

**DIVERSITY AND UNITY:  
THE VISION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION  
IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION**

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**THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBALIZATION**

Nowadays, the world is becoming a “global village.” Time and distances are reduced and that leads people and nations closer, towards a meeting. The interaction and interdependency of the financial systems of many nations, in other words the globalization of the world economy, accelerate that process. In view of that global unity, two conflicting propensities are formed: one to unity and another to diversity. As a result of this situation, contradicting views are expressed. On the one hand, the supporters of unification predict an earthly paradise, while, on the other hand, the supporters of diversity predict an earthly damnation.

The age-old question about the relation of diversity and unity, regarding the relation between the one and the many, is still waiting for an answer. Christian education is called once more to offer its witness, for its vision has always been ecumenical, a world community of brothers and sisters and, even more, a universal society of people being in communion with God. Therefore, Christian education must contribute to the creation of the proper environment for the real unification of the world. To be more specific, it is called upon to show the way of overcoming those temptations to which people are often submitted by their nation, civilization, ideology or religion. Christian education has to offer a proposal of life transcending all those dilemmas that have caused so many problems to humanity throughout history. It is also called to reveal the harmonious coexistence of diversity and unity, their equality and balance.

**THE TEMPTATIONS OF DIVERSITY AND UNITY**

**The temptation of nations: nationalism or internationalism?**

On the one side of the temptation of nations is diversity without unity, that is nationalism. Anything alien is regarded as by definition hostile, while one’s race, country and motherland are the highest values and ideals. Nationalists, by distinguishing themselves from “all the others,” fall into the syndrome of the “chosen people,” undervaluing one another. The result is quite often isolation and fanaticism which end up into provincialism. Then follows a fabrication of internal and external “enemies” conspiring to

annihilate the “chosen people” or to falsify the “supreme race,” which would justify any action of aggression against those considered as “enemies of the nation.”

On the other side of the temptation of nations is unity without diversity, that is internationalism. Far from the value of a nation as such, internationalism falls into the syndrome of the global individual, the *man of masses*, the suppression of difference, the disapproval of any personal trait. Any diversity denoting human multiform expression is considered as retrogressive and reactionary and therefore it must be abandoned immediately.

Against these temptations of nations, Christian education is called to point out that national and ecumenical can coexist in community: a community of persons, a nation of communities, a community of nations. Anyone can have at the same time a small and a greater country (Anastasios 1997, 412-413). The small country is one's birthplace, the place where he/she lives. The greater country is one whose citizens are all those who uniformly understand the great existential events of life such as birth, love, death. It is reasonable for someone to love his/her small country (motherland) for it incarnates what is unique and different and at the same time to love his/her great country (*ecumene*) for it incarnates unity.

According to Christian education, nation and *ecumene* express the richness of humankind. Nation underlines the need of *ecumene* to get rid of ideological abstractions. At the same time *ecumene* underlines the need of a nation to stay away from mass narcissism or racial idolatry. What is national accepts personal particularities and what is ecumenical affirms the common nature of all human beings. Consequently, the dialectic of the national and the ecumenical, diversity and unity, seems to be the only way for a harmonious coexistence of nations (Zizioulas 1991; Clément 1997, 150-152). That becomes obvious from literature. Major writers, like Homer, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky, are both national and ecumenical.

### **The temptation of civilizations: provincialism or cosmopolitanism?**

On the one side of the temptation of civilizations is diversity without unity, that is provincialism. In that case, people regard their civilization as perfect and self-sufficient and therefore they do not see any reason or need to have a fruitful interaction with other civilizations. Anything originating from their culture is the best that can be. For that reason, they think that insistence on their traditions is the only way to survive as a nation in the modern world. After all, an exit includes the risk of alienating their cultural identity. Thus, xenophobia, intolerance and folklorism are the characteristics of provincialism.

On the other side of the temptation of a civilizations is unity without diversity, that is cosmopolitanism. The will to eliminate anything different and the rejection of diversity lead to the levelling of everything. Therefore, the

rejection of the national culture is understood as the only way of surviving in the modern world. The rejection of any particularity is regarded as the only way to progress. Love for anything outlandish, the destruction of anything domestic and the approval of impersonal things become the main features of cosmopolitanism.

Against these temptations of civilizations, Christian education states that local and ecumenical can coexist in truth. Truth is applicable in specific environments. Therefore, any civilization can express what is true in its own way and that is actually an extension of the incarnation of Christ in a specific cultural environment. Christ being united with the entire human nature through the Holy Spirit, can and must be incarnate in all civilizations and, thus, any civilization can be adopted by Church and express its truth (Bria 1986, 56-62; Oleksa 1997; Zizioulas 2000, 25).

Church adopts a civilization as follows: a. It accepts all those elements that converge to a Christian perspective; b. it purifies all that is diverging, and c. it directs and fulfils everything in a Christian perspective. Thus every civilization is baptised and reborn in Christ and any aspect of it is permeated from the evangelical ethos of self-sacrifice. Scientists, for example, discover the *logoi* (principles) of beings and things; politics unify people in a community. Human civilization witnesses aspects of the divine beauty.

Therefore, Christian education must teach civilizations to open themselves to transcendental, which means that any cultural activity must surpass itself to reach a higher level. To give an example, it is not enough for technology and economy simply to serve the daily needs of people. They must contribute to the development of solidarity and brotherhood among people. However, that solidarity and brotherhood must not be kept isolated in an earthly perspective but should transcend themselves in order to promote unity among the people in their relation to God. As a result people are liberated from death. The way to God, through continuous transcendence, must be the aim and function of any civilization (Florovsky 1974, 30; Nissiotis 1986, 121-123; Evdokimov 2001, 214-215).

By following the above we can create a true multicultural society, not based simply on the acceptance of others and the respect of their existence. The necessary pre-condition for a pluralistic-singular civilization, founded on diversity in unity and unity in diversity, is the establishment of a common cultural ground, based on a classification of needs. For this reason, Christian education proposes its own classification and view concerning life's priorities. Those principles upon which every civilization must be based are the following: Every person is unique; all people are brothers; nature is the common home of humankind.

### **The temptation of ideologies: individualism or collectivism?**

On the one side of the temptation of ideologies is diversity without unity, that is individualism. In the name of freedom, an individual disregards love. Everyone cares for the fulfilment of his/her needs ignoring the needs of others (Litonjua 1999, 216-220). Social solidarity and a harmonious function of society are demoted. The part is considered above the whole, the citizen above the city, the individual above the society. The last boundary of individualism is anarchy, the rejection of any responsibility towards society.

On the other side of the temptation of ideologies is unity without diversity, that is collectivism. For the sake of love one disregards freedom; the otherness of persons as well as the uniqueness of one's existence are undervalued. The whole is considered above the part, the society above the individual, the city above the citizen. The last boundary of collectivism is totalitarianism, the disapproval of persons and their classification as a statistical numeral of the impersonal state mechanisms.

Against these temptations of ideologies, Christian education reminds one that the part and the whole can coexist in a person. Person is in a harmonious relation with God, with his/her fellow human beings, and with nature. In a person, love and freedom coexist in brotherhood and therefore a person has a catholic, a universal consciousness, feeling "responsible for everyone and everything" (Zizioulas 1985, 106). A person knows that "his/her problem to have a piece of bread is a material one, but the problem of the neighbour to have a piece of bread becomes spiritual." The person formed by Christian education is that of a first-born brother, who, according to the image of Jesus Christ, sacrifices him/herself for his/her little brothers (Khodre 1980, 35-37; Lossky 1991, 175-176; Schipani 1997, 29-40; Vrame 1999, 196-197).

If the French revolution was the revolution of the individual and the Russian revolution the revolution of the masses, Christian education has to evangelize the revolution of person, that is, a person whose "heart burns for the entire world."

### **The temptation of religions: sectarianism or syncretism?**

On the one side of the temptation of religions is diversity without unity, that is sectarianism. Sectarianism is the isolation within a sect of all those who regard themselves "pure" and simultaneously disapprove of all others. For sectarianism there is no truth outside the sect and, thus, fundamentalism arises with fanaticism and intolerance (Dumestre 1995, 193-197). Anyone who diverges must be ostracised or punished by death. God is projected as a cruel punisher who condemns the "enemies" to eternal damnation. Violence and sanctity are amalgamated and a scape-goat pays for the unity of the sect.

On the other side of the temptation of religions is unity without diversity, that is syncretism. According to syncretism, all religions have the same aim and therefore every believer is in the right way. Thus, every

religious particularity is assimilated in the great melting-pot of religions (Clément 1989, 121-122). Since all already existing religions possess part of the truth, a new religion could include the entire truth (Goldelwijk - Fortman 1998, 42-46).

Against these temptations of religions, Christian education underlines that the human and the divine coexist in Christ. It must establish a dialogue with other religions in an effort to point out their positive or negative aspects. It understands that religions constitute the anxious efforts of human beings to identify the cause of their existence, to illuminate their ontological question.

Christian education must reveal that Jesus Christ, the indivisible (= united) and unconfused (= diversity) unity of the human and the divine, is the answer to all religious queries. Christian education will reveal God-person to the religions of the impersonal, and God-love to the religions of power. It will project the incarnation of God to the religions of the transcendental, and the deification of human being to the religions of nature. It will point out the uniqueness of the person to the religions of amalgamation, and the immortality of the person to the religions of animism.

It is a duty of Christian education to convince that Christ is the only answer to the demands of religions for truth. He is the answer to the demand of Hindus for a perfect infinite, the demand of Persians for the perfect good, the demand of the Egyptians for a perfect life, the demand of the Greeks for a perfect human being, the demand of the Romans for a perfect human-god. The person of Christ fulfils the demands of centuries for salvation. The *theomonism* of the East and the *anthropomonism* of the West are overcome in the *Theanthropos Christos*.

### **THE COEXISTENCE ARCHETYPE OF DIVERSITY AND UNITY**

Briefly examining the various temptations of diversity and unity and proposing ways of overcoming those temptations, we feel the need to explain where they are due to and where their transcendence can be based on.

According to Christian education, the above problem is the result of the original fall, the refusal of human beings to accept God, the Absolute Other (Zizioulas 1994, 349-351; Clapsis 2000, 139-142). Therefore, diversity causes fear and ends up to division. For this reason people are united according to some common traits, forming groups which fight each other. Dualism arises and each group proclaims itself to be the "world of light" while all the others belong to the "world of darkness."

As a result of the above the whole world becomes a theatre of conflicts. One nation opposes another and political parties fight each other. One civilization opposes another and a "believer" fights the "unbeliever". The presence of the "other" is considered as a threat to one's existence and his/her death seems to be the safest way of suppressing any diversity. Thus, conquerors killed in the name of the nation, colonialists in the name of

civilization, ideologists in the name of an ideal and the inquisitors in the name of religion.

To overcome the results of the original fall, Christian education invokes the Archetype of the harmonious coexistence of diversity and unity, namely the Holy Trinity. God is a harmonious communion of three persons: the “I,” the “you,” and the “other”; the lover, the beloved and the co-beloved one; one-in-three and three-in-one; each one with the other, through the other, for the other. In the trinitarian communion, diversity and unity coexist. Every person is unique and irreplaceable. At the same time, every person exists in an absolute unity with the other. There is no distance or partition, not any individualism or collectivism, no anarchy or totalitarianism. The one and the many coexist in love: unity-in-trinity and trinity-in-unity. Diversity and unity is the way that trinitarian God exists.

This divine trinitarian-unity is depicted by the human multi-unity in Church where one experiences the coexistence of diversity and unity (Kallistos 1986; Stylianos 1996, 8-14). Within the Church each person is singular and unique, yet exists at the same time in complete unity with the others. In Jesus Christ, people are united regardless of their colour, language, race, age. None is afraid of the other and everyone cares for the others. The persons in the Church experience the eschatological vision of the Christian education by participating in the Holy Eucharist (Astley 1984; Ciobotea 1987, 110-116; Tarasar 1995, 85-104). Human beings respond to the love of God by offering everything to God and their fellow human beings. Music, architecture, poetry, and science serve the unity of the human and the divine. In the Holy Eucharist, diversities are united to glorify the Creator (Zizioulas 1985, 145-149). That is the way of life in the Church.

Christian education proposes that way of life in the era of globalization: the catholic unity of everything, the loving communion of human beings with God and therefore, by extension, with their human beings, and with nature. It is left to every person to accept this vision or not. Christian education does not force anyone. On the contrary, it regards everybody as children of the love of God. Church respects all, and prays for the entire world (Tarasar 1998, 207-209). It establishes a dialogue with everyone regardless of their nation, civilization, ideology or religion (Anastasios 1993, 151-152; Bridges-Johns 1997, 142-145; Hopko 1999, 370-371).

At times when unity without diversity and diversity without unity lead to death, Christian education is called to reveal a Life of diversity-and-unity, according to the archetype of the trinitarian life. That unity which does not confuse, that diversity which does not divide, that trinitarian divine beauty is the ultimate vision of Christian education.

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