

The new global ethic: challenges for the Church

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Abstract

This booklet offers an overview of the challenges that Christians face in front of the new global ethic that has imposed itself since the end of the cold war. A global cultural revolution took place immediately after the fall of the Berlin wall. New words, paradigms, norms, values, lifestyles, educational methods and governance processes, belonging to a new ethic, spread globally and have by now won the day. The ethical system we are facing is new in the sense that it is *postmodern* and, in its radical aspects, *post-Judeo-Christian*. It is, in addition, *globally normative*: it already rules the world's cultures. The tendency of the majority of intellectuals and decision-makers has been to follow the new norms without carefully analyzing their origin and implications, while an ever smaller minority has been reactionary. *Discernment* has not been made.

The content of the new culture is not self-evident. Under the guise of a "soft consensus", the global ethic hides an antichristic agenda rooted in Western apostasy and driven by powerful minorities at the rudder of global governance since 1989. A number of Christians already confuse the paradigms of the new culture with the social doctrine of the Church. The danger of Christian alignment with the new ethic is particularly real in the developing world now confronting head on the effects of globalization. On the other hand, Christians cannot put in doubt God's providential guidance of world events. They are called to discern the signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the new culture and to evangelize it, thereby offering an alternative to postmodern deconstruction.

Ignorance of the real stakes - be they sociopolitical, cultural or anthropological and theological - is abyssal. Ignorance, however, is always a bad adviser. A serious study of the global cultural revolution, both as *content* and as *process*, is in order to enable Christians to exercise their responsibilities. Such an effort belongs to the Church's mission of evangelization.

A global cultural revolution

Since the end of the cold war, hundreds of new concepts spread like wildfire to the remotest corners of the globe, expressing themselves through the means of a new language. Higgledy-piggledy, let us give a few examples:

globalization with a human face, global citizenship, sustainable development, good governance, consensusbuilding, global ethic, cultural diversity, cultural liberty, dialogue among civilizations, quality of life, quality education, education for all, right to choose, informed choice, informed consent, gender, equal opportunity, equity principle, mainstreaming, empowerment, NGOs, civil society, partnerships, transparency, bottom-up participation, accountability, holism, broad-based consultation, facilitation, inclusion, awareness-raising, clarification of values, capacitybuilding, women's rights, children's rights, reproductive rights, sexual orientation, safe abortion, safe motherhood, the rights approach, win-win, enabling environment, equal access, life skills education, peer education, bodily integrity, internalization, ownership, agents of change, best practices, indicators of progress, culturally sensitive approaches, secular spirituality, Youth Parliament, peace education, the rights of future generations, corporate social responsibility, fair trade, human security, precautionary principle, prevention...

Nobody may any longer deny the predominance of these concepts in contemporary culture - the main feature of which is to be *global*. This apparent mishmash of words and concepts may not be altogether condemned nor endorsed. Genuine human aspirations and perennial values got entangled with the bitter fruits of Western apostasy, which corrupted the process of globalization from within.

The new global language, however, tends to exclude words specifically belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition, such as:

truth, morality, conscience, reason, heart, virginity, chastity, spouse, husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, complementarity, service, help, authority, hierarchy, justice, law, commandment, dogma, faith, charity, hope, suffering, sin, friend, enemy, nature, representation...

Didn't Jacques Derrida, the master of postmodern deconstructionism, suggest in an interview by the French newspaper *Le Monde*, shortly before dying in 2004, to eliminate the word "marriage" from the French civil code so as to resolve the issue of the juridical status of homosexual couples? The exclusion of certain words is a factor that must be taken into consideration when analyzing the challenges of the global ethic.

A certain number of new concepts turned into *global paradigms*. A spontaneous generation of concepts thus became a *normative process*, through which the minorities in power imposed on all their ideological interpretation of the new concepts: the normative process was accompanied by a process of *ideological radicalization*. To speak publicly of homosexuality as a sin, for instance, now amounts to breaching one of the supreme norms of the new culture: the absolute *right to choose* or the *principle of non-discrimination*.

The new paradigms reflect dramatic paradigm shifts marking the transition of Western civilization from *modernity* to *postmodernity*. The new, postmodern paradigms destabilize the old, modern paradigms. Let us give a few examples of these shifts:

from *development as growth* to *sustainable development*, from *government* to *governance*, from *representative democracy* to *participatory democracy*, from *authority* to the *autonomy* and *rights of the individual*, from *spouses* to *partners*, from *happiness* to *quality of life*, from the *given* to the *constructed*, from *the family* to *various forms of families*, from *parents* to *reproducers*, from *objective and measurable material needs* to an *arbitrary rights approach*, from *charity* to *rights*, from *cultural identity* to *cultural diversity*, from *majority vote* to *consensus*, from *confrontation* to *dialogue*, from *international security* to *human security*, from *universal values* to a *global ethic*, and so on.

The cultural changes that have taken place since the end of the cold war have the magnitude of a *global cultural revolution*. Their implications are extremely complex and must be studied one by one with great care.

The influence of the new norms is not limited to the adoption of a new *conceptual framework*: the new paradigms became *dynamic action principles*, which have already led to concrete and irreversible transformations in all sectors of socioeconomic and political life. These transformations affect us all directly, where we are, in our daily lives, especially in the areas that are the most important for personal and social morality, such as education and health: new laws and policies, radical changes in mentalities and lifestyles, codes of conduct for businesses and institutions, changes in the content of curricula and textbooks, new norms and decision-making methods in politics, health care and education systems, new strategic priorities for international cooperation,

radically new approaches to development, fundamental transformation of democratic principles and mechanisms - a new social ethos imposed on all.

The efficiency of the revolutionary process has been such that the new concepts are by now omnipresent. They *imbibe* the culture of international, supranational and regional organizations, the culture of governments and their ministries, political parties (both left and right) and local authorities, corporate culture, the culture of health and education systems, the culture of the media, the culture of countless networks of NGOs and transnational governance. At various degrees, the new language has also penetrated into world religions - even in Christian NGOs and charities.

Everywhere in the world, societies and nations now live in a culture governed by the values of *consensus, diversity, partnerships, sustainability, holism, choice, gender equity, bottom-up participation* and so on. For better or for worse, whether or not we are aware of it, the global culture educates us all. Let us repeat that the content of this culture, which is externally seducing, is not self-evident. It is not *neutral* - neutrality being a myth that nobody ever genuinely believed in. The new values are *ambivalent*. The possibility of a genuine consensus coexists with a radical agenda. Ambivalence does not mean toleration and choice, although the majority would tend to believe so. Ambivalence is a process of deconstruction of reality and truth, which leads to the arbitrary exercise of power, domination and intolerance. The paradox of postmodernity is to seek to deconstruct the modern ways of exercising power while at the same time introducing new, more sophisticated and subtle ways of power-grabbing.

Integrated in a *culture*, the new concepts are not a jumble. They are in a dynamic, driven by an inner logic. The new concepts are interrelated, interactive, interdependent, indivisible, mutually reinforcing. They belong to a *system, a whole* in which all is in all. For example, in the new system, *good governance*, which presupposes *consensus-building* and *bottom-up NGO participation*, is the way to implement *sustainable development*, which goes through *gender equity*, of which *universal access to reproductive health*, itself founded on *informed choice* and the *right to choose* (i.e. the *right to abortion*), is the precondition. The new paradigms are themselves *holistic* - to the point of totally including each other.

A *new ethic* gives the new paradigms their unifying configuration. This ethic is *global*. The *global ethic* has taken the place of the *universal* values on which the international order had been founded in 1945 and by now considered obsolete. The starting and end points of the global ethic are not those of the traditional concept of universality: the global ethic is marred by radicalization. It is impossible to understand it without relating it to the "new theology" which preceded the cultural revolution and pushed God's transcendence "on the other side", entrusting immanence to man.

Most of the new norms have not yet formally entered international law and therefore are not yet legally binding. Yet the power of the revolution was such that they bind differently, not only governments but, primarily, mentalities and behaviours inside all the cultures of the world. The new ethic is a *Diktat*. In terms of efficacy and efficiency, it seems more powerful than the rule of law and international law. Which head of state proposed, articulated and spelled out alternatives to the new paradigms? Which organization successfully challenged their underlying principles? Which culture effectively opposed resistance? The fact is that all influential social and political actors all over the world, not only did not resist, but *internalized* and now *own* the new paradigms. Alignment has been general.

In spite of its devastating efficiency, the cultural revolution went almost unnoticed. It has been a *quiet* revolution. It took place without bloodshed, without open confrontation, without *coup d'état* or overthrow of institutions. There even never has been, anywhere in the world, an open and sustained democratic debate on the content of the new concepts. No organized opposition or

resistance manifested itself. Everything happened *by stealth*, by way of *consensus-building*, *advocacy*, *awareness-raising* and *sensitization* campaigns, *formal-informals*, *peer counselling*, *clarification* (the “experts” do it for you and determine what is right), *dialogue*, *partnerships*, *parallel processes*, *social engineering*, *cultural adjustment* and other *soft* techniques of social change that are manipulative insofar as they hide an agenda and are used to impose on the majority the agenda of a few.

The revolution took place both *above* and *under* the national level (at the UN and through the NGO movement, abusively called “civil society movement”). The true owners of the agenda are not governments nor the citizens they represent, but pressure groups pursuing special interests which, as we shall see, grabbed global normative power by stealth. These groups were the spearhead of the revolution, the trailblazers, the experts who forged the new, manipulative language, the sensitizers who led “global campaigns”, the consensus-builders, the facilitators, the primary partners of global governance, the social engineers, the champions of the global ethic.

Bypassing democratic principles, the revolution did not upset the external structures of political institutions. It did not yet change their mandate. It did not bring about a new political regime. Radical changes of mentality and behaviour occurred *within* institutions, *inside* enterprises, schools, universities, hospitals, cultures, governments, families - inside the Church. The institutional façade remains standing, while foreigners already occupy the rooms. The enemy must be sought *within*: *inside* is the new combat ground.

Historical background

How did the revolution happen? Historical circumstances after the fall of the Berlin wall facilitated the power grab of the agents of the revolution. Historically, the UN played a major but not exclusive role in catalyzing global cultural change in the first half of the 1990s. Today, the partners of the global ethic are so numerous, so diversified and so powerful that their agenda would probably further penetrate the fabric of society, would the UN disappear.

At the end of the cold war, people were ready for change. They aspired to peace, democracy, freedom, religious liberty, reconciliation between peoples, a genuine new consensus, real development, North-South solidarity, bottom-up participation, a holistic view of reality, a conscious integration of human and environmental concerns in policy-making, decentralization, subsidiarity, equity, a person-centred globalization process, an authentic dialogue between cultures and mutual respect. Sustainable development, women’s empowerment, good governance, peace education, dialogue among civilizations and most of the other new paradigms adopted in the 1990s seemed to respond to what humanity was waiting for. But humanity’s aspirations were hijacked. Global ethics, solidarity, altruism and humanitarianism now, more often than not, serve as a cover for an agenda of human and societal deconstruction.

The end of the East-West divide coincided with the fast acceleration of economic globalization. The financial and economic power of multinationals grew exponentially, while the power of nation states seemed to be diminishing. The UN sought to strengthen its institutions and to position itself at the strategic center of global governance. Proclaiming it had received an *ethical mandate*, claiming for itself a *monopoly over ethics* in the era of globalization, the UN presented itself as the only institution capable of making globalization *human*, *ethical* and *sustainable*. It offered to counterbalance the global economic power of the market with its “universal moral authority”. Furthermore, the UN argued that “global problems” required not only global solutions, but global values - a *global ethic* that only the UN would be able to forge and to enforce.

No sooner was the cold war over that the UN organized an unprecedented series of intergovernmental conferences. The purpose of the *conference process* was to build a new integrated world vision, a new world order, a new global consensus, on the norms, values and priorities for the international community in the new era: education (Jomtien, 1990); children (New-York, 1990); the environment (Rio, 1992); human rights (Vienna, 1993); population (Cairo, 1994); social development (Copenhagen, 1995); women (Beijing, 1995); housing (Istanbul, 1996); and food security (Rome, 1996). The conferences were conceived as a *continuum*, and the global consensus as a *package* integrating all the new paradigms within a new cultural and ethical synthesis.

It took only six years for the new consensus to be built and globally endorsed. The *implementation phase* started in 1996. Since then, the agents of the revolution have seen to it that no debate reopened or questioned the alleged consensus.

The Internet revolution of the mid-1990s, the mushrooming of partnerships and of informal transnational governance networks (grouping multibillion foundations, like-minded politicians, NGOs, representatives of the world of finance, enterprises, academics...), globalization under all its forms and the decentralization and regionalization strategy of the UN effectively brought the global agenda to the regional, national and local levels.

By its mandate, the UN is an *intergovernmental* organization. The “global consensus” was supposed to reflect the will of governments, themselves supposed to represent the will of the people. *De facto*, however, the global norms were constructed by “experts” chosen in function of their ideological slant and like-mindedness.

How was it possible for ideologues to grab global normative power? In 1989, everyone reasoned as if the “end of ideology” had automatically put the world in a *state of consensus*. According to the new mindset, issues had allegedly become only pragmatic in nature: the “neutrality” of the new issues placed at the center of international cooperation seemed self-evident: environmental degradation, gender inequity, population growth, human rights abuses, rising poverty, lack of access to education and health care and so on. Moreover, the UN argued that these problems were “global” by nature. According to this logic, governments primarily needed, not a democratic debate, but *technical expertise* and the *grass-roots experience* of the NGOs. The error of the majority was to adhere to the neutrality myth without paying attention to the fundamental anthropological stakes of these questions.

In reality, the May 68 generation, the powerful population control lobby and its multi-billion dollars industry, eco-feminist and other secular Western NGOs, postmodern academics had occupied key positions at the United Nations and its specialized agencies since the 1960s. While Western governments were busy containing the Soviet threat during the cold war, a minority of like-minded ideologues working within international bureaucracies and operating in networks was acquiring indisputable expertise in the various socio-economic areas addressed at the conferences. After 1989, they emerged as *the* experts the international community needed to address the new issues at the center of international cooperation. Without encountering opposition, these ideologues exercised global normative leadership under the guise of their expertise. The hidden agenda of a minority of ideological technocrats was to achieve global cultural change according to their social engineering purposes.

The paramount political fact of the cultural revolution is the effective control acquired by self-organized civil society groups (mainly NGOs) over the UN machinery, and by the UN *Secretariat* over member state governments. The influence of powerful NGOs on the direction of “global” policy-making after the fall of the Berlin wall grew dramatically. “Non-state actors” were the

powerhouse of cultural change. NGOs have been the primary partner of the UN Secretariat and UN specialized bodies all the way from agendasetting, to consensus-building, implementation and “monitoring progress”.

The UN-NGO interaction rapidly evolved into a principle – the *partnership principle*. The principle stipulates that governmental and non-governmental actors are treated as *equal partners*. The condition to join a partnership is to adhere to the pre-established vision and strategy of the partnership’s drivers: partners must be *likeminded*. Non-aligned forces are excluded outright. Partnerships are exclusive. In practice, the global ethic and its various components have been the *only* common vision of all existing partnerships.

It belongs to the logic of the partnership principle to claim ever more political power for the “partners”, to the detriment of legitimate power holders. It is therefore not unreasonable to wonder whether the partnership principle does contribute in a major way to the deconstruction of democracy. Yet the principle imposed itself so powerfully that it produced a *global culture of partnerships*.

The partnership principle in turn created new political standards: inter alia, *good governance*, *participatory democracy*, *multistakeholder consensus* and *transnational governance networks*. These standards do not start from the principle of democratic representation (itself tied to universal values), but from the partnership principle which *de facto* depends from the global ethic. The danger of these standards is to redistribute the legitimate moral authority of elected governments to unelected special interests groups which are not only without legitimacy but often radical. Participatory democracy and good governance are not integrated in representative democracy. Treated as its *complements*, they run in parallel, uncontrolled by traditional processes.

The global consensus is, as the UN jargon puts it, *multistakeholder*. This means that all “global citizens” are to get involved, own the agenda, advocate it, teach it, implement it, enforce it: not only governments, but NGOs, “civil society actors”, women’s groups, business and industry, scientific and technological communities, families, children and youth, academia, umbrella organizations, trade unions, experts, local authorities, farmers, indigenous people, the media, imams and pastors... The global ethic posits itself *above* national sovereignty, *above* the authority of parents and educators, even *above* the teachings of world religions. It bypasses every legitimate hierarchy. It establishes a *direct link* between itself and the individual citizen - the proper of a dictatorship.

Postmodernity and the radical agenda of the global ethic

The cultural revolution found its balance in postmodernity. Postmodernity *destabilizes* or *deconstructs*, first of all, modernity, the cultural synthesis that has prevailed in the West since the treaties of Westphalia (1648). To the extent that postmodernity also deconstructs the abuses of modernity - that is, rationalism, institutionalism, formalism, authoritarianism, Marxism and liberal pessimism, it has a providential character. But postmodernity also advances Western apostasy further than modernity. In postmodernity as in modernity, not everything is black or white.

The upheaval of May 1968, its rejection of morality and authority, its radical exaltation of individual freedom and the fast secularization process that followed precipitated the transition of Western societies to the non-repressive civilization advocated by Herbert Marcuse, the postmodern father of the Western cultural revolution. Postmodernity implies a *destabilization* of our rational or theological apprehension of reality, of the anthropological structure given by God to man and

woman, of the order of the universe as established by God. The basic tenet of postmodernity¹ is that every reality is a social construct, that truth and reality have no stable and objective content – that in fact that they do not exist. Reality would be a *text to be interpreted*. It is indifferent to the postmodern culture that the text be interpreted in this or that manner: all interpretations would be equal in value. If there is no “given”, then social, political, juridical, spiritual norms and structures can be deconstructed and reconstructed at will, following the social transformations of the moment.

Postmodernity exalts the arbitrary sovereignty of the individual and of his or her *right to choose*. The global postmodern ethic *celebrates differences*, the *diversity* of choices, *cultural diversity*, *cultural liberty*, *sexual diversity* (different sexual orientations). This “celebration” is in fact that of the “liberation” of man and woman from the conditions of existence in which God has placed them.

But the concept of free will contradicts the *normative* character of postmodern values and in particular of the *right to choose*, the supreme value of the new culture. Postmodern radicalism postulates that the individual, in order to exercise his *right to choose*, *must* be able to free himself from all normative frameworks – whether they be semantic (clear definitions), ontological (being, the given), political (sovereignty of the state), moral (transcendent norms), social (taboos, what is forbidden), cultural (traditions) or religious (dogma, doctrine of the Church). Such an alleged “liberation” becomes an *imperative* of the new ethic. It goes through the *destabilization* and the *deconstruction* (two key words of postmodernity) of clear definitions, the content of language, traditions, being, institutions, objective knowledge, reason, truth, legitimate hierarchies, authority, nature, growth, identity (personal, genetic, national, cultural, religious...), of all that is considered *universal*, and as a consequence of Judeo-Christian values and divine revelation.

When the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted in 1948, Western culture by and large still recognized the existence of a “natural law”, of an order “given” to the universe (and therefore of a “giver”): “all human beings are *born* free and equal in dignity” (article 1). The *Universal Declaration* hence speaks of the *inherent* human dignity of all members of the human family. If it is inherent, human dignity needs to be *recognized*, and human rights must be *declared*, not *fabricated ex nihilo*. In 1948, the concept of universality related to the recognition of the existence of these rights. Universality had a *transcendent* dimension and therefore, *moral* implications.

Universal human rights became radically autonomous from any objective and transcendent moral framework. The purely immanent principle of the *right to choose* is the product of that divorce.

Postmodernity claims the right to exercise one’s freedom *against* the law of nature, *against* traditions and *against* divine revelation. It re-establishes the rule of “law” and democracy on the right to choose, in which it includes the *right*, in the name of a new ethic, to make intrinsically evil choices: abortion, homosexuality, “free love”, euthanasia, assisted suicide, rejection of any form of legitimate authority or hierarchy, mandatory “toleration” of all opinions, a spirit of disobedience manifesting itself in multifarious forms. The *right to choose* so interpreted has become the fundamental *norm* governing the interpretation of all human rights and the main reference of the new global ethic. It supersedes and “transcends” the traditional concept of universality. It positions itself at a *meta level*. It imposes itself and claims for itself a *globally normative authority*.

The absence of clear definitions is the dominant feature of all the words and expressions of the new global language - of all postmodern paradigms. The experts who forged the new concepts *explicitly*

¹ Among influential postmodern philosophers, let us cite Sigmund Freud, Frederic Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jürgen Habermas, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Michel Onfray.

refused to define them clearly, claiming that definitions would set limits on one's possibility to choose one's interpretation and contradict the *norm* of the right to choose. As a consequence, the new concepts have no stable or single content: they are processes of constant change, enlarging themselves as often as the values of society change, as often as possibilities for new choices emerge. Social engineers say that the new paradigms are "holistic" because they would be inclusive of all possible choices.

Let us give a couple of examples: reproductive health and gender. *Reproductive health*, the key concept of the 1994 Cairo conference, is "defined" in paragraph 7.2 of the Cairo document. The pseudodefinition is one paragraph long, fuzzy, deprived of clear substance, ambivalent, all-encompassing. The absence of clarity is strategic and manipulative. The goal is to allow the coexistence of the most contradictory interpretations: maternity, contraception or abortion; voluntary sterilization or in vitro fertilization; sexual relations within or outside marriage, at any age, under any circumstance, as long as one abides by the triple precept of the new ethic: the partners' *consent*; their health *security*; and respect for the woman's *right to choose*. Reproductive health is the Trojan horse of the abortion lobby and of the global sexual revolution. In spite of its eminently incoherent character, reproductive health paradoxically became one of the most applied norms of the new global ethic.

Gender, the key concept of the 1995 Beijing conference, fully integrates the concept of reproductive health. It is "defined" as the *changeable* social roles of men and women, as opposed to their unchangeable reproductive functions. The agenda hiding behind this vague "definition" is the deconstruction of the anthropological structure of man and woman, of their complementarity, of femininity and masculinity. The role of the woman as a *mother* and *spouse* and her very nature as a woman would be nothing more than a social construct: "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman," said Simone de Beauvoir. The deconstruction of the human person as man and woman leads to an asexual society, to a "neutral" society, without masculinity and femininity, which however places the libido at the heart of the law. The deconstruction process eventually leads to a society without love. The gender concept is the Trojan horse of the Western feminist revolution in its most radical aspects - a revolution that has already successfully spread to the four corners of the world. Gender is at the very heart of global development priorities and in particular of the *Millennium Development Goals*.

There is a direct nexus between gender deconstructionism and the "sexual orientation" ideology (bisexuality, homosexuality, lesbianism, heterosexuality...). The global ethic puts all these "choices" on the same level. The Cairo conference introduced the concept of *family under all its forms*: this allegedly holistic concept includes traditional families, reconstituted families, and "families" made up of same sex "parents". Western nations seem to engage always further and deeper on the path of such a "diversity".

In postmodernity, the individual becomes the "free" creator of his own destiny and of a new social order. He can choose to be homosexual today and bisexual tomorrow (*sexual orientation*). Children can choose their own opinion, irrespective of the values they receive from parents (*children rights*). Treated as equal "citizens", they participate in the political decisions that affect their lives (*Youth Parliaments*). Students choose their own curriculum at school, educate each other, and teachers become "facilitators" (*peer education, education for all, lifeskills education*). Women play the social roles of men (*gender equity, unisex society*). NGOs make global policy, and governments conform to their values (*good governance*). Women's groups "clarify" the doctrine of the Church and democratize the Church (*clarification of values, participatory democracy*). The euthanasia lobby becomes a staunch advocate of "human dignity". Reproductive health means the right not to reproduce ("safe" abortion, universal access to the "widest range of contraceptives"). We are all *equal citizens* with *equal rights*, bound together by contractual relations without love. The world is

upside down. What the global ethic deconstructs is the very anthropological structure of the human person.

The postmodern ethic of choice boasts of eliminating hierarchies. Yet by globally imposing the “transcendence” of the arbitrary choice, it engenders a *new hierarchy* of values. It places pleasure *above* love, health and well-being *above* the sacredness of life, the participation of special interests groups in governance *above* democratic representation, women’s rights *above* motherhood, the empowerment of the selfish individual *above* any form of legitimate authority, ethics *above* morality, the right to choose *above* the eternal law written in the human heart, democracy and humanism *above* divine revelation - in a nutshell, immanence *above* transcendence, man *above* God, the “world” *above* “heaven”.

The new hierarchies express a form a domination over consciences - what pope Benedict XVI, prior to his election, called a *dictatorship of relativism*. The expression may seem paradoxical: dictatorship means that there is a top-down *imposition*, while relativism implies the *denial of absolutes* and reacts against anything it considers as “top-down”, such as truth, revelation, reality, morality. In a dictatorship of relativism, a radical deconstruction of our humanity and of our faith is somehow being imposed on us in “nonthreatening” ways - through cultural transformation. Relativism wears a mask: it is domineering and destructive.

In the past, what the West called “the enemy” (such as Marxism-Leninism or bloody dictatorships) used to be clearly identifiable, single, external to Western democracies, aggressive, centralized, ideological, regional. That “enemy” used top-down, brutal methods, such as power-grab by force, a repressive political regime, imprisonment and killing. It resulted in national or regional totalitarian regimes. In the postmodern world, the enemy is fuzzy, hidden, legions, internal to institutions, “friendly”, diffuse, incoherent, decentralized, subtle, quiet, global. Its strategies are soft, bottom-up, cultural, informal, internal. The end result of the global dictatorship of relativism is the deconstruction of man and nature and the cultural propagation of apostasy in the world and in particular in developing countries.

Like the ideological systems of the past, the global ethic will end up deconstructing itself. Replete with inner contradictions, it is not sustainable. Christians should not assume, however, that the emerging global civilization will come back by itself to common sense and traditional values: the new culture must be evangelized.

The specificity of the Christian kerygma

The global civilization is called to be that of *love*. The new global culture is the culture that the Church is now called to evangelize.

We are, as Jesus says it, *in* the world but not *of* the world. Yet the reality is that all over the world, Christians are tempted, often out of ignorance, to mistake the paradigms and values of the global ethic for the social doctrine of the Church, “culturally sensitive approaches” for the respect of culture, the “equity principle” of the new ethic for the Judeo-Christian concept of justice, “awareness-raising” and “sensitization” for the moral and theological education of conscience, “gender mainstreaming” and “women’s empowerment” for the Judeo-Christian teaching on the equal dignity of man and woman, “positive living” for living with theological hope, the arbitrary “freedom to choose” for freedom in Christ, human dignity for the eternal law written in the heart of man, “reproductive health” for healthy procreation, “safe motherhood” for healthy mothers and children (whether born or unborn), “behaviour change” campaigns (that are geared towards the use of contraception and condoms) for education to abstinence and fidelity, “human rights”,

“entitlements” and “nondiscrimination” for the good tidings of God’s merciful love, the agenda of UN conferences and of the *Millennium Development Goals* for an integral development respectful of people’s values and cultures - and so on.

Christians sometimes fail to distinguish the new, constructed, allegedly “holistic” ethical system from God’s holistic and eternal design of salvation, not realizing that the two logics lead in different directions. They are implied in countless partnerships, the drivers of which are agents of the global ethic. The Church must have self respect and keep her independence from the radical agenda. A vital line separates the post-Christian humanism of the global ethic from a genuine and complete Christian humanism driven by salvation in Christ and promoted by the Church. In practice, this line no longer clearly appears. To recover Christian identity, disentangle it from ambivalent agendas is an urgent task for the Church.

Confusing the Christian kerygma and the global ethic carries a double danger. First, the new concepts tend to occupy the space that should be occupied by evangelization. Christians preach human rights, sustainability and the *Millennium Development Goals* instead of preaching the gospel. Little by little, they are seduced by secular values and lose their Christian identity. Didn’t John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, speak about the “gradual secularization of salvation”?

Secondly, if Christian leaders use the concepts of the new ethic without explicitly clarifying what distinguishes them from the social doctrine of the Church and from the gospel, as is often the case, the faithful will be at a loss and will tend not to discern the difference. The resulting confusion may lead the Christian flock to a gradual erosion of the faith.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John-Paul II invited us to *start from Christ*: such is the *new departure* to which we are called now.

For more information

The *Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics* studies the key concepts, values and operational mechanisms of globalization.

The Institute produces *in-depth analytical reports* on these topics and monitors developments at the multilateral and global levels. The Institute also provides *didactic materials* destined to a wider audience, such as manuals, modules, training kits, one-pagers, slides, and regularly updates an analytical lexicon of the key words of the global ethic. The Institute participates in and organizes conferences, round-tables, awareness-raising seminars and training-of-trainers seminars. It occasionally makes policy prescriptions.

After having painstakingly identified the radical components of global cultural change, the Institute increasingly focuses on exploring the concrete possibilities for a positive alternative responding to the real aspirations of contemporary men and women.

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