

TRUTH AND FREEDOM IN DEMOCRACY – A MISSIONARY ANALYSIS

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Abstract: It is already known that democracy, fully expressed since the nineteenth century, directly concerns the ideological educational issue (e.g.: promoting freedom, promoting the ideal model of society organization, etc.), and Christianity insists on the evangelical values of life.

The Church cannot remain indifferent to the social and politic activity, and to the problem of power clearly expressed in the world. It is a subtle analyst that constantly analyses to what extent the above are in accordance with the Gospel precepts, to what extent they minister the Christian's quality of life, knowing that they visibly manifest the will and the power of God.

Keywords: Church, society, freedom, state, democracy, pluralism

1. Democracy supports human freedom

In the history of democracy, one can see that it has encountered, and it experiences even today, difficulties in its understanding, stability and functionality, although by dint of freedom, each state is free to choose its political ideology and leaders.

In terms of etymology, democracy means the power of the people. It is a term, a concept met in Aristotle, but which today indicates a society that is governed by representatives elected by the people. The choice is made for the common wealth of all citizens, without discrimination, for a just distribution of goods.

In normal situations, a non-democratic government cannot prove its own legitimacy. Each government, in some way, must be made up of men of the people, with the people and for the people. Democracy can be achieved in various forms of government: **monarchy, republic, federal republic** etc.

Unlike political ideologies, which are created by people to lead other people in this world, the Word of the Gospel is the Word of God, created in order to lead the faithful towards eternal life and make them partakers.

All monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism) believe that in the divine Revelation, moral laws are written in precise formulations. These formulations are then taken over by the states' legislation, which paradoxically declare themselves, in the history of their democracy (especially in the nineteenth century), as laic, in the virtue of self-determination as external and visible form of democracy.

The big difference between theology and politics is expressed by the way they both legitimize their power.

The authority that conveys its power in and through Church is God the Holy Trinity. He freely, but gradually shares His eternal energies with the believers. They are always personal and put us directly in touch with the godly Person(s), their living and inexhaustible Fountain. The Church cannot exist without this gracious power, without direct communion with authority, or without the One that shares them.

In the Holy Scripture, before commencing his public work, the Saviour Christ, receives authority/power from the Father: And a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3, 17). And a voice came from the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, my Chosen; listen to Him! (Luke 9, 35).

The power of God, through Church, sent in the world, is meant to teomorphose all the other powers (political, economic, and even military). All these in the shadow of the social mission of the Church and its ministers, although the assertion of the secular fundamentalist states' democracy hardly manages to publicly express its life ideal patterns of life, of intellect or of morality, in accordance to human nature and its degree of development.

Democracy is not only a form of government, but also a way to understand and promote civil coexistence. Some¹ believe it has an anthropological foundation based on economic welfare, social cohesion and political freedom. However, "if you have to approach the origin of

¹ Ralph Darendorf, *Quadrare il cerchio. Benessere economico, coesione sociale e libertà politica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1995.

political and social action through God's revelation of Himself and of His relationship with His creation, and with people in particular, the next danger is that our judgment about politics can influence our view of Him rather than our understanding of politics. Not even hermits are free of some assumptions about their time, in terms of normative political structures and political action".²

Given the need for practical principles in contemporary society, democratic regimes tend to become more authoritarian under the pressure of the need for global economic development. The democracy of political coexistence, that willy-nilly involves the spiritual, mechanically becomes cohabitation under the pressure of economic domination, hungry for power and generating crises in various social structures. *Homo civilis* is increasingly enslaved by *Homo economicus*. It is lost of sight the essential fact, namely that democracy itself was based on the human dimension, and today, it creates dilemmas: is it political philosophy? Is it historical doctrine? Or is it empirical political science?

Regardless of the approach angle to the topic of democracy, its tangent to theology cannot ignore two things: the truth and the man. Without truth and human being, democracy can only exist in the abstract as an ideology, or philosophy, with no content.

In Christian theology, especially in Orthodoxy, truth becomes man with multiple ontological and existential consequences. Jesus Christ is the God-Man and the Man-God. He is the absolute Truth. Or, even contemporary political scientists say: "who does not believe in absolute values, chooses democracy".³

Although mentioned ever since antiquity by Aristotle, the democratic concept belongs however to modernity, being positively influenced by the French Revolution (1789-1799) based on freedom, equality and fraternity.

Specifically, democracy is achieved and supported by:

- The connection between the form of government and the universal votes, regardless of age or sex (men, women, youth);

2 Costa Carras, *The Doctrine of the Trinity in Relation to Political Action and Thought*, in vol. *The Forgotten Trinity*, BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House 35-41 Lower Marsh London SE1 7RL, 1991, page 161.

3 Michele Nicoletti, *Introduzione a vol. Homo Politicus. I dilemmi della democrazia*, Gregoriana Libreria Editrice, Padova 1995, page 12.

- How the government represents the people and guarantees the exercise of the fundamental freedom (of thought, expression, education, association in various political and non-political groups, or religious).

A visible sign of democracy is the independence of the three branches of government: the legislative, the judicial and the executive. In democracy, institutional dialogue should represent the whole people, not according to the different trends of the political parties' plurality. When there are doubts, it appeals to referendum, as the final decision should reflect the basic orientation of the majority.

Thus, democratic governance is always in the service of the common wealth of society, through the full **development of all human beings, without any discrimination.**

From the **ideological** point of view, democratic governance must always be at the service of truth and of human's total integrity. Democracies, regardless of their orientation (liberal or socialist), have a common starting point: the conception of man. In liberal democracy, the man is free to choose his path in the capital area. On the other hand, the materialist socialist democracy proposes man the collectivism as a form of implementing the civil life. Hence, the popular expressions: rightist or leftist.

From the **Christian** point of view, the fundamental basis in *democratically analysing man* is **human dignity and its value for the community**⁴. The purpose of man's creation was double: his happiness and the glory of God. Human happiness must be the democratic ideologies' first concern. This happiness is consistent with the purpose for which humanity was brought into existence, along with the command to love one's neighbour, through which Christianity, as a dogma, opens and becomes the common denominator of all human democratic political systems.

The collaboration or the dialogue between all Christians of the world is itself a democratic process. This process is focused on the idea of peace (primarily social), despite local and international totalitarianism, respecting also the nuanced differences of state policies meant to strengthen the society in unity and humanity, in order to promote a *culture of life and love* so strong as the link between body and soul.

⁴ Juan Esquerda Bifet, *Democrazia*, in *Dizionario dell'evangelizzazione*, Editrice Dominicana Italiana, Napoli, 2005, page 244.

The *Epistle to Diognetus* is the document that explains the *strategy of pastoral and social faith of the Holy Fathers' Church*, the sad consistency centuries of superficial conversions that are allowed to remain in the deep pagan peoples (atheist), causing the Church's mission a negative aspect. "In a nutshell, what is the soul in the body that are the Christians in the world. The soul is spread through all the parts of the body, and Christians in all the world's cities. The soul dwells in the body but is not of the body; Christians live in the world but are not of the world. The unseen soul is imprisoned in the seen body; Christians are seen too, as they are in the world, but their faith in God remains unseen. The body hates and wars the soul without having harmed it somehow, because it prevents it from ceding the pleasures; and the world hates Christians, even though they did not harm it, but because they resist its pleasures. The soul loves the body, although the body hates the soul; the soul loves the members too, and Christians love their enemies. The soul is imprisoned in the body, but it is the one that holds the body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, but they hold the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle, and Christians temporally dwell in the corruptible ones, but hope for incorruptibility in heaven. The tormented soul gets better with little food and drink; Christians, punished every day, rise up their seeds more and more. God ordained them in such a great horde that they are not allowed to leave it".⁵

2. Political ideologies pluralism and sectarian pluralism

In nowadays society, democracy is facing the permanently increasing pluralism of the political and religious ideologies. Sects, for example, have arisen along with politics. Initiation rites have always served as a pretext to affirm faithfulness or devotion to a cause. The political action does not relieve any of the strongly developed sectarian movements. It is sometimes its secret engine. Today, these projects often take on shades of Arianism, elitism, racism, and even eugenics. They are often hidden behind some seemingly laudable intentions: saving the planet, stopping the wars, promoting human equality.

In Japan, the *Soka Gakkai* sect exerts its influence through the *Komeito* political party. Created after the Second World War, it is the philosophical branch of an unorthodox Buddhist movement: *Nichiren Shoshu*. *Komeito*, the third party in Japan, is part of the governmental

⁵ *Epistle to Diognet*, translated by priest D. Fecioru, collection *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* (further abbreviated as PSB), volume 1, Publishing House of the Mission and Bible Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church (further abbreviated as PHMBIROC), Bucharest 1979, page 341.

coalition and tends to be, together with the Renaissance party, the nucleus of a neoconservative force. Sokka Gakkai, with ten thousand members, is currently about 10 % of the Japanese voters. It is accused of expansionist and authoritarian visions very far from the Komeito democratic facade. These charges are the delight of another sect, the Soka Gakkai adversary: Rissho Koseikai. It does not shine through its democratic virtues, but it has a significant influence in politics, as it has six and a half million members. “In relation to the latter, many of the new Japanese religions offer a spiritual practice, which is also effective in solving the everyday life problems; it can be the recitation of a sacred formula or of any other technique. It is very difficult to emphasize enough the importance of this very concrete dimension: a member of the *Soka Gakkai* explained – confesses Jean -François Mayer⁶ – that one day, he felt unable to accept a Church bringing promises for the beyond world. The movement attracted him because of the need for a religion able to provide *yet from the present* its values’ evidence in order to face the daily hardships”.

Another example of *collusion* between politics and sects is the Unification Church, called today the *Moon sect*. If it has almost completely disappeared from the European sectarian scene, its political subsidiary established in 1980 under the name *Causa*, has taken over the fighting torch against Marxism. The fall of the Soviet empire somewhat has certainly deflated its speeches, but it still finances European political parties close to or belonging to the extreme right. Driven by Bo Hi Pak, the right arm of the *Moon*, *Causa* continues to fuel the Manichean dialectic that feeds the fascist right: on the one hand God and liberalism, and socialism and Satan on the other. This speech has apparently achieved some success in the anti-democratic right, as long as it is not too easily conquered by the prospect of financing its election campaigns.

As its European targets were denounced, *Moon* has strengthened its influence in Uruguay, where the sect has the third largest bank in the country, the second national newspaper, several radio stations and various agricultural fields. Meanwhile, the *New Acropolis*, the *Transcendental Meditation*, *Silo*, the *Movement*, were taking over in Europe the way of political infiltration.⁷

In 1933, the *Transcendental Meditation* was launched in the legislative elections campaign. The same is true for the European elections. Following its leader, Benoît Frappé, it

⁶ Jean-François Mayer, *Sectele*, Encyclopaedic Publishing House, Bucharest 1998, page 84.

⁷ Yves de Gibon, Jean Vernet, *Des sectes à notre porte*, Éditions du Chalet, Paris 1987, pages 35-36.

gathered thirty thousand voters, gaining thus an income source for five years, by the law on party financing. A few years earlier, it had proposed George Bush, the U.S. President, a meditation plan for recovering the hostages in Lebanon. In 1981, it did not hesitate to flirt with Marcos, the Tagalog dictator, and his wife Imelda. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi saw in them the founding father and mother of the “Enlightenment Age”.

In Mozambique, the stakes seems to be more important. Conquered by the doctrine of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, President Joachim Chissano seems to have converted to transcendental Meditation. After a *study* trip to Netherlands, the sect’s European headquarters, Chissano signed an agreement whereby he leased twenty million hectares of agricultural land to the *Yogi* followers for a period of fifty years without any real compensation. In fact, the contract signed by Eneas Comiche, the Minister of Finance of Mozambique, gives the Transcendental Meditation the opportunity to exploit an abandoned territory in order to create paradise on earth by reversing 40% of the profits achieved by the sect⁸.

South America too appears as a land of choice to sects. The integrist and reactionary *Association of Tradition, Family, Property, Catholic Sect*, is particularly active there. Founded by Brazilian Plinio Correa of Oliveira in 1960, it opposes the Brazilian agrarian reform, it fights against Marxism, communism and wants to restore the monarchy. It has attended the anti-militant political repression in Brazil, Argentina and Chile; it has also supported the South African *Apartheid*. Integrated with significant financial resources, it attended the installation of paramilitary militias fighting communism. Declared as the *Future of Culture*, it was made known in France through its actions against Martin Scorsese’s *The Temptation of Christ*, and against Jean-Luc Godard’s *Mary Greets You*.⁹

In Brazil, the *Universal Church of the Kingdom of God* (UCKG), surnamed *The Universal* by Brazilians, is the one that fills stadiums, under its leader Edir Macedo. Daughter of the Pentecostal Church, it follows the *Assembly of God* and the *Quadrangular Church*. Founded in the political field since 1960, it controlled the President Ernesto Geisel, president from 1974 to 1979. It was the close guard of the Peruvian President Fujimori, and at the same time, of the President of Guatemala, who converted to it few years ago. The strategy is simple: it consists of

⁸ *Le Monde Magazine*, 25th of October 1994.

⁹ Pe larg, Jean-Marie Abgrall, *La mécanique des sectes*, Éditions Payot & Rivages, Paris 1996.

controlling the media, especially the radio and television. Macedo used to control 28 radio stations and 850 temples. Due to its one million and a half followers, he has embarked on an evangelistic campaign against animist cults. This campaign does not lack fascist and xenophobic tendencies towards the black population. He knows, however, to combine perfection with the themes that fascinates the audience: success, wealth and healing by touching with hands for blessing. His most prosaic goal is to seize the country, which brought him more accusations that, for the moment, have not yet slowed his rise.

The influence of the *Pentecostal Church* and the success of its subsidiaries still do not seem to be the result of chance or of Brazilians' spiritual search. In 1984, in a report to the Vatican, the Brazilian Bishops Conference denounced the CIA's abusive seizure of the Pentecostal sects and their use for mental and political manipulation.

«I am a man seeking truth. In this sense I do not pay attention to the constitution, but to the Bible». These are the terms expressed in March 1982 by the General President Efraim Rios Montt, who had just taken power in Guatemala Ciudad, following a trivial military coup. Adept of the *Church of the Verb*, a fundamentalist sect in California, surrounded by Alvaro Contreras and Francisco Bianchi, two other members of this sect, President Montt only kept the power for seventeen months. Since his departure, various Guatemalan sects compete for influence. There the land is especially favourable, as 30% of the population belong to sects.

Similarly, following the sarin gas attack by the *Aum* sect, the international investigation revealed the close ties between the Russian political power and the sect. Asked about the investigation progress in Russia, Vitali Savitski, chairman of the parliamentary committee on religious organizations, said in July 1995: «The investigation was blocked at the highest level of the State. The *Aum* sect trial will not happen». Moreover, certainly, in Moscow, no real action has been undertaken in order to clarify the relationship between *Aum* and the state services. Oleg Lobov, Secretary of the Security Council, appears as one of the persons responsible for the *Aum*'s introduction in Russia. In 1991, he was the one who contacted Shoko Asahara on the pretext of collecting funds for building a Russian-Japanese university. During his trip in Russia, Asahara will meet Rouslan Khasboulatov, the Speaker of Parliamnet, and Alexandre Routskoï, the vice-president of Russia.

“Today’s ever-changing face of sects has however a constant: the desire to convert the whole planet, either freely, through proselytizing, or, more prosaically, through developing networks of influence using economy as good as the politics”.¹⁰

3. Christ is the truth that makes us truly free

There is no complete freedom outside the Incarnate Truth, or enhypositized in the divine-human person of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

God the Father as Absolute Truth is testified by the Son from eternity within intra-Trinitarian communion life, and in history, it is testified by Christ, the Man-God and the God-Man. “Truth, or God cannot be understood if we do not believe in His eternally existence with the Son begotten of Him. That would be a «God» without love, namely impossible. It would be an impersonal «God», or an essence subject to laws under which it emanates a meaningless world. In such an essence and in such a meaningless world there is no need for truth. The Son is the light of the world, because it shows the existence of the supreme truth, showing love without beginning, which is given as well to us, the conscious creatures”.¹¹

As early as the Old Testament, the Jews believed that only God Himself has *the laws of truth* (Neh. 9, 13). They also believed that we cannot approach God without *the truth in our hearts* (Ps. 14, 2) and that our God is *the God of truth* (Ps. 30, 5) and he loves it (Ps. 50, 7). The entire Psalm 88 can be axiological analysed as a psalm of *the theology of truth* from an anthropological perspective. And not least, for us the people, the greatest virtue is *the truth* (III Ezd. 4, 35).

The New Testament presents *the fulfilment of Law* as the *grace and the truth* that came into the world only through the Incarnate Son (John 1, 17, Eph. 4, 21). *Without truth*, we cannot approach Light (John 3, 21). **Only the truth will set us free** (John 8, 32) and the Saviour has entitled Himself as **The Truth** (John 14, 6) and the bearer of the Spirit of the Truth (John 14, 17): “and the Son is the Spirit and the Truth, more rather Both are the Truth; or they are both the Truth together with the Father. For only together are they the complete and perfect love. In Them

¹⁰ Flaubert Serge, *Une secte au coeur de la République*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1993, page 54.

¹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, note 110, to St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Despre Sfânta Treime*, in P. S. B., Volume 40, PHMBIROC, Bucharest 1994.

together is everything, or from Them together everything is explained and finds a meaning”.¹² He Himself as the Son is the Word of God, which is always *the truth* (John 17, 17).

An egocentric, purely autonomous, human reason, constantly asks, just like Pilate: *What is truth?* (John 18, 38). For questionable reasons, some people *can change the truth with the lie* (Rom. 1, 25). “The truth is one with existence. The whole existence is the Truth par excellence. The bounded ones are shreds of truth, or, if there is anything contrary to existence, there is lie too”.¹³ You can confess Christ only *if you have the truth within yourself* (II Cor. 11, 10).

In everyday life, Christian must *embrace the truth* (Eph. 6, 14), because *the truth remains with us forever* (II. 1, 2) if we fulfil the Saviour’s commands (I In. 2, 4). “Only the truth is real. And the truth lived through experience is also an uncreated independent existence, and a world dependant on it, so caused”.¹⁴

Sharing with us the Incarnate Truth, His divine-human life through the Sacraments in the Church, this condition makes us truly free, responsible and aware of the mission that we have to accomplish in this secular society. *Hic et hunc* the lie and the enslavement of sin is everywhere. Man lives increasingly more aspects of a cycle spiritual life in which the two poles are the pain and the pleasure that enchain human being.

Holding the Incarnate Truth, the Church must missionary engage in the social plan, in a permanent dialogue with the civil society, with the secular state, also guarantor of truth and freedom, but especially with its institutions.

Conclusions

State ethics is rooted in Church morality, they are complementary and the last fulfils the spiritual condition of the former.

There can be no current humanist ethics above the deified humanity of Jesus Christ. He, for love, becomes Man, suffers for the man and gives His life instead of the man. Christ is, and will remain forever, the Humanist par excellence who makes his brothers personal entities. These

¹² *Idem, note 417.*

¹³ *Idem, note 269.*

¹⁴ *Idem, note 45.*

entities are completely free, have social awareness and responsibility that though living in the world raise above it as some supporting on the one hand, democracy as a means of civic life, on the other hand live in full freedom and grace, and are fearless preachers of the Truth, of Jesus Christ.

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