians have proposed replacing this theory with other schemes in which the distinction between the Church and the world becomes more nuanced or towards a deepening of direct participation²⁸.

Conclusion

The Church is the sign that communicates and unites all people and, at the same time, is the servant of all humanity. These statements of the Second Vatican Council indicate the Church's vision of humanity: there is one humanity, one family of nations, with which it is necessary to work together to promote the common good and human rights. The Church and the international community must have a dialogue based on support, but also on criticism when abuses occur. The Church must not be content to criticize the world, but must often apply it to itself: against its own mistakes, failures, or betrayals. The Church is a sacrament of the salvation of the world and is placed in the service of the latter, but not to follow her in her wanderings, but to establish in her the Kingdom of God²⁹.

²⁸ Cf. Ș. LUPU, *Misterul Bisericii*, 434-436.

²⁹ Cf. Ș. LUPU, *Misterul Bisericii*, 439.