

THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE THROUGH THE PROCESS OF EVANGELIZATION

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Abstract: In our paper, we will focus on the relationship between worship, community and mission, who are fundamental dimensions for our Church in direct relation with the Revelation of the Father through His Son Jesus Christ – *logou antropou* – Word was made flesh. From the perspective of the evangelization of the culture, the transfer of the Scripture into vernacular languages is a part of the process of conversion but also a challenge for the actual languages who are more and more reduced to a materialistic view, yet secularized by different factors. One of our research question of this paper will ask the high culture but also the culture of the poor in search for a critical analysis of the post-modern culture. The process of enculturation should bring change and hope, a Christian perspective of life, justice, and above all the presence of God among us in local Churches.

Our paper will be developed on these documents: *Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World Document* (MOCT); Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; the documents issued within the *Lausanne movement*.

Keywords: evangelization, culture, religion, enculturation, mission.

The significant branches that make a culture are related to the aspects of the social life, the economic, religious and ethnographic ones, along with those represented through art. From the religious point of view, each culture contains moral values and appropriate teachings, which represent the result of a universal revelation that the Word of God enculturated, in accordance with His plan, having as purpose the finding of God. The Christian Gospel makes complete, accomplishes and ennobles the religious experience of each individual on earth. For this reason, culture must be taken seriously because it gives us the possibility to get involved in a process of the profound and open dialogue, with God. On the other hand, culture link, different hermeneutical communities, individuals, it has a substantial contribution in a multicultural environment.

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CULTURE, REVELATION AND THE INCARNATION OF LOGOS

The culture represents the essence of a community. The important branches that make it are tightly related to the different aspects of the social, economic, religious, ethnographic life, along with those represented by arts. From the religious point of view, each culture has its own moral values, good teachings, which represent the result of a universal revelation that the Divine Word or Logos inculturated, according to Its plan, for the purpose to discover God. The incarnation of the Son of God Himself was, nonetheless, “a cultural embodiment”¹.

Alexander Schmemmann denominates culture “the household of being” and considers that it is “a mirror where people should regard towards themselves”². God not only that He established the culture, but He is also present in different cultures and struggles to transform them and bring them as close to the reality and to His ideal as possible³.

Karl Barth talks about the decisive role of faith in the knowing of God, which he describes in terms of revelation, accentuating the idea that the seeing and the conceiving of God do not represent only a work of our nature, neither a performance of our rational capacity, but “an action of God’s willingness, in such way that, knowing God, we nevertheless know His mysteries”⁴. Therefore, we ought to convince the people of different cultures and religions that the truths of faith from the Holy Scriptures and the Christian tradition are not just ineptitudes, legends and myths, stories or events that are related to the fabulous or the extraordinary, but they represent the teachings emphasised by God that regard not only the Christians, but the entire people around the world.

GLOBALISATION AND TECHNOLOGY, RELIGION AND CULTURE

In a globalised world, where the technological developments have been occupying more and more segments of our daily life, our social and institutional organisations, in which the human activity unfolds, the religious elements are less and less evidenced, and even deserted into the insignificant sphere of indifference.

¹ International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation, The presence Of Christ to Culture and Cultures*, 12, 1988, available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html (30.12.2016).

² Svetlana Panich, *Apology of Culture in The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann* in the volume *Apology of Culture. Religion and Culture in Russian Thought*, Edited by Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch and Pawel Rojek, PICKWICK Publications-Eugene, Oregon, 2015, p. 93.

³ David J. Hesselgrave & Edward Rommen, *Contextualization. Meanings, Methods, and Models*, Foreword by George W. Peters, Apollos of Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1989, p. 60.

⁴ Karl Barth, *apud* Charles Van Engen *The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context*, in Dean S. Gilliland (editors), *The Word Among Us. Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, Word Publishing, Dalas. London, Sydney. Singapore, 1989, p. 75.

As Christians, we have the duty to promote and learn that technology is the result of human reason, the one that, ultimately, springs from the divine reason. The results owed to the ability of thinking should lead to progress, wellbeing and ways for facilitating our quotidian existence, which should be beneficial for the accomplishment of each person's common welfare. Therefore, technology is not to be used "for manipulation, distorting and destruction of the humankind"⁵. On the other side, it is concerning the human's condition of being preoccupied only with their material achievement and "with carrying out intense experiment of their own nature, in an extreme and dangerous manner. There appears the danger to transform themselves into a biological machinery, into an impersonal social unit, or into a device with controlled thoughts"⁶. The solution would be represented by the fact that the human subject to be positioned rationally and consciously in their relation with God, "as administrator (steward) of the divine creation and His collaborator in the world"⁷.

Globalisation is another dangerous phenomenon that causes, in many parts of the world, tensions and existential incertitude, imposing on the contemporary man only an economic logic, based on the principle of "having" and emerging inside them desires as individualism, greed, avarice, pride, egoism, indifference, rapacity, dilapidation, with all the consequences that they have on the environment and "our common house", which is the Earth⁸. Moreover, the actions of globalisation ruthlessly fought the cultural, national, religious and ideological traditions, trying to destroy them, or preoccupying to create, artificially, an unhealthy homogenisation of them. In reply, the Church brings the Gospel arguments for a moderate life, appropriate for the Christian asceticism (not in the monachal meaning), bringing forward the virtues of restraining, mutual help, solidarity and human loving, being in the same time aware of the fact "that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4, 4). For this reason, the position of the Church within the Synod from Crete (2016) is suggestive: "Against the levelling and impersonal homogenisation promoted by globalisation, along with the extreme nationalism, the Orthodox Church puts forward for proposition the protection of the peoples' identity and their local identity. As an alternative example for the unity amongst the humanity, it proposes the articulate organisation of the Church on the basis of equality among local Churches. The Church opposes against the menacing against the contemporary man and the cultural traditions of peoples, which are involved within globalisation and the principle of "economic autonomy" or economism, which is the automatization of economy on addressing the vital needs of the human being and the transformation of these needs into a purpose. *The Church proposes a*

⁵ The Cape Town Commitment, *A Confession of Faith and Call to Action*, Part II – *For The World We Serve*, IIA, 6, 2011 The Lausanne Movement, available at <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment> (10.01.2017).

⁶ *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, V, 12, Crete, 2016, available at <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/encyclical-holy-council>, 12.01.2017.

⁷ *Ibidem*, V, 10.

⁸ *Ibidem*, V, 14.

vital economy, based on the Gospel principles. The Church does not correlate the progress of humanity only with the increasing of the living standard, or the economic development, in the detriment of the clerical values⁹.

In the confession of believing and the appeal to action from Cape Town, it is underlined that fact that the people of different social and religious categories accept too easily “the dominant ideologies of the politic and economic spheres, without analysing critically, from the perspective of the Holy Scripture”¹⁰, this fact leading to the compromising of the revealed truth and the misrepresentation of the redeeming and theandrical relation between man and God.

The persistence of the individualist ideas, or those of religious exclusivism, lead to fundamentalist principles and present risks for the relations between the humans, along with the development of a normal environment of peace and reconciliation. It has to be accepted the idea that the religions are ways to express the spirituality of some community groups, or individuals, and they are worth a value only if they ensure an interior growth and change, positive and beneficial, on addressing the way in which people live and socialise. There is nothing to justify the religious fundamentalism. It expresses a “desire, without knowledge” (Romans 10, 2) and represents the expression of a morbid religiosity. The true Christian, emerged from the archetype of the crucified God, sacrifices himself and not the others, and he is the harsher critic of the fundamentalism, regardless its nature¹¹. In other words, the faith of every human being should be directed towards love, respect and tolerance, not hatred, discord or crimes and unjustified atrocities against our fellows who do not share the same ideological and religious opinions.

MISSION, EVANGELISATION AND THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE

The challenges that the Church faces are immense for the world of our days, due to the fact that, although there are means and methods of Gospel inculturation, there are also forms and attitudes contrary and denigrating against the historic and revealed Truth. In this fight, there are thrown the cultural values, the traditions, the customs and the spirituality of the human, on one side, and, on the other side, the orientation and the vision of humanity as regarding the purpose and its relation with God. As temptation and sin are transformed into a relative and apparent “good”, concealing, essentially, the attraction of man into the trap of the devil, in the same way the Gospel has to provoke, to be seductive and appealing, positively, in any cultural and religious context, for showing the human souls the inestimable richness of the divine grace and love. The Christian Gospel makes complete,

⁹ *Ibidem*, V, 15.

¹⁰ The Cape Town Commitment, *A Confession of Faith and Call to Action*, Part. I, *For The Lord We Love*, I, 2.

¹¹ *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church...*, VI, 17.

perfects and enriches the religious experience of each man on earth. For this respect, an authentic revealed knowledge gives us the possibility to become involved in a process of the profound and open dialogue with God.

There is an active and imperative preoccupation of the Christian Churches and communities from the entire world to spread the word of God, following both a process of “re-evangelisation of the people of God within the secularised contemporary societies, and of evangelisation of those who have not known Christ yet”¹², this aspect constituting an important duty to offer all the people “the good news, in a world of the bad news”¹³.

The messengers that preach the Gospel have to be examples of good faith and living, serving God with devotion and commitment, showing respect and endless love for their fellows, from every corner of this world. The authentic model of inculturation is Christ, “the Way, the Truth, the Life” (John 14, 6).

“The good news” is the power of God, cherished by the Christians and preserved dearly along the historical tradition, encompassing in itself the priceless treasure of the human spirituality along its development, and “justice, compassion, humbleness, integrity, good faith, purity, generosity, goodness, self-denial, hospitality, conciliation, lack of revenge, good deeds, forgiveness, joy, contentment and love, all joined into a life of worshiping and belief in God”¹⁴. These virtues direct or lead towards an authentic way of living, and a personalisation, development and transformation of each human individual.

Although the Gospel was not spread within different cultures around the world and occupies a rather vast geographical space, the Christians representing the most important and numerous religious community of the world, yet, we have to live with the deep regret and to express our concern that the good news still has not penetrated, after 2000 years, to all the races, peoples and cultures, as it was established in the commandment of the Redeemer to His disciples and apostles: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28, 19-20). Thus, it is necessary an active involvement of all the missionary forces and of renewing the commitment to the Gospel for “reaching those who have not heard the message from the Gospel yet, to integrate into their culture and learn their language, to live the Gospel within them, embodied in love and sacrificed serving, transmitting the light and the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, through words and deeds, determining them to see, thorough the power of the Holy Spirit, the surprising grace of God”¹⁵. This conversion serving, “a mass after another mass” implies a continuous search of “the lost sheep” in each place and social context of the human existence, this mission taking place “not abrasively, but freely, with love and respect for the

¹² *Ibidem*, II, 6.

¹³ *The Cape Town Commitment ...*, Part I – *For The Lord We Love*, I, 8, A.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, I, 6 D.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, Part II – *For The World We Serve*, IID, 1B.

cultural identity of people and nations”¹⁶. This attitude is necessary since God wishes that “all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2, 4), and, on the other side, the plan of the divine stewardship is that all of us to be part of the great Universal Family. This participation represents the assumed adhesion of each individual, responsible and faithful, to the sanctity of God and the community of the saints and members that make the Church of Christ¹⁷.

What truthfully matters in the evangelic action is that it involves the change of the way we think, the mentality and inner condition of the human individual through an open invitation to a profound act of spiritual “metanoia” that would make the man aware of the fact he is a “new”, enlightened person, blessed with the grace of the Holy Spirit. As an effect, the immediate and surprising acknowledgment on the enculturated person is that from that moment on they possess “a mind that can understand, hands that can join others for common chores and a heart that responds to the joy and sorrow of others”¹⁸. In this respect, we can assert that in this provocation and transformation of the man, the culture authenticates, promotes and certifies itself.

THE GOSPEL AND DIALOGUE CULTURE

For the Gospel to be promoted within a culture it is necessary a profound knowledge of the way people from that culture live, and to create a favourable environment for the connection landmarks between the ideology of that specific society and the Christian belief. The harmonious penetration of the evangelic teachings will generate a correct discernment between the cultural elements related to grace and those of the negative sinful ones, from a certain culture¹⁹.

The common aspects that can be used in establishing the dialogue between culture and Gospel are those related the human needs, shared by us all: “mental and physical health, accomplishment of hopes and aspirations, finding ways for educating the children in order to obtain the optimal efficiency, security of the future, helping of the troubled families, identification of the personal conflicts and moral characteristics”²⁰ and, nonetheless, those related to faith, which can coordinate and conduct towards the final purpose of life. The Gospel offers obvious, sincere, constructive and explanatory answers for all these problems.

The opening of a culture or its isolation from the other cultures of the world depend essentially on the acceptance or non-acceptation of the practical dialogue.

¹⁶ *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church...*, II, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, I, 4.

¹⁸ Eugene A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures. Anthropology for Christian Mission*, William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1981, p. 257.

¹⁹ Carl F. Starkloff, S. J., *Inculturation and Cultural Systems*, in “Theological Studies”, 55(1994), Regis College, Toronto, pp. 274-294.

²⁰ Eugene A. Nida, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

The cooperation and collaboration of cultures must be regarded in terms of progress, development and reciprocal enrichment. We believe that most of the people do not know well-enough the cultures, the traditions and the religions of the others, and, therefore, they emit preconceived opinions on addressing the manifestations and the spirituality of those different from them. Thus, we believe that our degree of “theological sufficiency” as regarding our own faith crosses, many times, the line of the indifferent individualism, without any connection to the virtue of love for the person next to you, preached by Jesus Christ. We have to understand, beyond any doubt, that the Gospel is not individualist, but it is one of universal love.

According to Alexander Schmemmann, in order to completely evangelise a culture and for it to produce the effects of awakening the common interest of the people, there are necessary three basic arguments: the argument of the message (kerygmatic); the argument of the contempt (Eucharistic) and the argument of the kingdom (eschatological)²¹.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of evangelisation is beneficial and appropriate for the world nowadays, because the Gospel can animate and transform people’s lives, from each culture, in a positive and saving way. The answer, the solution or the rehabilitation of absolutist, secularised, atheist and globalised cultures and societies can appear undoubtedly, not only through the acceptance of God’s endless love, but also through the rational and transcendent understanding of the Gospel, as an only “soul” for all the cultures of the entire world.

²¹ Svetlana Panich, *op. cit.*, p. 93.