

The Culture of Unity and Some of the Great Challenges of Humankind Today

ABSTRACT

This text explores some of the great challenges present in the cultural landscape of today, such as globalization and its associated phenomena – (internationalisation and ultra-contemporaneousness); exasperated economism with its outcome in the scrap culture; the “piecemeal third world war”, according to Pope Francis’ effective expression, which is connected with a widespread and still poorly understood post-humanism and transhumanism; nihilism and the eclipse of religion as an institution. It considers the light that might be shed by the culture arising from the Focolare’s charism of unity, in order to address these challenges rigorously and without hasty demonizing. The overall picture is not intended to be negative but, without being naive, to offer an interpretation that is able to discern the work of the Spirit in the dramatic scenario of present times.

KEYWORDS: culture of unity, charisma, ecology, transhumanism, communion, generativity.

INTRODUCTION

Among the different ways of approaching human realities, there are four complementary perspectives: social, economic, po-

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litical and religious-cultural. These constitute a hermeneutical quadrilateral which allows us to consider all aspects of the one reality.

So, in addressing the theme assigned to me, I will seek to identify first of all the great challenges of humanity today starting from a precise point of view which is that of the charism of unity and, therefore, from the perspective of the culture born from the charism of unity.

As we know, a charism is God's gift to a person for the good of the Church. It is about God's project, God's plan of salvation and therefore the Church itself in so far as it is a "sign and instrument" of salvation. The Church is not merely an association of the baptised but it is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Church is *koinonia*, the fellowship and communion of people with God and among themselves.

Unity, which is the central nucleus of the charism of Chiara Lubich and the Focolare Movement, is one of the words which sum up the whole Gospel. It is the horizon we want to reach, the goal indicated to us by God himself, who walks with us on this pilgrimage. Indeed, he is the Journey: only in Him can we reach unity, which, as we know, is a grace.

But we are dealing with a journey in history. Therefore, we need to take a look at history, seeking to identify within it the signs that enable us to journey in this specific time, always directing ourselves towards the goal.

I. SOME GREAT CHALLENGES OF HUMANKIND TODAY

In the Part I of our contribution we will give a general diagnostic view on contemporary world

problems. There will be presented the issue of globalization and internationalism with their global impacts, like the culture of wasting and throwing away, piecemeal third world war, and

cruel battlefields. And, finally, will be described intellectual and spiritual panorama of post-modern philosophical environment with its contemporary nihilism, and god without religion.

1. GLOBALISATION, INTERNATIONALISATION, ULTRA-CONTEMPORANEOUSNESS

By globalisation or internationalisation we mean the “tendency of economic and social phenomena to take on world-wide dimensions and value”¹. It means a tendency which has been more evident in recent decades, but is by no means confined to our age. In fact, historians generally agree in affirming that such a phenomenon began with the great “discoveries” of the XV century onwards, which helped develop trade relationships that gave rise to worldwide migratory movements involving the five continents.

In our day, however, the global effects of these phenomena are understood more from the information we receive continually in the media as well as the economic and social effects in the shorter or longer terms. Think for example of the two great World Wars; the economic crises of the last 100 years; but also the migratory movements of various kinds that have had an ever greater effect on society and culture.

The approach to these phenomena requires observation, study and discernment so as to identify the challenges they present and address them in the right way.

The fall of the Berlin wall (in 1989) marked the end of the opposition between East and West and the start of the more recent phenomenon of globalisation. What are the consequences? We have witnessed a structural deregulation (in politics and economics) and a cultural deregulation (individualism) which has

¹ This term is used in evolutionary psychology too and “indicates a process in the cognitive development of the child”.

threatened the process of “mass freedom” that began in May 1968, in an irrevocable way.

The “freedom for the masses” forecast in May 1968 was about wide-ranging freedom: freedom from poverty through economic well-being; freedom from all kinds of oppression, by recognising democratic rights; freedom from ignorance, through accepting religious and cultural pluralism. Through globalisation, freedom itself is in crisis with the emergence of new types of poverty, oppression and ignorance (Magatti & Giaccardi 2014: 9-28)².

In this globalised world, some people speak of power being used as distinct from the use of power. The traditional paradigm of relationships has changed, and this has happened in international relations too. Now economics comes before ethics, values, politics, rules or institutions.³

In the field of law, we are witnessing the phenomenon of the fragmentation of rules, while in the religious field, in addition to different types of fundamentalism, a new and somewhat paradoxical civil religion has evolved.

From a political point of view, we are aware of the unravelling of a centralised order in the world community and the rise of multipolarity.

Looking at the cultural context, in the broad sense of the term, relativism holds sway as the basis of tolerance, which in turn becomes the expression of a new fundamentalism.

² It is a study done in the fields of sociology and social psychology from the point of view of the history of freedom. Apart from the fact that freedom is challenged by current phenomena, their reflection sheds light which enables freedom to take a new leap in quality, which I will refer to later.

³ Nowadays economic growth is considered to be the criterion with which to evaluate progress in a society and therefore market competition. The consequences can be seen by all: political, social and ecological instability. But this is nothing other than a sign of the human crisis which recent Popes have referred to. Cf. Tornielli & Galeazzi 2015, p.18).

Ultimately, we are living in an age of cultural pluralism. We have known for a long time (at least since the discovery of the New World) that there are many cultures on the planet, which are often very different from each other. What is new today is that we no longer need a world map to be aware of pluralism. It is enough to see who is living in our block of flats, or in our area. The outcome is that we no longer know how to use the concepts of centre and periphery, top and bottom, within and outside a system (whether social, economic, political or environmental...). Space has been uncoupled from tidy geometry. Ideas about groups, communities or peoples have given way to more dynamic and complex concepts, like that of the swarm (an agglomeration of people on the move).

Cultural pluralism becomes a matter for concern when it presents itself as ethical and religious pluralism. Individuals living side by side, with different ethical approaches, seem to threaten order and peace. The paradigm for such co-existence needs to change. Ideas about the State, the nation or freedom mean different things to citizens from different cultures. So tolerance seems to heighten the crisis and not resolve it. We need another paradigm. Ethical theory too has realised the need for a change of paradigm (Apel 2005, Brunkhorst 2008: 55-77).

Furthermore, we must speak of the phenomenon of ultra-contemporaneousness. One geopolitical analyst defines it as:

“... Ultra-contemporaneousness ... refers to the space/time of globalisation (simultaneous, ubiquitous, systemic and productive) and it includes both historical-local time and the notion of “real time” in the New Information and Communication Technologies of the Internet, in particular, and also the tendency to use English as the common world language. It includes a complete levelling down, beyond frontiers, in the civil and military fields. ... An ultra contemporaneous battlefield is continuous, simultaneous, ubiquitous, systemic and

productive, and it occurs at sea, in the air, on land, in space and in cyberspace” (Rodriguez 2014:10-11).

Ultra-contemporaneousness refers, therefore, to the manipulation of space-time coordinates which have profoundly changed in recent decades and which greatly affect people’s daily lives. Not having time and not being able to control it have become a genuine and true conditions of existential insecurity, more than simply being aware of the fast pace of events.

2. THE CULTURE OF WASTING AND THROWING AWAY

The new forms of poverty, oppression and ignorance, which arise from the consumerism characteristic of globalisation, are both cause and effect of what Pope Francis, with his human and Christian sensibility, has called “the culture of wasting and throwing away” (Viganò 2015:125-139)⁴, dominating the contemporary world. It is a theme which has been present for many years in Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s thought and pastoral practice (Tornielli & Galeazzi 2015).

This subject touches on some concrete challenges which he has coherently explained and addressed: sobriety, integral ecology (care for creation and for the human person), the globalisation of indifference (Pope Francis 2015), social debt, social inequalities and the universal destination and use of goods.

Here is one of his reflections on the subject:

⁴ In this chapter, called “Resisting the culture of waste”, the author considers the following topics which are present in the thought and action of Pope Francis: moderation, care for creation (and the human person), the globalisation of indifference, integral ecology, social debt, social inequalities, the universal destination of goods and participation.

This “throwaway culture” is tending to become a shared mentality which infects everyone. Human life, the person, is no longer seen as a primary value to respect and safeguard, especially if they are poor or disabled, if they are not yet useful – like the unborn – or are no longer useful – like the aged.

This key theme has been part of Pope Francis’ pontificate right from the start, and was stated explicitly in the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

“These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish” (n. 22).

The current crisis in which people find themselves is accompanied by a crisis of values, in which relativism and self-referencing emerge very clearly:

The culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labour on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests. It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage. In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species? (n. 123)

3. PIECEMEAL THIRD WORLD WAR, BATTLEFIELD, TRANSHUMANISM

Many people are talking about a “piecemeal third world war”, an expression coined quite recently. Accepting it means knowingly facing a harsh and stark reality. Despite the terrifying news in recent years, even today you will find people who ask “But, are we at war?” This is not out of cynicism but simply because people are not aware of the extent of the conflicts that concern us all.

The events in Paris and Brussels are the nth manifestation of this “piecemeal third world war”. It is a matter of a widespread war... The focus on Paris and Brussels might blind us to other equally serious situations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa...

Other authors speak about a “battlefield”:

The concept of battlefield ... concerns and becomes part of everything, from the molecular level of genetic engineering and nanotechnology all the way to places, spaces and daily experiences of urban life. It includes tangible planetary space and the immaterial cyberspace of global importance. ... The generalised strengthening of military and police forces has an impact on society. We know very well that in situations of war, the first victim is the truth. Instability and conflict can be very productive for some economic and geopolitical powers. They dehumanise. Thus the transhuman condition of the 21st century comes about” (Rodriguez 2014:60-61).

We have just read the words “transhuman condition”. What is it? Analysts tell us that someone is preparing an age:

... characterised by the incorporation of human beings as part of the great technological-military system which will allow humankind to go beyond conventional limits, whether in

biology or society, that the human species has stayed within over thousands of years⁵.

In the field of biology people speak rather of post human. The post human person arises from the encounter between culture and technology, a space in which we perceive a new way of being human. One illustrative example was in 1982, when TIME Magazine's Man of the Year was a computer. The figure of this post human person is Cyborg. Drones that kill people represent the first attempts at this new way of being. It is not by chance that they were first used in military and surveillance spheres, even if not only in those.

From a social and geopolitical point of view the concept of planetary transhumanism alludes to a structure of civilisation characterised by multipolar hegemony with an efficient system of control and surveillance, a globalised economy (which is in fact ultra liberalistic) in which democracies would become formalities in a context beyond the nation-state, and at the service of superpowers. If, at the start, we spoke about losing the ability to manage one's own time, transhumanism could make us understand what it means to lose our own destiny.

4. CONTEMPORARY NIHILISM, GOD WITHOUT RELIGION

What is known as contemporary Nihilism is a phenomenon linked to the postmodern condition. When we use the term postmodern we are referring to a number of realities including: "the decline of grand narratives" (Lyotard 1979; Cacciari 1994); "deconstruction"; the ongoing unravelling and re-vamping of grand narratives that become "micro-stories" (Theobald 2007:891-912).

⁵ *Idem*, p. 107.

The postmodern condition has a direct effect on Christianity, itself considered as a grand narrative. As C. Theobald says, the situation of the Church, at least in Western Europe, is marked by a process that he calls the ex-culturation of Christianity⁶. This concept refers to a cultural scenario in which the Christian religion not only has lost its attraction for people as a religious message, but has also lost its cultural bonds. Christian humanism no longer exists in Europe.

André Glucksmann, a philosopher and essayist who died recently, wrote (2004:51):

God is dying. In Europe he is already dead. ... And we ask ourselves: why Europe? Why only Europe? Why is it the one place, on our planet and in the history of humankind, which has produced a civilisation without God?"

If I were to say something like: "Christ did not come to found another religion but to announce and inaugurate the Kingdom of God among people", I am sure you would all agree. But things are not as simple as that. Today many of our contemporaries would agree with this affirmation but they would probably mean something very different from what we understand by it. What does God without religion mean?

Antonio González, a Spanish philosopher in the Mennonite tradition, sees the marker of being Christian in recognising the sovereignty of God proclaimed by Jesus, and hence in the capacity to flee from any kind of institutionalised power, even a religious one. It concerns the victory of the Crucified and Risen Lord over all power and hence the radical renewal of humankind (Gonzales 2015:62-68).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his letters from prison collected in *Resistance and Submission*, speaks of the dawn of Christianity

⁶ *Ibid.*

beyond religion, of a God without religion. This is what he said in a letter dated 30th April 1944 (Bonheoffer 2015: 369-271):

How do we speak of God – without religion, i.e. without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on? How do we speak (or perhaps we cannot now even ‘speak’ as we used to) in a ‘worldly’ way about ‘God’? In what way are we ‘religionless-worldly’ Christians, in what way are we the ek-klesia, those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favoured, but rather as belonging wholly to the world? In that case Christ is longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world. But what does that mean?

This is how he puts it in a letter dated 16th July 1944.

God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without Him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mk 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God, is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering!⁷

Christos Yannaras writes in the same vein with his call for an ekklesia stripped of religion and which knows how to contemporise the newness of Christ’s message as one which propounds

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 466-468.

a radically new type of existence in the image of trinitarian communion. It is a question of assuming and subsuming people's natural religiosity into this radical existential newness (Yannaras 2012).

In the Preface to one of his works, Basilio Petrà writes:

Christianity is a new mode of existence in communion, according to the intimate and radical trinitarian truth about the person, made in the image and likeness of God.

And he goes on:

(The Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church) have need of conversion and to become once more a happening regarding a new existence, a contemporising of God's way of being manifested in history, the experience of infinite freedom in a boundless communion of love⁸.

In an effort to appreciate the spiritual need behind these expressions, which might seem rather extreme, we can see that it is not a question, I believe, of an abstract, unhistorical or in other words idealistic return to a supposedly original Church devoid of institutional character. Rather, it is a matter of discovering what must always animate the institution, that is to say the very life in Christ which underlies the institution, the grafting into the Holy Spirit which enables His Life and His Truth to grow uninterruptedly.

Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Europa* looked at "the challenges and the signs of hope" calling people to "Return to Christ, the source of all hope" and, therefore to return to the Gospel. He perceived and understood the crisis of Christian Europe in the category of a dark night, so dear to the mystics, which is not only

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

darkness but a climb into the light. His powerful words to the Bishops of Europe have been very much quoted:

The crises of European people are the crises of Christian people. The crises of European culture are the crises of Christian culture ... Even more deeply we might affirm that these trials, these temptations and this outcome of the European drama not only challenge Christianity and the Church from the outside, as a difficulty or an external obstacle, ... but in a real sense are within Christianity and the Church⁹.

The Pope took up the subject again a few days later, in Segovia, explaining how the trials – the night - are within Christianity and the Church:

Humankind today, despite great progress, touches in its own personal and collective experience the depths of forsakenness, the temptation to nihilism, the absurdity of so many physical, moral and spiritual sufferings. The dark night, the trial which makes us touch the mystery of evil and requires the openness of faith, sometimes takes on epochal dimensions and collective proportions.

The individual Christian and the Church itself may identify themselves with the Christ of St John of the Cross, at the height of his suffering and abandonment. All these sufferings were taken on by Christ in his cry of pain and in his entrusting himself to the Father. In faith, hope and love, night is changed into day, suffering into joy, death into life.

St John of the Cross, through his own experience, invites us to trust, to let ourselves be purified by God. In the context of

⁹ Talk by John Paul II to the participants Bishops at the V Symposium of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE). Translation into English not on Vatican website.

faith woven together with hope and love, the night begins to perceive “the first light of dawn”, and becomes like an Easter night - “O vera beata nox”, “Oh night more lovable than the dawn” – and proclaims resurrection and victory, the coming of the Spouse who unites each Christian to himself and transforms each one: “The loved one transformed into the Beloved”.

If only the dark nights which are gathering over individual consciences and the collectivity in our day were lived in pure faith, in the hope that “obtains as much as it hopes”; in the burning love of the power of the Spirit, so that they may be converted into light-filled days for our wounded humanity, in the victory of the risen Lord who frees through the power of his cross!

II. A RESPONSE FROM THE CULTURE OF UNITY

In the Part II will be presented some of the challenges that characterise our times, in a way which for some could seem negative. Obviously, only a negative viewpoint would not do justice to the reality of things. These challenges are not inherently negative, but ambivalent. In fact, an immediate and unassuming analysis shows that, thanks to globalisation, humankind has never been in better circumstances to be fully itself. Ultra-contemporaneity allows us to share not only in negative events with our equals, but other very positive ones. This enables us to experience, although perhaps only for a few moments, what the “ut omnes” (may they all be one) Jesus spoke of might mean. Post modernity has not only led to the disappearance of grand narratives but also of totalitarian ideologies which left millions of dead in their wake. Furthermore, today we are witnessing a religious re-awakening which, despite its ambiguities, bears with it considerable hope.

But we need to go into depth. Thus, the Second Vatican Council comes to our aid by encouraging us not to have an attitude

of judgement but of listening to the world (GS 44). In fact, after the resurrection, Jesus told Mary Magdalene that he would meet his friends in Galilee, that is, outside the holy city. For us today, Galilee means the world as it is, in which God speaks. Paul Evdokimov said: "We know where the Church is, but we cannot judge and say where the Church is not." And Klaus Hemmerle, "The Church – said strongly – has this to say to the young generations: Teach me your life, your way of thinking and speaking, your way of asking and being, so that I may be able to learn once more the message I want to give you".

Ultimately, the true Christian attitude is that of listening and receptivity.

On this foundation let's see now whether the charism of unity has something to say about the challenges presented earlier.

In the last talk Chiara Lubich gave to bishops who are friends of the Focolare Movement, at a meeting in Switzerland on the 5th August 2004, she said:

"Our spiritual way ... is aimed at giving life to Jesus spiritually present among us ... following the example of Mary who physically brought him into this world."

The Second Vatican Council highlighted the eschatological nature of the Church, which is about two fundamental things: that the Church embraces everyone, both the earthly and the heavenly church; and that ecclesial life has an eschatological character, meaning that the reign of God, already present and visible in the Church, has an eschatological character, and is an anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The eschatological dimension of Christian life, in which the Christ who at the end of time will reveal his presence (Parousia), is already present in our midst.

In that same talk, Chiara affirmed:

The presence of Christ, which constitutes the deepest essence of the Church as a whole and of each Christian community, has never been lacking throughout the centuries. It continues to be manifested in every member of the Body of Christ who lives consistently in accordance with his or her faith, in every religious community (for example, in certain monasteries). I recently saw a film about Saint Clare of Assisi - they certainly had Jesus in their midst! But what difference is there between Jesus in their midst... and the Jesus in our midst that the Holy Spirit asks of us? He is present in a liturgical assembly, if they are not just standing side by side, and also in every authentically Christian family. As long as mutual love is lived out, Jesus is in their midst.

So what is new here, which according to the Abba School has never existed up until now? What is new? The newness lies in bringing this presence to its ultimate design: to the unity of the whole Body, as it is, for instance, with our vocation to "that they may all be one." This is the novelty.

The newness brought by the charism of unity will always be what Chiara described: to direct everything towards its aim, "may they all be one". Some theologians say that the process of manifestation of Revelation will end only with "may they all be one". When I heard this affirmation I got a shock and I wondered: is it the case, then, that the charism of unity, together with others and in synergy with others, is a charism that aims to fulfil Revelation?

Fulfilment means fullness. But, if we look at reality with our own eyes, we find many limits which seem to say that such fullness could not possibly be reached. This is exactly what Pope Francis is saying with his principle "time is superior to space"¹⁰. Recognising the limitations of our historical condition, we must trigger processes of change rather than seeking positions of power.

¹⁰ *Evangelii gaudium*, nn. 222-225.

1. FROM UNION TO UNITY

A first response to today's challenges that emerges from the charism of unity is contained in the distinction Patriarch Bartholomew I made between "union and unity"

Athenagoras and John XXIII, Paul VI and Athenagoras, were to be the bearers of a new springtime in the Church. They were the ones who made unity the centre of their pastoral action for the good of all. They did not speak of union, but of unity, fundamental concepts of a culture, which was current during the whole of the 19th and 20th centuries, not only in the Christian world and in the wider religious context, but also in all developments in sociology and anthropology in human history. It is a groundbreaking, historic development and not only a reflection on different semantic concepts, from Union to Unity, from ΕΝΩΣΙΣ (enosis) to ΕΝΟΤΗΣ (enotis)! (Bartholomew 2015).

I consider the difference between union and unity to be decisive in characterising the leap in quality that is asked of us so that the phenomenon of globalisation might acquire all its humanising significance. In fact, union requires subjects who consider themselves a zero point of departure, risking that one or other takes some form of control. Throughout history, all types of union failed sooner or later, precisely because of this anthropological deficit. Only unity guarantees true multipolarity without hegemonic control. Unity intrinsically maintains diversity, and indeed promotes it. The charism of unity has no difficulty working in a space without fixed geometric reference points: the spatial architecture of the charism of unity is that of the Exterior Castle (Zanghi 2004:371-376; Zanghi 2008; Cervera 2011). Loving one another to be worthy of unity means that I seek the centre of my existence in my neighbour. It is a mobile centre, indeed very

mobile. The further away a brother or sister is from me, the more I need him or her to build unity. The centre is the periphery, or, put another way, neither of them exist as the criterion regulating human experience. The dialogues which spring from the charism of unity, are the right response to tensions caused by the advent of ethical and religious pluralism in so far as they supplant the old tolerance, revealing its ineffectiveness.

True globalisation and internationalisation lies in the words Chiara Lubich said “My Self is humanity”¹¹. For the founder of the Focolare Movement, globalisation is trinitisation.

Regarding ultra-contemporaneousness, I don’t think there is any more overwhelming and effective phenomenon of ultra-contemporaneousness in unity, than Eucharistic communion. In it, time is not lost but transfigured, while our destiny is safeguarded in the heart of the Trinity.

Let’s look now at the phenomena of post-humanism and transhumanism. Already in the 1980s, Piero Pasolini, in his studies on cybernetics, spoke of a qualitative leap in the history of humanity (Pasolini 1985). Today his ideas have acquired new relevance. We are no longer envisaging Cyborg, with the post-human theorists, but a true world-person, “Jesus us”, the total Christ, to use a term coined by Teilhard de Chardin, which arises out of the experience of God in unity, the experience of Jesus in our midst (Rondinara 2003: 347-364). The new way of being human is to be “Jesus us” as Chiara would say; all of us are Jesus (human-God) and each one is themselves and us at the same time. The new cultural subject which arises out of the charism of unity is the Soul, as Chiara says in *Paradise 1949*, a subject which is collective but personal (Zanghi 2015), the true post-human in so far as they are beyond being centred on the individual. It is the dawn of the person in contemporary culture. This is true transhumanism. It is Christian hyper-humanism.

¹¹ Lubich C. *Paradise '49*, 6th September 1949.

2. GENERATIVITY

In society today, people talk about generativity. In fact, a recent publication sees generativity as a new sociological and anthropological category, destined to be pivotal in a society of people who are truly free. A generative personality, these authors claim, – is one which:

[...] is able to open up their own spectrum of action both on the temporal level – there is not only the here and now but before and after – and also on the spatial level – there is not only the immediate circle of the family and the microcosm of belonging, but there are other people and other approaches to which attention can be given.

Feeling called to make their own contribution to the reality surrounding them, generative personalities contribute to making it more beautiful and welcoming. Being able to gamble with their own freedom, beyond themselves, they become able to “generate” (Magatti & Giaccardi 2014:40).

It is a question, therefore, of freeing up freedom through a new way of exercising it, which is by being generative, or in fact givers¹².

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-28. . It is a study done in the fields of sociology and social psychology from the point of view of the history of freedom. Apart from the fact that freedom is challenged by current phenomena, their reflection sheds light which enables freedom to take a new leap in quality. It is a question, therefore, of freeing up freedom through a new way of exercising it, which these authors identify with being generatives, meaning givers. In this light, in the second part of their book, four generative attitudes are outlined: desiring, giving birth, taking care, and letting go. In the third part, these generative attitudes are seen in their concrete application to a social, cultural economic and political environment. Hence, the invitation: “Generatives of the world unite!” so as to allow a “new historical subject” to emerge, that is to say the “society of the free”.

In this light, in the second part of their book, Mgatti and Giaccardi outline four generative attitudes: desiring, giving birth, taking care, and letting go. In the third part these generative attitudes are seen in their concrete application to a social, cultural economic and political environment. Hence, the invitation: “Generatives of the world unite!” so as to find a way of allowing a “new historical subject” to emerge, that is to say the “society of the free”. Theobald too speaks of a pastoral work of engenderment as a new opportunity for the Gospel.

I think these considerations are in great harmony with a few key points in the charism of unity, in particular with the experience of Jesus in our midst, generated, precisely, by reciprocity on the basis of our being a nothingness of love. Generativity is always reciprocal and reciprocity is always generative. It is a question of setting in motion what Herbert Laueroth calls “secularised motherhood”¹³, which is perhaps the true challenge facing the Church of Christ today.

3. THE “NIGHT” AS THE SHADOW OF THE RISEN LORD WHO IS DRAWING NEAR FATHER

Sergej Bulgakov, in his philosophical work “Unfading Light” written in 1919, affirms:

«We must accept that in the contemporary world the spiritual being is afflicted with problems and filled with doubts, but faith has not been lost and hope shines out. Perhaps this painful complexity hides an opportunity for religions. Perhaps

¹³ Herbert Laueroth at the Gen’s Consultation: “*La Chiesa in uscita*” su “*Relativismi e fondamentalismi: una lettura sullo sfondo del postmoderno*”, [“*The Church going out*” in “*Relativisms and fundamentalisms: reading these on a postmodern canvas*”], Rocca di Papa, 21st May 2015. Unpublished text.

religion has a particular task, precisely in our age, and all our problems, with their foreboding and their omens, are nothing other than the shadow of He who comes." (Bulgakov 1916; Zanghi 2007:15).

Giuseppe M. Zanghi concludes: "The darkness [of our day] is the shadow of God who is coming".¹⁴

Understanding the inner workings of the "culture of waste and throw" should be done objectively, starting from the peripheries of existence, not as a philanthropical strategy but in faithfulness to the economy of salvation which finds its explanation and fulfilment in the Crucified and Risen Lord.

In an interesting article in *La civiltà cattolica* the Jesuit theologian Amauri Begasse de Dhaem invites us to contemplate the face of the defeated Messiah and the mystery of the cross, as defining elements of the Christian kerygma. In reality, Christ chose the cross and defeat, not victory; he chose fruitfulness, not efficiency. In this we find the fundamental criterion for Christian action in the world.

The bishop and theologian Bruno Forte, writing in the *L'Osservatore Romano*, presents the suggestive image of the sacrificed Lamb in the Apocalypse as the only one able to open the book of history (the history of the suffering and hope of humanity) and to break the seals. It is the image that conveys the power of the greatest powerlessness, the key to change history which is hidden in suffering unto death.

In the perspective of unity, these words of Scripture are interpreted in the light of the mystery of Jesus crucified and forsaken. He is the God of our time, the God without religion, who dies outside the walls of the holy city, like those cursed by God. It is in Him that we can see the radical renewal of Christian experience.

¹⁴ At the Pre-volunteers School, Castelgandolfo, 20 aprile 2007. Unpublished text.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I believe the situation in the world today constitutes a true *kairos* for the unity of the Churches, an unavoidable task for the Christian world which cannot be postponed. In fact, if we keep in mind the indispensable attitude of listening which we mentioned earlier, then we should bring about a necessary work of purification and deconstruction of the “religious encrustations” present in our Churches. These are the things that divide us. The world no longer allows us to be divided, nor does it allow us to proclaim the message of Christ as we have done up to now. The exculturation of Christianity affects even the doctrinal presuppositions of every Church.

As Yannaras says:

(Christ) never declared nor did he allude to the fact of being the founder of a new religion. He incarnated and indicated a new mode of existence for people.

This mode of existence which Christ incarnated and to which he called people did not have features characteristic of religious needs; it did not lead people to subjective convictions; it did not presume individual meritorious virtues; it did not oblige observance of a law, nor conformity to forms of worship. In all these areas Christ’s doctrine was an overturning and reversal of the terms-presuppositions of religion (Yannaras 2012:47).

His Church was nothing other than the synaxis in Eucharistic and trinitarian communion: being one body in Him, one in Him in full communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the spirituality of unity can help us refind, and refind ourselves in, the one Church of Christ.

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