Church and culture in the today`s world

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Abstract

This paper aims to point out some basic ideas concerning the relationship between faith and reason, religion and culture (especially philosophy) and the role that the Christian Church should play in our contemporary diverse society.

Keywords: faith, religion, Church, Christianity, philosophy, language, community of communication, Weltanschauung.

1. The end of the 21st century, clearly marked by the confrontation between modernism and postmodernism, appears to have been dominated by a feeling of dissatisfaction, as well as by an excess of historical consciousness, putting into question not only one side or another of the modernity, but even the style of thought and, on a broader plane, the configurations at the level of Weltanschauung and life forms. Queries aimed – then as today – the truth, values and technique, in a quite unusual manner: causing concern or at least wonder, sometimes even blockages of communication, arising directly from a disorder of language, but favoring also a sense of human emancipation. As the ancients were saying: Nondum omnium diem solem occidisse.2

The decisive step of registration in a new history was made! The necessity to resize the human behaviour, the horizon of life, the truth and the consciousness of perennial values of culture has become imminent. The advice of a great modern philosopher becomes somehow prophetic and resonant: “The man must honour himself and consider himself worthy of what is higher. Regarding the greatness and power of the spirit, his thoughts will never be good enough.”3

We shouldn’t forget that, under these new conditions, a new phenomenon appears, namely, the “re-enchantment” of the world, being opposite to what Max Weber called the “disenchantment of the world” (“Entzäuberung der Welt”)
and present in various forms of losing the sense of values and the genuineness: the linguistic degradation of the public discourse; the lack of measurement and nuance in appreciation; the weak concern for identity, ideal and performance in history; the feeling of being “cheated”, that something was “confiscated” and, in response, the culpability (sometimes in corpore) of others. But the most significant phenomenon is what the tradition of the philosophy of values used to call by the expression “pass someone by”: “Many people meet other people. Only few of them really ‘see’, in an axiological sense… isn’t it so absurd that everyone knows what is the other’s desire and yet they pass by without seeing that the man remains alone with the hidden pain of his solitude?”

2. However, the retrieval of what is authentic, the return to normality must be still possible! Of course, this may be possible with the help of culture, by promoting the taste for values, past (“the tradition”) and contemporary. We should remember Edmund Husserl’s advice, who studied the “crisis of European humanity” a century ago, pointing that “the European humanity” has “only two ways out: the European decline and alienation, the abandonment of the rational sense of life and the return to hostility and barbarism, or, the European rebirth through the spirit of philosophy and the heroism of reason”.

This moment expresses a significant meeting for the understanding of the phenomena of spiritual life, the meeting between truth and reason. These two paradigms of thought, whose understanding at the level of contemporary philosophy manage the connections between man, “truth” and “reason” in the forms of culture and according to “the types of experience”, lead to a sui generis pluralism, which is relevant through the plurality of “experiences of truth” (analyzed by the hermeneutic representatives, particularly by H.-G. Gadamer) and the pluralization (originated in the Kantian philosophy: “pure theoretical reason” and “pure practical reason”) of “Reason” seen as “Rationality” (what has sense, what is grounded in knowledge, action – including behavior – and human creation).

In this context, the most significant is the plurality of what is true (das Wahre, seen as totality, in the Hegelian hermeneutic): “the total experience which man acquires in the world”, “the experience of truth” (Erfahrung von Wahrheit), i.e. “the Truth” seen in different “experiences”, as Gadamer specified: the hermeneutic procedure aims “to discern, wherever they encounter the experience of truth… The sciences of the spirit use other modalities of experience than the scientific experience, namely: the experience of philosophy, the experience of art, the experience of history itself.”

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Our times have, more than ever, the consciousness of “some types of experience”, as the interaction, and implicitly, the consciousness of “the types of rationality” and its formal configuration as a system of culture. “Man – noticed E. Cassirer – lives in a symbolic universe, not in a simply natural one. The language, the myth, the art and the religion are parts of this universe, multicolored aspects that interact in the network of symbols… The man has no longer… a direct relationship with the reality… He lives intensely in the forms of language, in the works of art, in mythical symbols or in religious myths and he can no longer look, nor learn anything outside the interrelationship with these artificial environments.”

3. In this moment, we can start the discussion on the relationship (in fact, the differences in unity!) between faith and knowledge (theoretical and scientific), religion and philosophy (as forms of culture), theology and metaphysics (forms of interpretive approach, whose finality is a world conception) and, the last but not the least, on the place and the role of Church in the society and cultural life.

We should notice now some theological arguments, formulated on the background of difficulties and trying to reveal solutions for dialogue and communication.

We live in an era when the idea of cultural pluralism imposes itself (though the philosophy isn’t excluded), creating structures for the new training programs, aiming to expose what unifies us in a non-generic universality expressed in multiple forms, both historical and axiological (so their living moment is forever included in the horizon of eternity).

In these conditions, the main advice would imply an universality that brings together the truth and the salvation: God – “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2, 4).

Concerning the sacred message, the theology states: “Every epoch comes with a cultural and specific problem, so the theology is called to find answers to its questions, always relying on the divine Revelation. In this way, the Church is able to carry on its mission in a fruitful manner”. More precisely, the theology “can not descend into the sphere of practical relationships... if it does not engage a dialogue with culture”, to find answers to the problems of Church and to its mission. From this point of view, one could say that the Church is called to permanently renew itself, challenging the culture and the problems of its time.

Nevertheless, the dialogue between theology and culture should be supported by a clear conception of values and their interaction in the cultural space. In fact, this seems to be its propitious comprehension, aiming to acquire

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“the secularized culture” and its valuable background: a) the position of religious values in the system of cultural values; b) the position of religion inside the fundamental forms (language, myth, art, religion, science, philosophy, technique) of culture and, as a result, the function of the theological approach in the interaction with other types of approaches (especially the scientific and philosophical ones).

Consequently, the process will require a sui generis complementarity: a) on the background of the unity between reason and mysticism, distinguishing their different message (form and content, or even the “ontological commitment”); b) by understanding the theocentric and anthropocentric positions, as well as the specificity of the contemporary anthropological vision on the background of the axiological interactions of a dynamic culture; c) by comparing the theological and metaphysical perspectives on transcendence, namely “the theory of the two worlds”, trying to avoid the sacralization of the world and its vision.

The boundaries whereof the Kantian criticism is speaking seem to be necessary: “Ich mußte also das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen”.8

In other words, the discourse focuses on the difference between what is an object of knowledge and what is an article of faith, and, according to Kant, it emphasizes the distinction between “Religionsglaube” (seen as a moral entity, on the basis of “practical reason”) and “Kirchenglaube” (“the faith being objectified by representation”). This raises the question of the moral autonomy and involves, therefore, the autonomy of the human reason (treated as an object in the dialogue between theology and metaphysics) which becomes intelligible as a consequence of the difference between “knowledge” (Wissen) and faith.

4. These theoretical and methodological aspects, analyzing differences or insurmountable oppositions, have a distinct appearance in the relationship with the contemporary society which confronts crisis at multiple levels, mostly because the failure of many cultural, educational and political models in nowadays world.

In fact, the consequences of the laicization of culture due to the “modern man” and the “new spirit of science” have been observed since a long time ago. If we perform a simple systematization (hopefully not a simplistic one!), we should pay attention to the following components of this crisis: a) the message of the evangelical openings, honestly received and presenting a remarkable depth, opposed to the new forms of non-receiving (which are increasingly manifested through the dominance of scientism and secular spirit); b) the religious experience, which narrowed its diffusion; c) the other forms of experience, also diminished and even peripheral for most people; d) the contemporary human

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beings, specific to this epoch, whose spiritual structure is alienated in regard to social, cultural and religious values (in other words, the Christianity is removed but nothing else seems to replace it); e) a low level of religiosity, indicating the lack of values in the structure of human spirituality; f) the spirit of love and joy, so characteristic for the European Christianity, which is now rarely felt in the contemporary world; g) the European alienation in regard to Christianity, which risks to become a loss of self and a death of ego; h) a question that arises more than ever, because it seems to indicate a right formula: “Has the humanity reached an impasse?”.

Despite these facts, the augmentation of crisis has a positive side too, most precisely, the new types of values and their evolution, which appeared in Europe at the end of the 20th century. The new direction becomes more and more insistent, and, in the same time, the necessity of a spiritual and moral renewal reveals its importance.

Under these circumstances, our contemporary world requires balance and reposition of normality, especially in the axiological space, concerning the values of culture and the values of faith (these values represent the exponents of the cultural identity in the new world history and determine, in the same time, the European context).

The Church can exercise here its formative mission, seeking “to develop... the sense of order, discipline, research and analysis, which is specific to the Western culture. Because of this spirit, Western culture has been able to accomplish remarkable achievements in science and technology, with benefits for the entire world. And this didn’t happen only because of Western culture, but mostly because of God’s Spirit that is not the spirit of disorder and turmoil, but the one of the order and mutual communion.”

5. That is why God must coordinates everything and, when we examine the mission of Church in the human life and in the contemporary culture, we must situate Him in the center of our activity and thoughts: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was fully God. The word was with God in the beginning. All things were created by Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created.” (John 1, 1-3)

The assemblies of believers, the totality of those who believe in God and confess Him as a Savior and Christ, or the Church itself is structured as an image of the Holy Trinity or the representation of the supreme love. Accordingly, the Revelation is a main instrument of Church, and the Church keeps itself alive through Revelation. In addition, the real progress of theology represents a fidelity to Revelation, carried by the Holy Scripture and Tradition;

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their existence is continuously related to the life of Church, becoming a responsibility for believers and their cultural epoch.\textsuperscript{10}

The truth preached by the Church of Christ is the testimony of the relationship between God and His creation or the man and the world, confirming the perpetuity of the biblical message, the mission of the Church and its theology in the world nowadays. Therefore, the most important aspects are the efforts of the contemporary ecumenical movement which appeal to different methods for maintaining the Christian unity in the conditions of a historical and cultural diversity.

However, we should take as an example the ontological model of the Trinitarian community. The Church has the mission to contribute to the work of its believers through the unifying force of love; in addition, the cooperation and the dialogue with the followers of other religions or with the people of good faith from everywhere will help to overcome the difficulties that the human spirituality confront in the age of globalization, especially the tendencies to theoretically administer the “end” of diversity, which is an irreducible feature of the humanity.

6. In this point, the discourse returns to the pluralism of values and its role in relation to what is called the “secularized mentality of the contemporary man” or “secularized culture”. We should notice that the biblical message becomes efficient inside the cultural space specific to the contemporary man. However, it becomes a reality only if we regard the type of experience where the individual feelings occur.

In this paradigm, we encounter several mentalities (for example, the scientific mentality) for whom the message would require to be released by the sacred shell. Thus we have to introduce the world of textual languages (scientific, philosophical, poetic and so on) which operates with specific semantics and dynamic languages, structurally different from the text of Holy Scripture, whose exegesis imposes an apophatic and reserved attitude.\textsuperscript{11}

Being a specific theoretical discourse, theology mainly acts at the level of religious experience, though, because the religion is a form of culture, it interacts with other forms (science, art, technology and so on), so its theological approach (explanatory and interpretative) should take into account the universal cultural context and its interaction with the social life.

In other words, the complexity of the “cultural” phenomenon induces the dialogue and the mutual understanding. In fact, the discourse on faith and culture is not simple, but it reveals the unity to the rationality or Logos. What the theology considers as “the unit of Creation in the Spirit of God through the


\textsuperscript{11} St. Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Ambigua}, 79a, 79b.
universal order of all Creation”, a “rational” and unitary order, constitutes in fact a genuine prerequisite for a dialogue of “rationalities”: beyond differentiations, the rationality preserves the idea of a “rational and unitary order”, even if this process takes places in various systems, having different explanatory values and finalities for the human behavior.

This is the only manner that accomplishes the human needs and ideals, and it cannot be disregarded by any genuine interpretative approach. Therefore, it seems that sometimes we all say the same thing, even if our languages are different. In fact, we adhere to the same stages of rationality to which every individual rationality partakes. In the same time, the parabolic model (so specific to the sacred text) suggests multiple meanings applied to other plans of the discourse.

7. Nevertheless, the most important thing is the opportunity for this kind of meetings and, as a result, the possibilities of communication between different types of thought; anyway, because the cost of living is continuously extending, the oppositions becomes complementary and people start to communicate with each other. In the end, the communion of faith becomes stronger then ever in this “community of communication”.

The manner in which such engagement takes place, meeting a form or another of experience, belongs to the human deliberation. The options can be various. The most important thing is where we are in regard to truth, “rationality” and service of good. Here Kant’s deliberation acquires a strong sense: “... *der Mensch ist (von Natur) entweder sittlich gut oder sittlich böse*. Er füllt aber jedermann leicht bei, zu fragen: ob es auch mit dieser Disjunktion seine Richtigkeit habe, und ob nicht jemand behaupten könne: der Mensch sei von Natur keines von beiden; ein anderer aber: es sei beides zugleich, nämlich in einigen Stücken gut, in anderen böse. Die Erfahrung scheint sogar dieses Mittlere zwischen beiden Extremen zu bestätigen.”

Thus, the experience rises to support decision! These are the words of a great theoretician of experience for whom “the dignity of the human being” (*Würde des Menschen*) should be the basic thesis of every thinking under the sign of the triad: human-world-God.

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12 Translation: “… from a moral point of view, man is (by nature) either good or bad. Each of these two can be easily answered: if this disjunction is entitled and unless someone else may state: by nature the man is neither good nor bad; but someone else may say: the man is at once in both ways, namely: in one respect good, in another bad. Only the experience can confirm this mediation between the two extremes.”