

SOCIOCULTURAL AND INFORMATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE HUMANITARIAN SPHERE DURING GLOBAL SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

PETER TIRPÁK¹

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59505/IRHNS.22352007.2024.3.01>

¹ University of Prešov in Prešov, Greek Catholic Faculty of Theology, Prešov (SK)

Contact: doc. ThDr. Peter Tirpák, PhD. - peter.tirpak@unipo.sk

Abstract:

The interest in human beings that the various sciences have today is also reflected in theology. It cannot be denied that human beings have always had a central place in the theological reflection on faith and have been the most important object of the Church's pastoral care. Nevertheless, theological efforts to focus on this concern, which brings together various theological treatises dealing with different aspects of creation and God's redemption, are relatively recent. The basic reason for this focus is that the one on whom God's work is focused is man: he is the center and summit of creation. This idea is confirmed in the present paper, whose author aims to show the universality of the Church in the context of her social and humanitarian education of man through catechesis. The latter also contains within itself a discal, i.e. didactic sense.

Keywords: Human dignity, the Church and the development of society, transformation of education.

Faith – Utopia or the Foundation of Education?

The Christian faith in the current millennium faces the challenge of unbelief and religious indifference. The Second Vatican Council already pointed out that the situation is serious because „*many of our contemporaries either fail to understand or explicitly reject this intimate relationship with God, so atheism must be considered one of the most serious phenomena of our time and must be subjected to more thorough analysis*“ [2]. People are turning away from the Church, yet they continue to search. On one hand, they find solace in their personal life philosophy or atheism, often becoming trapped in practical materialism, where hedonism becomes their greatest idol. On the other hand, because humans are inherently beings open and oriented toward the transcendent, they search and find their place in modern religious cults, of which there are many today [17, p. 182]. What they have not received from the Church, they find in other communities. Various sects seek to sink the Christian faith, offering those who have lost contact with the Church the certainty they had lost, providing an alternative to the loneliness in which these people find themselves. Their simple message, presented as new and attractive, puts an end to the doubts that people had in their infantile faith. Through the media, they promise perfection to those anxiously striving for it, a personality change that will bring happiness and a new life [10, p. 16]. They are aware of the resistance, especially among the young, against institutions and traditional forms of religious expression, yet they also know very well that deep down, there remains a hidden but constant longing for the transcendent. Therefore, they usually do not conduct their proselytism directly through religious messages, but through two appealing avenues, particularly sought after by the young. One is related to utility and leisure time. The second is the opportunity to gain knowledge in the fields of occultism and esotericism. All this forms the modern magical climate, which permeates our culture, lacking the spirit of Christ's Gospel. Here, the rediscovery of Catholic identity is crucial. This means a new clarity, new joy, and new pride in being Catholic. Since we often seek a pastoral response to the question, „*how can we once again offer the joy of living the Christian faith?*“, it is appropriate to recall what sects use, or rather exploit: the experience of the „*warmth of community*“. And it seems that this very kind of warmth and spiritual life has disappeared among us. Where parishes have understood the importance of small communities living in unity with the Church, sects cannot find a foothold. It is necessary to practice a value reorientation of the world, which requires seeing many problems from a higher perspective while seeking causes and possibilities. It is not God who needs the world, but the world that needs God, so that human life can have meaning [23, p. 86]. This principle must be properly confronted with what the media offers us,

through a fundamental and clear decision to reject programs and broadcasting structures that ignore or obscure the essence of living in communion with God.

The Church Supports the Healthy Development of Society

When we consider the need for the renewal of society, we must necessarily talk about the creation or reorientation of values within the individual. The Church responds to this challenge and speaks of a living Christian upbringing that helps build life according to God's commandments. This is the way to remove tendencies towards immorality and hedonism from society. However, the moral renewal of society is not possible without the moral and spiritual renewal of families. This also takes place through the lived awareness of the „*Ecclesia domestica*“, which includes the integration of catechesis into the family environment. Here, the social-humanitarian spirit of a future renewed society is formed and grows [22, p. 148].

If we speak of catechesis from the perspective of upbringing, it is important to emphasize that catechesis is the education of faith. Today, the situation and understanding of faith education is completely different from what it was a few years ago when it was only about passing on information about faith (doctrine without explanation). Nowadays, it is no longer about memorization or demonstrating theoretical knowledge in the field of religion, but primarily about understanding that God reveals Himself to man in his everyday life, in ordinary situations. All education depends on the ability to experience life experiences and the value system of both the educators and those being educated. The meaning of catechesis can already be understood from its etymological foundation: the term *catechesis* comes from the Greek word „*katecheo*“ – to call from above or to evoke an echo (*kata* = from above; *echeo* = to sound, to proclaim). Later, this word was translated as *instruction*. This clarification is very important because it shows that instruction or catechesis fulfills its purpose when it is not just a one-sided explanation, but when it creates a dialogue in which questions and answers alternate [8, p. 13-14]. The catechetical documents of the Church view catechesis as one of the forms of the Church's service of proclaiming the Word, and in this sense, catechesis is an ecclesiological activity. On the other hand, catechesis also has an evangelizing dimension. This arises first and foremost from the fact that it is the proclamation of the Gospel, a proclamation that is systematic and deep. These attributes of proclamation respond to the excessive secularization of society, leading to what is called a *new evangelization*. In this sense, evangelization – in addition to faith education, instruction, and initiation – becomes the catechesis

of today. Catechesis that changes a person's view of society and themselves. This reality was fully recognized by St. John Paul II, who in one of his homilies said: „Thanks to catechesis, the Church can carry out its evangelizing activity with even greater zeal and thus expand the reach of its mission“. By the term mission here, we should not understand only those geographical areas where the Church has not yet evangelized (*bringing the good news to all humanity, transforming, and creating a new humanity*) [25, p. 7]. Mission in this case means the reorientation or conversion of society towards building the heavenly kingdom here on earth. Such conversion will occur through a deep experience of human dignity.

Catechesis is a process of faith education, a process that must always progress and respond to the needs of the individual. Catechesis cannot be detached from the person; on the contrary, it must fulfill their desires, answer their questions, and help them live their faith. It must deal with how a person lives, what concerns and joys they have. Catechesis arises from the apostolic kerygma, which it appropriately explains and interprets for those who already believe and want to deepen their faith. From this, it can be concluded that the goal of catechesis is not only to provide information about faith, spiritual growth, or religious maturity but to lead into a deeper communion with Jesus.

Human Dignity – The Alpha and Omega of Society's Transformation

The correct vision of community ultimately stems from the Christian concept of the person, and the true recognition of society's „subjectivity“ always depends on the recognition of the subjectivity of each individual. The value of a person has its origin in the very existence of human being [5, p. 20]. In today's rhetoric, a human is considered a political and social being, as their existence takes place within a circle of social relations that influence them, and to which they in turn react [21, p. 19]. This also relates to the very understanding of human dignity and personhood in general, as it is deeply rooted in the fact that God created man in His image and called him to a supernatural life that transcends earthly existence. Man, as a being endowed with reason and free will and as a subject of rights and duties, represents the first fundamental value of the Church's social doctrine, and is the heart and soul of this teaching [3]. It can be said that after World War II, humanity came to the forefront of the Church's social statements, particularly concerning questions of human dignity, as efforts were made to create a social order that would no longer threaten this dignity [6]. The protection of human dignity is the natural consequence of truth in its primary relation to society. Therefore, the personalist principle strongly confirms that one person should

be accepted by another and, consequently, through the community, considering their unique value determined by inherent human dignity [1, p. 124]. In the same way – by recognizing and protecting human dignity – we can fully understand how to harmonize the normative aspect of social order with the right to freedom. Norms should not be presented as something that limits a person but as the correct recommendation on how not to violate what expresses the „essence of man“ [20, p. 42-63]. In this way, the person becomes the source of social order.

If we were to reflect on why a person has inherent dignity, what its value is, and where it originates, it might be appropriate to remind ourselves that a human is described as a spiritual-physical being endowed with reason and free will. With this reason and will, they transcend the world of things. Dignity also includes the fact that, even by nature – and this applies even to non-believers – the law written in their hearts is the voice of their conscience, as the Apostle Paul pointed out in Scripture (Romans 2:14-15). The theological explanation of human dignity begins with the theology of creation when God created man in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Already the Church Fathers, especially Pope Leo the Great, emphasized that in Jesus Christ, God ultimately embraced all of humanity and thus conferred upon man a unique dignity. The proof of this is the fact that in Jesus Christ, all natural differences between people lose their discriminatory character, as the Apostle Paul also says that there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, for in Christ we are all one (Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11). This means that everyone is called to the dignity of God's children. Jesus Himself, by His behavior, shows that all people have their dignity and have the right to be recognized and taken seriously.

Human dignity can be understood in two senses: as a perfection that a person achieves through self-improvement, activity aimed at others, fidelity to accepted values, and their realization. A person becomes the creator of their own dignity and can – similarly to how they acquire it – lose it. It is not an inherent value. Such an understanding of dignity is called individual dignity. The second understanding of personal dignity is the inherent ontic value, which is permanent, unchanging, and obligatory [11, p. 261].

It is not the human person who decides that they are a person or that they possess dignity. Human dignity is simply the person themselves as a value [13, p. 262]. Accepting the dignity of a person means recognizing the fact that a human being is the work of God Himself. He creates the spiritual, immortal soul of this being, whose organism begins to exist as a result of the physical relationship between a man and a woman. The physical relationship must result from the love of persons, for in it, it finds its complete fulfillment. Although this love does not bring a new spirit – the soul of the child – into existence, it must

nonetheless be willing to accept this new personal being, which arose from the physical relationship, and ensure its full physical and spiritual development. Such development later bears the rich fruit of education.

In its natural state, corresponding to God's creative plan, man is simultaneously an autonomous, intelligent, and free subject, a living member of a single human family, a being called to fulfill their destiny through the diverse activities of their abilities to achieve the goal of both the individual and society [19, p. 59]. Man, as a person, is the center and pinnacle of society and aims to create and improve the economic, cultural, and spiritual conditions that enable as many people as possible to develop their abilities and satisfy their legitimate demands for perfection and happiness. Man demonstrates the need for various values. Of these, one is the most important. We could call it the mother of other values that a person chooses in life. This is the dignity of the human person [16, p. 32]. The protection of human dignity will only be real when it is accepted that the person is a being existing in themselves and not in something else, that they are based on themselves and not on another being. They are therefore not a part, fragment, or contingent being, nor are they an element of the world or a mere specimen of the human species that can be replaced. Every human person is unique and unrepeatable. Being a person means existing from oneself, in oneself, and for oneself. At the same time, it means that the person is an autonomous and free being in making decisions about themselves. This results in the seriousness of the person's dignity being so profound that they cannot be treated as a means [24, p. 29-30]. There may not be a single clear understanding of the concept of human dignity. However, in general, it can be said that the loss of dignity is caused by dehumanization, which manifests in the disappearance of humane values in personal, social, and cultural life. One could speak of a kind of dehumanization. Among its most important manifestations and sources are, for example, the commercialization of culture and human activity, the instrumentalization of attitudes towards work, where the creative and personal relationship to work disappears, the objectification of interpersonal relationships, which cease to be relationships between persons, the anonymity of life, which threatens individuals despite the growing social interdependence, attempts to use material and technical-industrial development to dominate others [12, p. 715]. In summary, this involves everything that results in the removal of space for the development of true humanism [15, p. 23]. According to the teaching of the Council, the loss of humanity and human dignity is not only the result of these transformations. The Council also reminded us that Christians are called to build a more human world, one that better corresponds to the unique dignity of man [4]. True social progress lies in the development of moral consciousness, which leads to taking on greater social responsibilities and openness towards others and towards God.

Catechesis – A Path to Strengthening Faith and Humanity

If we want to speak about the richness revealed in the words of Christ, we certainly cannot overlook the parables He offered to His listeners to better explain His mission on earth. It would be extremely naive to expect a qualitative change in the personal lives of individuals and in the whole of human society as a result of some revolution. People and the world will not become better through the often-mentioned and demanded change in the political system. The change that people of goodwill desire will come as the result of many „revolutions“ in the personal lives of Christians. It involves listening to the Gospel (the good news) and keeping it in their hearts [9, p. 3]. The revolution in a person's heart is also revealed in the parable of the sower, which warns us about what could threaten the effectiveness of God's word in our lives. If a person consistently listens to His word, keeps it in a good and noble heart, and reflects on it, they will bring forth a rich „harvest.“ The effectiveness and fruitfulness of God's word is also described by the prophet Isaiah: *„As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it“* (Isaiah 55:10–11).

The history of the Church is rich with testimonies of men and women whose lives were transformed and made fruitful by God's word because they accepted and lived by it. For example, St. *Anthony Pustovník*, the spiritual father of all monks and one of the so-called Desert Fathers, took care of his sister after their parents died. When he heard the words in the temple about perfection and the treasure in heaven (cf. Matthew 19:20), he sold his property, gave part to his sister, and the rest to the poor. He decided to serve God and retreated to the desert, where he persistently fought against demons. Gradually, more young men began to gather around him. Since the admiration of people did not suit him, he withdrew further into the desert [14, p. 45].

The fruitfulness of listening to God's word is also confirmed by St. John Paul II, who in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* wrote: *„Following the example of Mary, the new Eve, the consecrated person expresses spiritual fruitfulness by opening up to the Word“* [7]. These words are actually relevant to all Christians. It can be said that the human heart is created to be nurtured by the seed of God's word. On the other hand, every person is called to „embody“ something from that word. Such a symbiosis of embodying the Word – Christ – in human relationships, words, gestures, and other expressions will surely be the beginning of a new, more valuable life and society.

References

- Buttiglione, R.: *Chrześcijanie a demokracja*. Lublin : Polihymnia, 1993.
- Dokumenty Druhého Vatikánskeho koncilu: Pastoralna konštitúcia *Gaudium et spes* (čl. 19). Trnava : SSV, 2008.
- Druhý Vatikánsky koncil: *Gaudium et spes* (12-22) - Konštitúcia o Cirkvi v dnešnom svete. <http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1118410965> (26.11.2011).
- Druhý Vatikánsky koncil: *Gaudium et spes* (91) - Konštitúcia o Cirkvi v dnešnom svete. <http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1118410965> (26.11.2011).
- Haniš, M.: Morálne problémy surogačného materstva. In: KARDIS, M. (et al. eds.): *Človek, náboženstvo a spoločnosť. Vízia pre nové tisícročie*. Prešov : GTF PU, 2023.
- Ján Pavol II.: *Centisimus annus* (61) – Encyklika k 100. výročiu encykliky *Rarum novarum*. <http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1117280649> (12.4.2011).
- Ján Pavol II.: *Vita Consecrata* (čl. 34). Trnava : SSV, 2006.
- Jan Paweł II.: Katecheza u początków Kościoła. Katecheza śródowa. In: Jan Paweł II.: *Wierze w Boga Ojca Stworzyciela*. Citta del Vaticano, 1987.
- Job, P.: *Evanjeliové blahoslavenstvá*. Bratislava : Lúč, 1997.
- Keden, J.: *Sekty*. Bratislava : Lúč, 1990.
- Mazurek, J.: *Godność osoby ludzkiej jako wartość absolutna. Roczniki nauk społecznych*. Lublin : KUL, 1993.
- Ostrowski, M.: Kultura uswiecania czasu. Refleksja teologiczno-pastoralna w swietle nauczania Ksiedza Biskupa Tadeusza Rakoczego. In: *In aedificationem Corporis Christi*. Bielsko-Biala : Wydawnictwo „Czuwajmy“, 2013.
- Paľa, G. – popovič, J. – halagová, E. – volková, N.: *Mediácia a jej význam pre človeka a spoločnosť*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvu PU, 2021.
- Philippe, J.: *Volám Ťa žiť*. Liptovský Mikuláš : Komunita blahoslavenstiev, 2010.
- Piwowarski, W. a kol.: *Slovník katolíckej sociálnej náuky*. Trnava : Dobrá kniha, 1996.
- Rodziński, A.: *Osoba, moralność, kultura*. Lublin : KUL, 1989.
- Rusecki, M.: *Istota i geneza religii*. Warszawa : Verbitum, 1989.
- Sojka, J.: Zlyhanie rodiny a pastorácia. In: RAŠLOVÁ, K. – KOŠČ. M.: *Psychológia*

a pastorácia: Príprava na životné povolanie, manželstvo a rodičovstvo.
Bratislava : Centrum rodiny Bratislava pod patronátom Pastoračnej
komisie KBS, 1992.

Spiazzi, R.: *Sociálny kódex Cirkvi*. Trnava : Dobrá kniha, 2000.

Szostek, A.: *Wokół godności, prawdy i miłości*. Lublin : KUL, 1995.

Šoltés, R.: *Politika a etika v živote kresťana*. Prešov : GTF PU, 2017.

Tkáč, M.: Interkultúrne diferencie v rodinnej výchove a socializácia detí
so zreteľom na Slovensko. In: *Theologos : theological revue*. Prešov:
Vydavateľstvo PU, roč. 25, č. 2/2023.

Vrablec, J.: *O otázkach viery*. Bratislava : Lúč, 1992.

Vragaš, Š.: *Základné otázky sociálneho učenia Cirkvi*. Bratislava : CMBF, 1996.

Zimny, J.: *Katecheza w ujęciu Jana Pawła II*. Sandomierz : Instytut teologiczny
im. Błogosławionego Wincentego Kadłubka, 2004.

