

Post-modernism opens new perspectives for evangelization

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Western societies,¹ as Marcel Gauchet stated in 1985,² entered the 21st century weakened and disenchanted. On the one hand, Western influence in world affairs continues to decrease, and the time of a break draws near in the balance and reordering of international relationships at the expense of the West, thrown out of the dominant position it used to occupy. On the other hand, Western culture itself is going through a large-scale mutation, identified as an exit from modernism and an entrance into post-modernism, the outcome of which is uncertain. These two aspects, external and internal, of ongoing evolutions, are somewhat linked. It is in this context of more and more secularised, post-Christian societies that there emerges a postmodern culture, which we think may be open to new perspectives to evangelization.

1. The withdrawal of Western influence in the world.

Western decline on the international scene is made visible in its demographic,³ economic,⁴ and political components. In order to better identify its cultural and ethnic causes, it is useful to recall several major geopolitical changes that have accelerated this process: in 1945, the weakening of Europe to the benefit of the United States and the USSR after two world wars; in 1989-1991, the fall of the USSR at the end of the cold war. The fall of communist regimes in 1989-1991 has returned to freedom-exhausted populations that have discovered no other future than that of modern secularized societies, materialistic and consumerist. Having become the only world super-power,⁵ the United States then led a policy of national interest at the expense of its traditional "leadership" regarding freedom and democracy. Its opposition to international institutions' efforts⁶ to respond to the great challenges of

¹Europe, The United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand...

²Marcel Gauchet: *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*. Gallimard, Paris, 1985.

³The European population (included Belarussia, Russia, and the Ukraine) represented 20% of the world population at the start of the twentieth century, 11% today, and probably 8% in 2050. That of North America (United States and Canada) represents 5% of the world population.

⁴While their economies take an increasing part in the world economy, developing countries (Brazil, China, India...) aim at becoming full time players in international relations.

⁵Population: 4.5% of the world population; GDP: 24% of the world GDP; military spending: 41% of the world military spending.

⁶Over the past twenty years, the United States has mostly opposed resolutions from the international community concerning issues of general interest. For example, regarding human rights: the non-ratification of the International Charter on Children's Rights (1989), the refusal to non sign the second facultative protocol regarding the International Agreement Relative to Civil and Political Rights, aiming at abolishing the death penalty; the non-ratification of the Treaty of Rome (1989) instituting the

humankind has made void the idea of an international order based on right, and reinforced the position of those contesting the universality of human rights and of democratic values. The financial crisis of 2008-2009 and its economic and social consequences show that the Republican administration, after having served categorical interests for eight years, rather than promoting an international order based on right, has lost everything, even the wealth that it attempted to acquire.⁷

The contingent causes above do not in themselves explain the Western decline that we observe. The totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, which left millions dead behind them, represent the obscure side of modernism. As a woman from Hungary said “the Communists promised us a bright future, and we woke up with a hangover.” One after another, modern utopias and ideologies, beginning with positivism⁸ and rationalism, have disappointed. Even the perspective of infinite progress able to face the challenges presented to humankind does not convince anymore. The persistence of some pathologies such as cancer, and the appearance of new ones such as AIDS, make one doubt the ability of modern medicine to master health issues. The persistent existence of pockets of poverty in spite of all the existing social safety nets implemented by over-indebted developed countries shows the limitations of modernism’s approaches in resolving social problems. In spite of impressive scientific, technical, and economic successes, modernism faces a crisis with deep cultural and ethical causes. Even the universality of the values that are put forward by modernism, such as the respect of individual rights, is contested in the name of cultural diversity. Modernism’s crisis is not a crisis of growth, rather the dusk of an era.

2. The decline of Western modernity

In order to identify the causes of the decline of modernism, one must examine the roots of its dynamism and its creativity, and explain why these no longer work. Among the reasons that contributed to the birth of modernism we will consider two: the cosmology of Newton and the status of reason, arguing the fact that a view of the universe and an understanding of the human being lead to a particular view of society.

The Renaissance, reconnecting with Greco-Latin roots in European culture, developed humanism; the travels of the great explorers⁹ widened the world’s

International Criminal Court of The Hague. Regarding civil security: the refusal to sign the Ottawa Convention forbidding land mines (1997); the refusal to sign the Dublin Treaty on the ban of cluster bombs (2008). Regarding environmental protection: the refusal to ratify the Rio Convention on Environment and Development (Agenda 21) (1992); and the refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of greenhouse gas (1997), etc.

⁷We may refer to the advice given by Jesus in Mt. 6: 33.

⁸In his *Course of Positive Philosophy*, Auguste Comte formulates his theory of scientific positivism.

⁹Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Vasco de Gama, Ferdinand Magellan, etc.

horizon to the dimensions of the globe, while the Copernican revolution changed the perception that the human being had of his/her place in the cosmos and led to Newton's cosmology,¹⁰ that of an infinite and intelligible universe, obeying unchangeable laws (Voltaire's famous clock). The unprecedented success of sciences reinforced the role of reason in all areas of knowledge (Blaise Pascal's famous thinking reed), the ability of the human being to act in a rational and predictable world, and to organize society. The role given to reason by modern anthropology freed the operating power of human beings. Then followed systematic developments of technology, economics, and artistic creation reaching new heights. The introduction of democratic principles in the political organization of societies¹¹ contributed to the dynamism and luminosity of modern culture as well.

However, one must admit that modernism has today reached its limits. It is the case, for example, in the economic field, dominated by the neo-liberal paradigm of globalization. Intensive use of natural resources has two limitations: the resources get exhausted, and the environment is unable to absorb the amount of pollution produced. Sometimes, these two limitations cross, as in the case of oil, with its reserves being depleted, while the production of greenhouse gas is not tenable anymore. Not only is the global economy under stress, but the economic development of emerging countries forces developed countries to reduce their living standard. However, such an evolutionary turn is not part of the scheme of modern economy which, moved by the ideology of infinite progress, is forced to grow. In other words, the neo-liberal workings of the economy and the Anglo-Saxon understanding of globalization have no future. The recent financial crisis and its economic and social consequences due to a speculation that takes money without creating value calls for reforms more fundamental than a better regulation of financial markets. It calls for reforms that aim at a post-modern redefinition of the standing and the role of the economy in the lives of societies.

These considerations lead one to think that modernism's inability to resolve the problems that its successes generate comes from the very causes that had ensured its success, in particular of the role given to reason in the organization and workings of societies, in the sense that the excess of rationality then appears unreasonable. Following the Renaissance's humanism, and strengthened by its scientific successes, a newborn modernity magnified human reason, which did not go without a movement of the idea of God that Blaise Pascal had indeed perceived in his *Memorial* where he refers to the "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of the philosophers and the wise." In opposition to the Church's control over society, modernity developed a kind of theism, then a form of deism, and celebrated the cult of reason

¹⁰In 1687 publication of the *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.

¹¹American Declaration of Independence in 1776; French declaration of human rights in 1789 and French Revolution.

and the cult of the Supreme Being¹² during the French Revolution. Going from theism to atheism, modernism followed a secularization process that one could interpret as the inverse of the Christianization of the Roman Empire. The modern endeavour to separate the Judeo-Christian revelation from the Greco-Latin tradition in order to keep only the latter,¹³ appears in fact as an inverted process from that of the Fathers of the Church who had implemented the inculturation of the Christian Faith into the Greek and Latin cultures in the first centuries of our era.¹⁴ Three major stages can be distinguished in the process: the secularization of ideas in the Century of the Lights or the Enlightenment of the 18th century; the secularisation of institutions starting at the end of the 18th century, and the secularisation of society starting in the cities and now generalized, the latter being itself comprising three phases: virulent anticlericalism, religious indifference, and religious ignorance.

The most efficient lever of this secularization is anthropological in that modernity substituted reason for the human heart, negating the obscurity that separates one from the other. Blaise Pascal clearly perceived this obscurity: 'the heart has reasons that reason does not know,'¹⁵ adding: "it is the heart that feels God, and not reason."¹⁶ The narrative that can best help us understand the consequences of this substitution between heart and reason is the 2nd Creation narrative (Gen 2:4 – 3:23). What is the tree in the middle of the garden? Is it the tree of life, as created by God in Genesis 2:9? Or the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as affirmed by Eve tempted by the snake in Genesis 3:2? The difference between Judeo-Christian anthropology, which values the human heart, and modern anthropology, which defines humans by their reason, is at the source of many misunderstandings in the conflict-ridden relationship between the Church and modernism. However, after the Copernican revolution that pushed the earth out of the centre of the universe, and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution that displaced the human from its central spot in the natural selection process, the philosophical anthropology from the work of Sigmund Freud¹⁷ and his successors dislodges reason from the human heart and makes nonsense of the modern pretence of a complete knowledge of oneself and of the world.¹⁸ Socrates' "know thy self" remains

¹²During the French Revolution, worship was rendered to Reason in the churches transformed into temples of Reason after the massacres of September 2nd 1792. Similarly, worship was rendered to the Supreme Being from 1792 to 1794.

¹³One must note that modernity borrowed from Christianity many values that it secularized.

¹⁴One must remember that Christianity, as witnessed by the New Testament (Mt 15:11, Mk 7:19; Rm 14:14) stepped aside from the distinction of the profane and the religious common to the religions of the time.

¹⁵Blaise Pascal: *Les Pensées*, Jacques Chevalier, Gallimard, Paris, page 1221

¹⁶Blaise Pascal: *Les Pensées*, Jacques Chevalier, Gallimard, Paris, page 1222

¹⁷In particular his work on denegation.

¹⁸In this way, it is not realistic to consider the realization of "absolute knowledge" to which G.W.F. Hegel comes at the end of his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, as a historical event. The reconciliation that he operates within knowledge under the guide of reason, is conditioned by that more fundamental one between heart and reason, which is itself conditioned by the reconciliation between the human being and her neighbour, and between the human being and God. This is an eschatological perspective.

more relevant than ever as a task always unaccomplished. The Promethean view of modernity is here fought, since the knowledge of the world is not detached from the knowledge of oneself.

One must note that Immanuel Kant had indeed distinguished the three levels of sensitivity, understanding, and reason, but in distinguishing between concepts and ideas he ascribes understanding and reason as two levels of knowledge, with only the former coming from experience. This distinction is not the same as that between heart and reason mentioned above, because the intelligence of the heart comes from an experience of interpersonal relationships, and leads to another type of knowledge than that of the phenomenal reality discussed by modern philosophy. This distinction between heart and reason, in which reason proceeds from love, is also found in the ethical realm. Following St. Augustine's distinction between "*libertas*" at the level of the heart, and free will at the level of reason, "*justicia*" is distinct from distributive justice, "*veritas*" from scientific truth, etc. Ignoring this articulated distinction leads to distorted ethical debates such as that between "pro-life" and "pro-choice" regarding abortion, because the two positions are not at the same level, the first one being at the level of the tree of life, to come back to the categories from Genesis, and the second at the level of the tree of knowledge. Similarly, the dialogue between the Christian faith, which is an opening of the heart engaging in an interpersonal relationship, and modern reason, becomes an ideological confrontation when the faith is held down as knowledge stemming from reason.

How does the substitution of the heart by reason, of love by thought, weaken modernism to the point of coming to an end? It is love that gives life and creates, and not modern reason which knows only of phenomena of reality and not of reality itself, and which acts from the outside, as a user. To put reason in the place of the heart is to negate the division which separates them, and more fundamentally the otherness of our origin.¹⁹ Hence the ephemeral outcome of modern ideologies that rest on nothing other than the abstraction of a shared utopia.²⁰ The movement of ideology towards totalitarianism is a further step in the same direction, consisting in giving oneself one's own origin. The history of the 20th century has taught us how devastating the effects of such a denial of the real origin and an abstraction from the reality could be, while the addition of the predicate "scientific" to ideologies²¹ or totalitarianisms²² has in no way improved the inefficiency of their pretension to fulfill their goals. Reason, which develops its reasoning from the unity of the concept and aims at the unity of the totality, never

¹⁹The debate on the Christian roots of Europe and the refusal to mention them in the introductory words of the project of the European Constitution are a nice example of this denial.

²⁰Who negates his/her origin, has no future.

²¹For example scientific positivism.

²²For example scientific socialism.

arrives there, because the duality that characterizes it is the reflection, at the level of reason, of the dichotomy between heart and reason, which is the mark of our human condition here on earth.

3. From modernism to postmodernism

Sociological studies on the passing of a modern culture to a postmodern culture, make it clear that the movement of contemporary ideas and social behaviours stems from either an exacerbated modernism such as the absolute nature of individual rights at the expense of the common good, or the neo-liberal understanding of the global economy... or from an emerging postmodernism such as the ecological concern for the conservation of the natural and biological environment, or the promoting of organic agriculture and the appearance of an economy of solidarity...

At the time of the emergence of modernism, Immanuel Kant could write "What is the Enlightenment? The coming of man out of the minority for which he himself is responsible."²³ Today, the period of adolescence is over and postmodernism is about entering into adulthood. In spite of the resistance on the part of some threatened ideologies,²⁴ modern reason is called to come down from its pinnacle and to take its place, its proper place, but only its place, in an anthropological, ethical, and social balance, which gives back to the human heart, with its affective and relational abilities, its rightful central place. The sentence attributed to André Malraux: "The 21st century will be spiritual or will not be" marks indeed the challenge of the entry into postmodernism, to the extent that one understands 'spiritual' in its most noble acceptance of a spirit moved by unselfish love for the other.

The entrance into postmodernism can be considered, in a Teilhardian perspective, as a qualitative jump to a higher level of complexity, a passing from the "always more" to the "always better." It is an invitation to appreciate the relevancy of the dichotomy between heart and reason that is obscure from the perspective of reason but provides structure from a spiritual perspective; an invitation to create new relationships with nature, and new ways to weave the social web without rejecting the positive progress from modernism; an invitation to more personal responsibility in a softened legislative environment functioning more by motivation than by coercion. The assets of modernism will be all the better preserved as postmodern reason can

²³Immanuel Kant: *The Philosophy of History*. In answer to the question: "What is the Enlightenment?" Original reference by the author of this article is "*Emmanuel Kant: La Philosophie de l'Histoire*. Trad. Stéphanie Piobetta, Paris, France: Opuscles. 1947: p. 83."

²⁴In particular the free thought that (in France, in Belgium...) forgets that freedom of thought is, like all other freedoms, a freedom received and conditioned. Or, neo-liberalism that (in the United States, in England, etc.) makes individual rights absolute, for example in the economic realm, at the expense of common good (for example, the 'think tanks' rejecting the conclusions of experts on global warming).

renounce the central position that modern reason had taken, in order to adopt a position centred on the primacy of the heart.

Just as contemporary anthropology is not the same as that of the modern era, today's cosmology is not that of Newton. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity,²⁵ the cosmology of the Big Bang,²⁶ Max Planck's quantum mechanics,²⁷ and chaos theory²⁸ have changed our view of the universe. While Newton's universe was infinite, continuous, and foreseeable, the contemporary universe is finite, extends itself and has history. Chance is here next to necessity,²⁹ and the real, in the scientific sense, shies away from researchers' investigations.³⁰ Scientific discoveries in the 20th century in anthropology and cosmology have radically changed the self-understanding of human beings and their view of the world. If it is legitimate to think that a new self-understanding of the human being and a new view of the world triggered a new view of the society, just as in the birth of modernism, one may surmise that the scientific discoveries of the 20th century will fashion a postmodern culture, all the while knowing that such a paradigm shift will require many years. And, thus, scientific discoveries of the 20th century provide interesting clues to sketch the shape of postmodern culture. Below are some that seem significant.

After the stability of medieval society, modern society perpetuated the movement that saw its birth. Darwin's theory of evolution and the cosmology of the Big Bang mean one step forward in reinforcing the idea of evolving humankind and of a world in movement. Once again, one's relation to time changes in that it validates Heraclites to whom we attribute the "Πάντα ῥεῖ." Movement takes over the space-time continuum, the speed of light being promoted to the rank of universal constant by Albert Einstein. The universe and humankind not only have a history, but a history that is oriented to increasing complexity, and sees the emergence of new realities that are more than the sum of their parts, giving credit to the idea of ongoing creation.

²⁵Special theory of relativity in 1905 and general theory of relativity in 1915.

²⁶Flowing from the general theory of relativity, the Big Bang theory has been comforted by the formulation of the law of the recession of galaxies (expansion of the universe) by Edwin Hubble in 1929, and the discovery of cosmic microwave background radiation by Arno A. Penzias and Robert W. Wilson in 1964.

²⁷The discovery of quantum by Max Planck in 1900, and the theories of Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger, and Paul Dirac in 1925 set the stage for quantum mechanics. Werner Heisenberg is also the author of the uncertainty principle discovered in 1927.

²⁸From 1960 on, Edward Lorenz developed chaos theory with the help of computer simulations of non linear phenomena (for example weather-related) very sensitive to their initial condition. Benoit Mandelbrot represented this graphically under the name "fractals."

²⁹Jacques Monod: *Le hasard et la nécessité*. Paris, France: Seuil, 1970.

³⁰Nick Herbert: *Quantum Reality*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, Random House, 1985. (see Chapter 2 "Physicists Losing Their Grip."). Bernard d'Espagnat: *Le réel voilé: analyse des concepts quantiques*. Paris, France: Le temps des sciences, Fayard, 1994.

The relationship to nature should also change with the change in the status of reason that must no more posit itself in a user/tool relationship to nature, but rather as a partner of a nature that has resolved most of its issues without the help of human beings, such as in the case of waste management. The relationship to nature would thus go from modern usage to postmodern cooperation. In this perspective, which takes into consideration the fact that human beings are a product of nature and belong to it, economic exploitation of natural resources would be adjusted to the satisfaction of limited needs, and no longer based on the bulimic appetite of obese societies. At this economic level, the need to shift from quantitative growth to qualitative progress clearly appears. Nature offers us much more than natural resources for health, aesthetics, or way of life. The historical dimension of the universe that once knew its youth, knows its maturity, and will know ageing, and the unfathomable variety of the shapes it developed during its already long history invite us to welcome diversity as a treasure. Protection of biodiversity goes in this direction, safeguarding the fragile balances among the biotope without which we could not live.

The continuity between the view of the world and the view of the society is clear when one considers the level of exploitation that shaped labour relationships and the degree of rationality that characterized the organization of modern economy.³¹ The cultural revolution at the end of the 1960s protested against a certain way of exercising authority and a certain form of institutional organization, thereby announcing a postmodern view in interpersonal and social relationships. The general relativity theory, which describes a universe without any particular centre and without a system of fixed references, shows a society with hierarchical structures that would leave the place to more systemic relationships, a bit like the Internet's web. A resolved implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, bringing forth a better participation from the agents and helping them to assume responsibilities, would be an intermediary stage in this process. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the equal dignity of all human beings and their right to difference should lead to a postmodern rehabilitation of complementarities, as against the drift to uniformity from the modern principle of equality. Such a move would favour the emergence of a unity rich in its diversity, be it in relationships between man and woman, in corporate life, or in social relationships... Indeed, it seems difficult to imagine that the protection of biodiversity does not go hand in hand with the respect of cultural diversity and the respect of local identities.

Unlike the entry into modern society, which occurred as part of Western civilization, the entry into postmodernism should gather all civilizations with respect for the values, traditions, and richness of each. One can then hope that the respect of diversity of large cultural groups would lead to a multipolar

³¹Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* in 1936.

world architecture, cooperating together under the guidance of the world institutions. In this perspective, the development of organizations of cooperation and of government at the world level would go hand in hand with reinforcement of local roots and an increasing feeling of multi-belonging.³² Thus, postmodernism should promote a kind of globalization which respects diversity, very different from the Anglo-Saxon neo-liberal globalization by way of the economy, which attempts the levelling and the blending of cultures. Nonetheless, as underscored above, the entry into postmodernism should first be made manifest through an exacerbation of the close of modernism. Its end is visible, for example, in an intensification of secularization encouraged by circles of free thinkers, and of the consumerist materialism of the neo-liberal ideology.³³ The main obstacles to the entrance into postmodernism are also manifest in the debate on ethics,³⁴ where modern ideological circles defend positions that ignore the link between heart and reason described above.

4. New perspectives for evangelization

In accordance with its mission to proclaim the Reign of God and to participate in its elaboration, the Church is invited by the Second Vatican Council to “recognize the signs of the time” that bear witness to the creative work of God in history. In the 6th and 5th century before the common era, a spirit of wisdom blew over the earth and inspired the founders of the great philosophical and religious traditions upon which humankind still lives today: Buddha (624 B.C. – 544 B.C.),³⁵ Lao-Tseu (570 B.C. – 490 B.C.) Confucius (551 B.C. – 479 B.C.) Socrates (470 B.C. – 399 B.C.)... “When the times were accomplished, God sent his son” (Gal. 4:4) to a place at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. From this time forward, the ebb and flow of history well served the spread of the Gospel. The Roman Empire was its receptacle until Christianity became the empire’s religion under Theodosius the 1st in 395. The final fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 eased the spread of Christianity all through Europe where the Church provided the matrix for European culture. The travels of the great explorers of the Renaissance opened the way to missionaries who spread Christianity to the far reaches of the earth. A new stage now begins with the blooming and the developing of local Churches all over the world, secularized Europe bearing the risk of appearing like a dead flower having released its pollen. Each time, Christian faith acts like yeast transform-

³²Family, business, neighbourhood... But also at the local, regional, national... global level.

³³Ideology with a totalitarian view in the meaning given by Hanna Arendt in the third volume of her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, called *The Totalitarian system: Le système totalitaire*, traduction par Jean-Louis Bourget, Robert Davreu et Patrick Levy (1972), révisée par Hélène Frappat (2002) Paris, France: Le Seuil, collection “Points / essais” n. 307, 2005.

³⁴In particular, bioethics.

³⁵Dates are approximate.

ing cultures from within,³⁶ be it Roman culture, European culture, and now world cultures.³⁷ One can thus distinguish several eras in this historical process that we just described: Roman infancy, medieval youth, modern adolescence, and postmodern maturity... At each stage, initiatives are born within the Church to respond to new challenges: the Eastern monasticism of the 3rd century, at the end of the great persecutions, when Christianity acquired the right to exist in the empire; at the beginning of the 6th century, Western monasticism that played an essential role in European evangelization and the formation of a medieval Christianity; Franciscan spirituality in the 13th century, insisting on evangelical poverty at a time when the merchant economy was thriving with the bourgeoisie; Ignatian spirituality in the 16th century offering the experience of a personal relationship with God, at the threshold of modernism;³⁸ the devotion to the Heart of Jesus Christ after the apparitions of 1673 and 1675 to Saint Marie Alacoque, counterpoint to the modern worship of reason, less than thirty years after the famous "I think therefore I am" of René Descartes in 1647. It is also not difficult to see the hand of God in events such as the vocation of Joan of Arc, whose intervention led to the end of the Hundred Years War between England and France. Such events, mediated by people of faith³⁹ and re-opening a future that seemed closed, have also happened more recently: the Franco-German reconciliation launching of the process of European integration following the Second World War; the Second Vatican Council and its opening up to ecumenism and to the world; the implosion of the Soviet empire without bloodshed. However, these unfolding events did not live up to the level of hope they had created. The initial dynamics of European integration around a political project rooted in common values⁴⁰ and set in a European legislative body made of multilateral conventions fell short when the treaties of Rome in 1957 founded the European project on economic cooperation, which was until then only a support to the political integration. The inversion of the end, the political project, and the means, economic cooperation, created the European Union, and this explains in part the gap between a large agreement on the idea of European integration, and a

³⁶Modernism, that arose in opposition to the Church and negates its own Christian roots, would probably never have existed without the Christian contribution to the Greco-Latin tradition. Indeed, almost all of the great names of modernism in the scientific and philosophic realms stem from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

³⁷One can guess, in a postmodern perspective, at the role Christianity can play in other cultures, in following the example of a pioneer like Matteo Ricci.

³⁸Kant's three *critiques* resonate, as if they were echoes, terms such as *contemplation in action*, and *discernment* that characterize Ignatian spirituality.

³⁹European integration: Robert Schuman, with the contribution of Konrad Adenauer, Jean Monet, Alcide de Gasperi.... Second Vatican Council: Pope John XXIII, with the contribution of Cardinal Suenens, Döfner, Bea...and the theologians Congar, Rahner, Murray.... Fall of communism: Pope John Paul II, with the contribution of Lech Walesa, Andrei Zhakarov, Mikhail Gorbachov...

⁴⁰European Convention on Human Rights, and more than 200 subsequent conventions.

⁴¹The project of European integration has nonetheless been emulated around the world: ASEAN, Mercosur, African Union...

much lower support to the European Union.⁴¹ Likewise, the Second Vatican Council had created great hopes through its indwelling spirit of openness, and coherent body of documents adopted by overwhelming majorities⁴² well received in the ecclesial body. But even before the end of the Council, some topics were taken out of the discussion and assigned to specialized commissions whose decisions are still subject to public debate. After promising beginnings, the implementation of the Second Vatican Council has slowed down, and then stopped, before it could produce all the fruits that were expected from it. Nowadays, the Church is rather set in a withdrawal into its own identity, turning its back on the Council. And regarding the fall of the communist regimes, we have shown above how much the Western world has missed the opportunity of a significant improvement toward an international democratic order based on mutual respect and the idea of what is right.

It is in this historical context that one must reflect on the postmodern perspectives for evangelization, recognizing that the role of the Church is at the service of the Creator's action in history, and cannot be a substitute for it. As already previously indicated, the postmodern factor most favourable to evangelization is the abandonment of the Promethean status of modern reason and the adoption of a more realistic approach based on the complexity of the real. The anthropological reconciliation between the postmodern understanding of the human being and the Christian discourse about the human being should favour a lessening of modern secularization.

The spiritual experience pertains to the affect before, at the second step, it becomes intelligible. It is the experience of the companions on the road to Emmaus who discover only after they recognized Jesus⁴³ that their hearts were burning. It is also the experience of St. Augustine at the time of his conversion, when he discovers God present in depths of his heart, while he looked everywhere else,⁴⁴ to no avail! Similarly, spiritual progress, as described by mystics such as St. John of the Cross, goes through a purification of sensitivity, and then of intelligibility, before coming to a unifying phase, thus indicating that reason is not the ultimate destination of the journey. From a theological perspective, the dichotomy between heart and reason is linked to the sinful nature of the forgiven, but not yet saved, human being. This dichotomy is also found in Christianity between the order of law, sign of the renewal of God's Covenant with a human being that rejected him, and the order of faith. This asymmetric relationship between the tree of knowledge and the tree of life expresses the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the Kingdom of God, between a Kingdom of God present in the world, otherwise the world would not exist, and a Kingdom of God that is not of this world, otherwise the world would be perfect. The Church, whose mission it is to announce the

⁴²John O'Malley: *What Happened at Vatican II?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

⁴³Lk 24:32

⁴⁴St. Augustine: *The Confessions*.

Kingdom of God, must place itself in a just relationship with society, especially in its political dimension, and not regard itself as an institution above others. To do this, the Church must articulate this structuring asymmetric relationship within herself, and give it an institutional visibility. The proclamation of God's Kingdom will be credible to the ears of our postmodern contemporaries if the institutional dimension of the Church does not hide its sacramental reality.

The historical dimension of the postmodern understanding of the world and of society and the continuation of the creative action⁴⁵ of God in history question the ability of the Church to discern the "signs of the times" and to identify the working presence of the Risen,⁴⁶ in order to collaborate with his work. However, the history of the Church shows an institution that undergoes, rather than announces or anticipates, cultural changes. This was dramatically true at the time of the Renaissance and of the Reformation. This seems still true today and creates fears of the tearing apart of the ecclesial fabric at the continental scale of a multipolar world. The cultural withdrawal perceived in the Catholic Church for several years was due, for example, to a nostalgia for the pre-conciliar Church that did not believe in the action of the Spirit in the Church, notably during the Council, and considered as sacred vestments and issues of language... Such an attachment to human traditions,⁴⁷ while the entire law is summed up by charity⁴⁸ as Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the encyclical *Deus caritas est*, turns its back on the Church, the people of God, and on its future. This lack of faith is a hindrance to evangelization since, even more than in modern culture, the proclamation of the Gospel to a postmodern society will not be credible if the Church gives a pre-modern view of herself. Indeed, the visibility of the Church bears its own witness. When Jesus speaks about visibility, he is unequivocal: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."⁴⁹

As postmodernism approaches, it is imperative that we trust the Holy Spirit present in the Church and finish implementing the decrees of the Second Vatican Council. This is not only about the Church's credibility, but also about her unity. Therein lays a major challenge for evangelization: "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."⁵⁰ Ecumenical dialogue, which made enormous progress in the theological realm and in the lives of Christian communities, stumbles upon institutional rigidities. Within the Catholic Church, the gap has increased between the Church as people of God (*sensus fidelium*) and the institutional Church (magisterium), while lay people,

⁴⁵JN 5:17

⁴⁶MT 28:20

⁴⁷This has not changed since the time of Jesus: MT 15:3-9, MT 23:2-12...

⁴⁸MT 22:36-39

⁴⁹JN 13:35

⁵⁰JN 17:21

re-acknowledged by the Council, are the main actors of an evangelization of proximity. The centralisation and the uniformity of the Latin Church create fears of schisms along cultural lines (Africa, Latin America, China, India...) in the context of a multipolar globalization where the great regional identities will affirm themselves. The anthropology at the basis of a postmodern society invites us to consider the unity of the Church as a unity of hearts, in union with the One who is perfectly united with the Father in the Spirit. The institutional unity that flows from this cannot be realized under an authority that sets its actions in a power setting in the political sense. That would be authority working in an ideological fashion that, in its essence, divides by excluding. The institutional unity of the Church seems possible only around an institutional configuration that articulates in an adjusted way the asymmetric relationship between 'tree of life' and 'tree of knowledge' indicated above.

There still exists a spiritual thirst, for instance, in Western countries. The Church's answer cannot continue to be a ceaseless restating of apodictic principles that set an ideal of perfection, which appears to be a wall impossible to climb to people of good will. It must instead open paths accessible to the spiritual experience of those who wish it, offer a meeting with God that takes place within a personal story each time different. In order to facilitate as much participation as possible in the life of the Church, and to increase the vitality of the ecclesial body, some dispositions can be made at the level of the institutional workings of the Church according to perspectives opened by the Second Vatican Council. For example, the liturgy, as a celebration of faith in one's culture, would gain in being administered by the Bishops' Conferences according to major cultural areas. Or still, bishops' nominations would be better perceived as ecclesial events if the concerned Christian communities were consulted, and the Bishops' conference to which the diocese belongs was associated with the appointment process.

To conclude, the possibly most favourable perspectives that postmodernism offers evangelization challenge the evangelizing ability of the Church. Our discussion has mostly tried to show that in a postmodern context, when the level of education and the ability to form a judgment by oneself are high, the proclamation of the faith is not just about an explicit discourse, nor only about generosity with charities or people, but, more so than in the past, about the witness of a type of organization and of institutional workings.

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