

Some Perspectives on Religion, the Effects of Globalization and the Universalization of the Christian Message

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ABSTRACT: Human creativity has always generated new cultures, both material and non-material, such as ideas, objects, beliefs, traditions, customs, behavior, language, culture, institutions, etc. These diverse dimensions, often associated with spirituality, through which man manifested his presence in the cosmos, are real testimonies to his desire to find himself in a matrix that enables him to express himself to eternity. A kind of pattern with which to quantify and authenticate the diversity of expressions that define it. In other words, to analyze and measure his existence everywhere and always with the same measure. An act to univocally unify and universalize the specifics of all the parts that make it up in being. From the perspective of religion, however, it is definitely about something much deeper than the diversity of presence and creation through which man defines and measures the dimensions of his own worlds, because regardless of whether they are grounded in the sacred, the transcendent or the spirit, religion remains indisputably the unmistakable testimony of God's presence and, at the same time, of the multiple and diverse forms of manifestations through which the divine reveals its Being. These global human diversities reflect the way in which the identity of faith, founded on the conviction that God has revealed himself and on the dogmatic truths that testify to this fact, such as: the teaching about the creation of the world, the continuous presence of God in creation, the struggle of the Church to defend religious convictions, of the emblematic saints and martyrs who contributed to the foundation of the common memory in the great spiritual community of the Kingdom of God, highlights the image of a history based on the diversity of epiphanies and theophanies. In order

to perpetuate these virtues and values of faith, this study is addressed to the generations in search of and building their own paradise, from the perspective of the relationship between the globalized world, which proposes a revalued life, and the dissemination of the Christian message that the Church of Christ addresses to all nations (Matthew 28: 19).

KEYWORDS: globalization, diversity, universalization, identity, religion, Church

1. Globalization and universalization of Christian teaching

Globalization is meant to be perceived as a new pattern of expression of religious beliefs and traditions within which the spiritual emphasis is no longer on identity, but on the interweaving of cultures as universalizing spaces (Rotaru 2014, 532-541).

From this generalizing perspective, the relationship between the concept of globalization and the universal message of Christian teaching shows certain similarities, the most visible of which seem to be, on the one hand, the fact that both spiritual dimensions are addressed to the whole world and, on the other hand, the fact that both speak of the realization of human communion and community. At the same time, it must be said that the obvious distinction lies in the fact that globalization proposes to the contemporary Christian believer a human community based on diversity of spiritual expression and broad communication, whereas the Church addresses to the same modern man the Word of God Incarnate, Christ, and in His name calls him to the realization of spiritual communion through sharing in the source of life of the Sacred Mysteries (Rotaru 2012, 5).

In our opinion, therefore, the relationship between globalization and the Christian teaching of the Church should begin by specifying the diversity of attributes by which they make up the body of secular, on the one hand, and doctrinal, on the other, notions and confessions by which they address the world. In this way our discussion is constructed by analyzing the relationship between part and whole.

Martin Heidegger, a renowned philosopher with a background in Christian theology, clarified the distinction between what constitutes a whole and the parts through which it relates to reality: „The granite block that rests in itself is something material in a determinate form, even if this

form is coarse. The form here means the spatial and local arrangement and ordering of the material parts, which result in a determined outline, namely that of a block. But a jug, an axe or a pair of shoes are themselves material moulded into a shape. In its capacity as a contour, however, the shape does not appear here as the result of the arrangement of matter. On the contrary, form now determines the ordering of matter. Moreover, it predetermines, in each case, the quality and choice of material: a waterproof material for the pitcher, one hard enough for the axe, strong yet flexible for the shoes. In addition, this interweaving of form and material is determined in advance by the purpose for which the pitcher, axe or pair of shoes is to be used" (Heidegger 1995, 51-52).

If we understand globalization and the Church's teaching as wholes that we address to the world, then we must see them as raw materials, as the philosopher would say, with which we could not relate. But things are more complex. Due to the fact that their matter is moulded into the shape of the world, and thus they are both part and whole of it, it is necessary, in our view, to specify the purpose that both globalization and the Church serve. As such, in the parts that make up both the Church and the concept of globalization, we must find the purpose that the matter of which they are made is serving. Diversity, as matter, belongs to both spiritual dimensions and through it matter and purpose are ordered and directed as forms through which both Church and globalization are expressed and manifested.

Speaking specifically about diversity in the context of globalization, however, we note that in this concept the relationship between parts removes particularities, turning individuals and societies into an amorphous mass, while the universality of the Christian teaching of the Church is formed precisely by respecting these particularities of individuals and societies through the cultivation of harmony and their development.

Globalization is thus manifested in a dynamism that is exclusively concerned with the outer parts of the world, whereas the universality of Christian teaching, although it may seem static, is much more dynamically concerned with the inner parts of man. Globalization addresses the world methodically, systematically and impersonally, controlling the parts of the economic structures that offer the world the perspective, still insufficiently defined in our opinion, of a world community block organized on principles

and values that want to break away from the ideologies of colonialism, imperialism or the nation state, a reality in which religions, peoples' cultures, moral and personal values are simply parts of the diversity of the world's manifestation. Globalization thus proposes a ubiquity of the world made up of a multitude of distinct parts through permanent migration and translocation. In this world, religious beliefs no longer retain their homogeneity, but become a hybrid that multiplies whenever necessary, which relativizes the identities of the parts and allows universalism to be diluted into particularism. As such, globalization is causing the deterioration of religious identity and favoring technological approaches that facilitate this virtual translocation (Saint-Blanc 2000, 5 *apud* Tănase 2002, 262).

Moreover, the concept of globalization cuts across the regional and cultural specificity of the actors of today's world through the diversity of analytical approaches with which it studies them. This is why research on globalization draws on approaches that go beyond the economic and political spheres and seek to reconsider human dimensions of a universal nature, such as religions, culture, climate change, etc., emphasizing the idea that the identity of a community is not based solely on the idea of solidarity in which its members, who „whether they meet or not, each carry in their minds the image of their community” (Anderson 1991, 6 & James 1996, 5). The reality of a virtual community is proposed, which no longer requires a common origin, a common language and a history in which the elements that constitute continuity over time or reference to standard heroes, monuments and specific cultural symbols, heraldic insignia, authentic costumes, flags or flags, etc. are fixed.

In the context of globalization, diversity of religious beliefs and practices are therefore packaged and provided as mere consumer goods that can be bought and re-bought or accessed from religious markets everywhere through media and online as identities and lifestyles. It is a general palliative that turns faith into an illusion of religiosity and a source of spirituality devoid of transcendental values.

Paradoxically, however, globalization, through the global markets it offers for labor and consumption, is developing religious diversity in a pejorative sense. The facilitation of travel that it engenders gives greater scope to the phenomenon of migration and thus to the movement and intersection

of religious ideas, beliefs and traditions across ever wider geographical and spiritual spaces and areas, leading to the emergence of religious congruence and competition on a global scale. Thus, religious commercial strategies are emerging to promote their own religions. These trends highlight the presence of general erosive contradictions in religious life everywhere, justified in the name of respect for a liberal tradition in which religion is treated as a general spiritual theme or as an individual dimension to be decided only by the inner forum of personal conscience.

The universalization of the Christian faith is the antithesis of globalization, because it is a truth and a reality that does not co-opt or destroy the other. It does not propose but insists on the mobilization of a life built to face passions, weaknesses and the definitive destruction of egocentrism, for a community and a profound human communion that is realized on the foundation of identity and at the same time the particularity of each person.

In Orthodox theology, the universalization of faith is understood as a spiritual act of deification and familiarization of man with the divine life in order to perfect him and to make him aware that he is a creature created in the image of God, called to be transfigured into His likeness. The universalization of the Christian faith is therefore synonymous with the dehumanization of the world, an atoning act of grace which makes room for God in creation. Universalization here has historical dimensions with an eschatological character and does not create globalizing spaces that swallow up the generations and ages of the world in order to facilitate consumption and utilitarian and immediate progress.

Therefore, unlike globalization which feeds its development through the accumulation of material and spiritual spaces and dimensions, the universalization of the Christian message addresses to the world the teaching about the Incarnation of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God. These spiritual processes are distinct, because while globalization is a secular expression of postmodern civilization, the message of Christ is embedded in history by internalizing time within the world, both globally and personally. In this way, each person, and at the same time the whole world, participates freely and consciously in the building of Christian universality on the basis of the religious faith professed by all believers, in contrast to the way in which globalization integrates the world's societies and cultures through progressive

economic exchange, increasingly efficient communication technology and the methodical development of production, transport and consumption lines on ever larger scales. Christ's message considers all these means of improving the quality of human life to be testimonies of man's striving to rise to the likeness of God, who is almost unconsciously trying, through them, to build, here and now, a better life. Thus Christian teaching shows that these strivings for the better in human civilization reveal, on the one hand, the permanent presence of the longing for God in man and, on the other, the fact that living in this world is not the ultimate goal of human existence. This is why the Church proposes to the world, as opposed to globalization, a globalization based on a diversity and diversification of goodness, gratitude and love that universalizes the human being in order to complete it as a cosmic being.

In this way, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church establishes the inexhaustible universality of the reaches of the whole world, that is, it globalizes and embraces creation in order to preserve it in history. Therefore universality is the Church's principal attribute, and man, freed from frivolous passions and inclinations, becomes its principal exponent by the fact that he naturally feels by faith the gracious presence of God everywhere and always.

The Holy Fathers speak of God's love which is poured out upon all creation and makes the universality of the Christian faith a reality. Saint Silvanus Athonite, a modern-day devout man who has been enabled to see the light of Christ, testified of how his soul was overcome by a sense of love for God and for all people (Mantzarides 2002, 4). This theological truth of human universalization through deification is formulated by St. Gregory Palamas, who developed the teaching of faith on how uncreated light gives man the capacity to embrace within himself the whole of creation and to acquire perfect love (Saint Gregory Palamas PG 150, 1081 AD *apud* Mantzarides 2002, 4). The relationship between globalization and the universalization of the Christian message, although not a particular concern of patristic thought, is sufficiently well specified in the works of the Holy Fathers. This is why the theme of the idea of the unity of the world through its deification is always present. Thus, we understand that globalization unifies the world in the name of economic interests through rational methods, while Christianity unifies it by treating and alienating the wounds that canker it. St. Gregory the Theologian art in this sense: „For we do not seek

to conquer but to bring together brothers who are torn apart” (Saint Gregory the Theologian PG 36, 440 B *apud* Holbea 2006, 53). Saint Maxim the Confessor also specifies how important it is in the joy of the communion of God: „I write these things not to make heretics suffer, nor to rejoice in their evil. Let it not be! Rather, I write rejoicing and rejoicing together in return. For what is more pleasing to the faithful than that the sons of God should be ennobled together in one” (Saint Maxim the Confessor PG 91 *apud* Holbea 2006, 53). Therefore, if globalization achieves a secular community based on communication and economic strategies of production and consumption, the universalization of the Christian message highlights the role of faith and religion in the deification of all creation as a permanent and universal state of divine-human communion.

In summary, we believe that both human dimensions can contribute to the unification and universalization of the world in Christ. In order to achieve this work, the Church must increasingly diversify its modes of expression and relationship so as to build bridges linking the fundamental role of religion in linking spiritual flows with the impact that globalization has on general well-being and quality of life, because spiritual needs are measured by the demand and supply of goods and services whose inestimable value must be understood both as patterns of coexistence and global communion and as relationships between separate spiritual segments. Diversity must therefore be understood as a way of connecting the general effects of globalization with the universalization of the religious message in which the proliferation of decentralizing elements, as spaces and parts of a whole, represent challenges to which the Church is called to offer solutions.

2. The Diversity of Globalization and the Church’s Response

A recent step in this direction was taken not long ago with the holding of the Holy and Great Council of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Crete in 2016, held specifically during the week of Pentecost (*Document Relations of the Orthodox Church with the wider Christian world - main themes and debates*). Under the presidency of Patriarch Bartholomew, this Council remains to this day the largest gathering of Orthodox hierarchs that has brought contemporary religious diversity to the world’s attention. The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of Crete listed the diversity that contemporary

Christianity needs to be aware of in order to act accordingly in the face of the aversion of globalization.

Thus, the meaning of marriage and the family was discussed in Encyclical III; the role and purpose of religious education in Encyclical IV, 9; the challenging extremes of secularization manifested in culture, society and politics; the empowerment of man in relation to Christ and the spiritual influence of the Church in the world; the distinction between the Church and the conservatism in which society is dragging; and its relation to globalizing progress and development in Encyclical V, 10; on the meaning of human freedom, the abuse of the person, the loss of values and traditions, the threat and destruction of the environment in Encyclical V, 11; on the irresponsible approach to biotechnology in Encyclical V, 12; on the ideology of globalization in Encyclical VI, 15 as well as on the spread of violence and military conflicts, the persecution, extinction or exile of religious minorities, human trafficking, the violation of the principles and rights of persons and peoples, migration and forced conversions as evident results of globalization in Encyclical VI, 18 (On the Holy and Great Council of Crete, 16-26 June 2016. Questions and Answers 2017, 22-23).

During these debates it was stated that the solutions offered to these problems lie in open dialogue based on the confession of the right faith which „is reflected in right living, which for the Orthodox also implies the effort to live in good relations with Christians of different ethnicities and confessions, so that together we can give a credible witness to the humble love of Christ in a world that is increasingly secularized, more distant from God and the Church” (On the Holy and Great Council of Crete, 16-26 June 2016. Questions and Answers” 2017, 33).

This action highlighted the fact that the diversity of today’s world influences all spheres of the Church’s work, highlighting the range of its responsibilities. Thus, the Church’s response is equally diverse, addressing in a timely manner the needs that the universality of the Christian message demands. In this sense, the building of places of worship, the Church’s philanthropic, educational, cultural and social concerns stand out from the multitude of the Church’s concerns which it carries out in the context of the phenomenon of globalization in order to preserve the material and spirituality of today’s world in their authentic values, distinct from those of

the globalization which is reshaping the world. All these works constitute real forums for dialogue and open work sites within the world through which the Church addresses Christ to the contemporary faithful in order to make them responsible for the universalizing role they have in building, sacrificing and engaging endlessly in the spiritual life of the Church, out of the conviction that a society deprived of prayer and the dimensions of an ascetic life is in fact devoid of real peace and communion.

3. Christian identity and diversity

For St Maximus Confessor, the diversity of the world is the result of the reasons for the things God has founded. Therefore, divine reason constitutes the basis of all existence in which each presence is preserved independently and exists individually among the created. Each existence possesses a reason by which it situates itself as *gen-γένος*, as *species-εἶδος* and by which it defines its *essence-ουσία* or *nature-φύσις*, i.e., the *reason-λόγος* which characterizes its *constitution-κράσις* and by which it expresses its capacity to be sufficient itself and at the same time in permanent relation to quantity, form, participation, space, time, becoming and identity in the whole of which it is a part. According to these reasons, the diversity of existence is expressed orderly in relation to the whole from which it is in no way distinguished in its own nature and with which it is not confused. In the absence of these *ratios-λόγοι*, which particularize and individualize all the elements of the created world, the cosmos would remain disorganized and amorphous matter. Each element created by God is distinguished by its own reason by virtue of which it manifests itself independently and uniquely. Saint Maxim emphasizes this reality by specifying the indivisible difference and unmistakable particularity of the world's *ratios* in which „species, overcoming the variety due to difference, receive identity together through the genus. And individuals, receiving through species their coincidence, become one and the same among themselves, having through the community of being a complete likeness and freedom from all distinction. And the accidents together combined in the subject have a unity which remains undivided, together with the subject” (Saint Maxim the Confessor 1983, 225).

Father Dumitru Stăniloae observes in this regard from the patristic commentary that „beyond the variety of individuals there exists and is maintained the mysterious unity of the species, beyond the variety of species there exists and is maintained the mysterious unity of the genus, and beyond the variety of genera there exists and is maintained the unity of creation” (Stăniloae 1983, 225). As such, the reasons for existence do not refer to the presence of matter, but to God’s thoughts that all things were created to manifest themselves in their essence through indefinite depths. Creation is a process of the opening of existence achieved in the relationship between the reasons of things and their unfolding from the unity of the divine Logos. Therefore, the purpose of the various reasons of the world is their union in the reasons of the divine Logos: „It is the Word of God who creates all creatures according to their reasons and helps them to advance towards their goal, since their reasons, which are also uncreated energies, work in them or collaborate with them, and through them, the divine Logos himself works.” (Stăniloae 1983, 29).

The identity of created reasons as the source of the world’s diversity and unity highlights the unifying relationship of the diversity and identity of human persons. The concept of the person is distinct from the notion of the individual, which characterizes the personal individuality of each person. Therefore, the individual is in itself a monad, a number that expresses only itself, independent of everything. The identification of the individual is achieved by its distinctive isolation from the diversity of other individuals, which makes the individual personality its identification among other persons on the basis of its defining characteristics. In short, human personality resides in the accumulation of individual attributes (Holbea 2006, 49).

In Europe, the concept of the person, through Christian thought, constitutes the key notion of culture and civilization, the main formamentis, disseminated in all fields and activities through which man’s personal relationship with God, with his fellow men, with history and with the world is expressed (Rougemont 1957, 55, 85, 161 *apud* Ică jr. 2005, 33-34). „On the basis of this notion Europe has been able to assimilate different traditions and cultural heritages, becoming an open culture” (Ică jr. 2005, 33). Denis de Rougemont considered that „the person distinct from the individual has a double genesis: theological and political. From a political point of view, the

person has succeeded in integrating the two opposing meanings previously given to man: of the individual existing in and for himself (discovery of ancient Greece) and of the citizen existing exclusively through and for the state (ancient Rome). If the individual is exposed to the seductions of egoism, scepticism, profanation and anarchy, the citizen is exposed to the seductions of collectivist-totalitarianism." (Rougemont 1957, 85). Associated with the virtues of Christian faith, hope and love, the notion of personhood has opened to the human being the possibility of transcending the personal towards God, the One who is all in Persons, as well as the possibility of overcoming the vicious horizon in which man was swinging between individualism and collectivism towards the universalization of divinity. „The relationship with God frees the believer from the terror of the social and arbitrary, of the individual, obliging him to an infinite responsibility towards his neighbour and to the building of a new type of community: the supernatural and as such supernatural communion of the Church whose model is the triune communion" (Rougemont 1957, 85).

That is why, above all, in today's secularized (Rotaru 2006, 251-266) and globalized Christian world, prayer remains the main universalizing criterion of life. Orthodoxy therefore proposes to the world today a diverse and rich liturgical program, in keeping with its in-globalizing and universalizing diversity, through which it can rediscover and further preserve the individual divine reasons of which it is composed, in order to acquire the divinizing eschatological perspectives.

Conclusions

Each generation of Christian theologians is presented with new topics for debate. Today's Church is called to offer solutions to the concept of globalization, which is characterized by the complexity and diversity of the ways in which it proposes itself to the world as a new order. Particularly associated with economic activity, globalization is more than just an attribute of the economy, since its manifestations affect all dimensions of human life. Globalization is thus influencing the contemporary world with its diversity of expressions, bringing back to life what should have remained history, i.e., internationalization and the perpetuation of belligerent and violent aggression, growing discrepancies between the world's regions and religions,

exploitation of the weak and unwanted in the name of the free exchange of values and principles which, as soon as they meet, clash and clash, creating ever more intense diversions and diversities.

The complexity of globalization is given by its dynamism which proposes it as a kind of new spirit of the world. It is a dynamism that is notable for the contradictions it generates and the undeniable negative effects it produces. A dynamism which, in the name of unification and unity, individualizes and centralizes while destabilizing and simultaneously reconstructing another reality which radically compromises the individual's membership of the spiritual community by rearranging the world into „transnational economic organizations” (Ică Jr. 2002, 482).

In this context, the Church is called upon to coordinate the way in which globalization is being achieved in the spaces of international economic and political relations. For this reason, the proclamation of the Gospel about the Kingdom of God and the permanent celebration of the Holy Mass are the most important and valid universal meta-narratives addressed to the world, which sanctify creation and do not flatten it, because they are based on God's love for man. The Church must re-propose this method of working to the world in a language that it understands as an alternative to globalization because only the Sacrifice and the Church of Christ represent the eternal guarantee that the Kingdom of God is not totalitarian but a permanent and true celebration of Pentecost, a perfect model of the universal diversity and unity of this world.

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