
INFLUENCE OF CHURCH ON CULTURAL EVOLUTION

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to present concisely the influence of the Christian Church on the culture's evolution along the history. By the notion of culture are analysed aspects concerning education, science, economical and social relations. On the other hand, the paper takes into account the role-played by the development of fundamental sciences and of the new technologies, mainly the information technologies, on the dynamics of modern culture. In this context, the position and the role of the Church in our days are also considered.

Keywords: interdependence, theology, information technologies, cultural dynamics

1. Introduction

The problem of the relation between Christianity and culture-civilisation is a difficult and a continuously new issue. The spiritual aspect of the future will depend on how it will be understood and achieved this Christian-cultural reciprocity, in the same way in which our time depends on how the humanity did understood and succeeded to correlate the Christian conceptions with the demands and the conceptions of the human life. With this point in the view, the present paper will try, by a chronological approach, to reveal some of the main aspects concerning the above subject.

2. Discussion

2.1. Past

There are voices claiming that if the ancient culture was not maintained under the shape of the Roman Empire, it irremediably collapsed with the guilty complicity of the Christianity. These voices are ignoring that the Christians were deeply conscious about the historical and providential role of the Roman Empire. They are ignoring that, Augustine at one end, Ieronim at the other end

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of the empire and many others like them were grieving over its breakdown, despite the fact that the Roman Empire has made to flow so much Christian blood in the dust [1].

In the tragic circumstances of the last Roman days, the Church with its people was the institution who represented and defended the civilisation against the barbarian invasions, the bishop being named in many cases 'defensor civitatis' [2]. By their attacks, the barbarians endangered not only the empire but also the Church because its cause was interweaved with the Greco-roman civilisation, as in Persia the Christianity was persecuted as Romanism [3].

After the fall of the empire, the Church became the *heir* of the culture generated in the Western Roman Empire by the Greek philosophy and Latin law, whilst in east the heir was the Byzantine Empire. Later, during the so-called "medieval night", only the Church had and made possible cultural interests, allowing in this way the appearance of Renaissance, which is the cultural resurrection of the humanity. The monastic institution, considered by so many an anti-cultural one, played the main role here.

The formation of the clergy always requested the study of the holy books obliging the Church to support and to organise *the education* in any situation. Therefore, around the churches and monasteries existed the only schools of the time, for hundreds of years, up to the appearance of the universities, which are originally the same thing – church schools. At the East end of Europe, the Byzantium University attracted students as far as Armenia, giving instruction to both clergy and laic Byzantines much earlier than did western universities [4].

The libraries were one of the usual treasures of the occidental monasteries whilst Byzantium was named the librarian of the mankind. These libraries kept the contact with the ancient world, saving by the difficult work of the copyists the spiritual values of the antiquity. The monks have also been for ages the only literates and writers, and even the Renaissance begun in history with a man of the church - Petrarca.

The monasteries, the church schools and the Christian writers have saved for the posterity the greatest cultural value, which is *the Latin language*, basis of the medieval spiritual life. On the other hand, *the Greek literature* was the fundation of Byzantine culture, the Occident taking advantage of its benefits mainly through the Greeks established in Italy.

The early monasticism was in Europe the reserve of *intellectual force*, organised to be useful to itself and to the society mainly by two great men of the culture history: Casiodor and Benedict of Nursia, their work and influence on the Western culture being well known all around the world.

The modern *science* was cultivated in germ during the Middle Age by men of the Church. The church schools were teaching algebra, geometry, geography, cosmology and astronomy. A great mathematician, the monk Gerbert, becomes the Pope Sylvester II [5]. The Franciscan Roger Bacon and the bishop of Lisieux, Nicolas Oresme, are among the great astronomers of the time. Bacon was also a great physicist and a multilateral savant. Many studies of chemistry, geography, botanic, zoology, anatomy and physiology are the work

of the people of the Church. The medicine and pharmacy were studied and practised in monastery schools. The study of the law was a permanent necessity for the Church and due to the Christian principles the justice made progresses, the so-called 'christianisation of the law' beginning with the emperor Saint Constantine the Great.

In parallel, the Church has also developed an intense and valuable *artistic activity*. Famous paintings, from museums all over the world, the painted monasteries and churches from Romania, e.g. are now the solid proof of this interest. The architecture knew a flourishing development due to the interest and the support granted by the Christian Church.

Another aspect by which the medieval monasteries have aided the culture, regards their *economic activities*. After the collapse of the Roman Empire the towns have lost very much of their importance and the monasteries became real economic centres, where the agriculture, the vocations and the commerce were considerable promoted.

We cannot finish this enumeration without adding the *social and missionary work* developed by the Christians along the history. The initiative for peace actions, social assistance, hospitals and asylums belonged almost always to the Church. In the East are well known Basil the Great, Efreem of Syria and John of Alexandria. On the other hand, the christianisation of different people usually meant the converting to civilisation.

2.2. Present...

The lost of the Church impact on the culture in the last two centuries, the strong disagreement with science playing an important role here, was also reflected in the evolution the human society. We had two world wars and a Bolshevik revolution that succeeded to destroy the cultural effort of many generations both here in Europe and around the world.

Despite the effort made by many people of art, the main cultural result of the communist period was the 'socialist culture', which is dominated by the kitsch, hypocrisy and the cult of personality in many of its branches. On the other hand, the explosive development of the applied sciences requested by the wars, was the germ of the appearance of the so-called 'third culture'. However, after the fall of the communism this 'third culture' seems to be the tendency of our times and we will focus on it.

Science historian C. P. Snow firstly used the term of 'third culture' in 1964. He predicted, at that time, a culture where literary intellectuals conversed directly with scientists [6]. Thirty years later, J. Brockman, a literary agent to many bright scientists, resurrected but amended Snow's term [7]. According to him: "The third culture consists of those scientists and other thinkers in the empirical world who, through their work and expository writing, are taking the place of the traditional intellectual in rendering visible the deeper meanings of our lives, redefining who and what we are." Therefore, it seems that Brockman's

scientists intend to replace the literary intellectuals rather than to cooperate with them.

Other authors have recently criticised in strong terms this tendency of our days, stating that the third culture has not very much in common even with the fundamental sciences, because it is a culture based on technology and for technology [8]. Accordingly, the third culture creates new tools faster than new theories, because tools lead to novel discoveries quicker than theories do.

It is a fact that for the last two decades, the technology supersaturated our cultural environment and it's clear that computers had a lot to do with this. The result is that we have a current generation of Nintendo kids and Internet dependent persons. And if we speak about Internet, we must to mention here that unfortunately, despite the fact that is a very useful tool, it is by far easier and cheaper, or even free, to visit sex devoted sites than gathering scientific information for example. And this is not the only weak point. On the other hand, the television, by its recent low quality productions (never ending movies, pointless talk shows without beginning and without end, etc.) also affects in a negative way the people's perception of the culture and implicitly the cultural evolution of the mankind.

We may say that the man can lose in this way its identity as spiritual being. There is the risk of reducing its life to the relation with the PC and the virtual world. Nevertheless, the Internet and the PC supply an extraordinary amount of useful information but this does not turn the computer into an all knowing and wise god. Contrary, the PC could become an instrument of manipulation, corruption and dehumanisation, of alienation for the ontological man, the spiritual being, face of God saved by the universal sacrifice of the Cross of Christ.

Even the creators of the information technology underestimated this tendency. For example, during the series of lectures, on the theme 'Management and the Computer of the Future', presented at the M.I.T.'s Centennial Celebration in 1961, Gene Amdahl [9], the manager of Advanced System Design project from IBM Data Systems Division, made the following remarks concerning the time-sharing computer systems: "I do have some reservations, however, about whether every individual user will desire to operate his own console. Not everyone wishes to operate his own typewriter, for example." The reality of our days proves that he was wrong!

On the other hand the artists have shown a more realistic approach concerning the cultural evolution. In an interview given in 1950 by the American painter Jackson Pollock he said that the modern artist "cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other culture. [10]" This is amazing now because by the three keywords: the airplane, the atom bomb and the radio he denotes in fact the new technologies, where the destructive ones occupy an important place and indeed the present culture turned to the technology.

Another important aspect of our time culture concerns the globalisation tendency and which means in fact the preference for the so-called material

values. The “global culture” is promoted and supported by the communications, the information, the entertainment, the trade, and is very tight bound to the third culture [11]. The spiritual values, established by the western culture – the pure love, the self sacrifice, the spiritual joy of God contemplation, the meditation at the sacred texts, the Christian tradition, the charity, seem to vanish in this future context.

In this context of dissonances between different kinds of intellectuals, the solution could be the return to the original meaning of the term ‘third culture’ – that one exposed by Snow. According to our experience, we do believe that the generous area of Science & Theology is able to supply the right frame for such a forum.

It must to be mentioned here, in a few words, the potential of the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology (ESSSAT) to create the appropriate confluence zone. As its President very well underlined it, ESSSAT is a society appreciating the richness of Europe’s diversity, including the diversity of languages, histories, habits and confessions [12]. It is the place where scholars of different religions, as well as atheists or agnostics share their opinions about the most various subjects preoccupying any kind of real intellectuals. A simple example supporting our point here is the theme developed at the last ESSSAT conference in Barcelona 2004: ‘Streams of Wisdom? Science, Theology and Cultural Dynamics’ and that of the future conference in Iasi 2006: ‘Sustaining Diversity. Science, Theology and the Futures of Creation.’

2.3. Future?

The collision of the Christianity with the ancient world was not a war for the material goods but a fight of ideals. In the same way, being at war with what is degenerated, the Church will contribute to the formation of the culture of the future. Her attitude is a primordial necessity for the rise of the moral level of the humanity, which is the main condition for the existence of a durable culture extended in space and time.

God as absolute personal existence, even if the modernity and post modernity elude the divinity problem, is The One That Is (Exodus 3,14) and the Christianity, today as yesterday, let the world know the same God revealed in history, inviting the man that belongs to the technological and informatics society to the communion with Him in the ambient of the ecclesial community where He is always present as devoted love, as Saviour gift. In the human horizon, anxious as result of different competitions, only God – The Light may bring the peace to the man that achieves the plenary communion by the personal and common prayer. The religious dimension of the human being defines and ensures its identity and the so much needed wisdom.

For each age, the life and teachings of Jesus represented an answer (or, more often, *the answer*) to the most fundamental questions of human existence and of human destiny [13]. We think that the biblical triad of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, as He is described as having identified Himself in

the Gospel of John (John 14:6) must be the wisdom of the future evolution of the human society.

3. Conclusions

The present culture has to be Christianised in whatever it has so valuable – the easy and quick communication, the knowledge on the human and cosmic universe – by the conversion to the unique, always new and inexhaustible message of the eternal Truth. The Christians, which are ontologically and spiritually reporting their life to Christ, must hope that the time of quantity domination, who deceitfully claims the quality, will diminish its offer of immoral consumables in order to make place to the responsibility, the respect and the love that has as source the infinite love of God – The Being of love.

Everything concerning the culture, the Church has centralised under her wing in the Middle Age and as result, our modern world possesses now in independent and developed forms. We may say that the history of the Church is the very history of the modern culture. Unfortunately, our day ideology of secularism rejects the transcendence of the Divine Absolute. This vision, of an anthropologic reductionism, defies the general culture of the humankind that includes the religion sphere, leading in fact to a self-rejection in the complex cosmic and community relations.

This might also explain why the Christian Church can't find her place in the new European Constitution. Despite the fact that Ireland, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland requested for a reference to the Christian origins of Europe to be included, the opposition of other countries has practically ruled out the possibility of a compromise to include such a reference in the EU constitution.

We end the paper with the hope that our leaders, the persons responsible for our lives, in the wisdom of their decisions, they will understand the major importance of culture and implicitly of the Christian Church on our future and they will act consequently.

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Influence of Church on Cultural Evolution

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