

THE CRISIS OF THE WORLD IS ACTUALLY THE CRISIS OF THE HUMAN EGO. RETURNING TO CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Rev. Prof. PhD. Emil JURCAN

Faculty of Orthodox Theology

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ABSTRACT: **The crisis of the world is actually the crisis of the human ego. Returning to Christ Consciousness.** My work attempts to present the forms of the current social, political and religious crisis. These are related to the way in which man and his relationship in the Church have been perceived throughout history. The state of obedience and total submission has not been the best option in the history of the Church. It would be much better if we managed to create the state of sacred awareness so that people would live their faith from conscience and not from fear of punishment. Recovery through agape is the world's chance to return to the dialogical joy between people and peoples. Love overcomes any conflict and through love each one sees the other as a divine image or icon, for we have the image of God within us.

Keywords: conscience, humanity, icon, crisis, grace

An enormous number of analyses have been written on the subject of contemporary crises from all perspectives or socio-political-economic analyses. I could say that all of them are true or partially true. As a theologian, however, I would like to delve deeper into the search for this crisis that did not come up yesterday or today, but is deeply rooted in the sphere of European history. I am talking about Europe because almost all the great crises and tensions, argued religiously or confessionally, have happened here. Europe was supposed to be the cradle of an authentic Christianity, brought here by the apostles, facing the hostility of an empire that was based on the cult of the Roman emperor, on obedience to him and on the elimination of everything that could stand in the way of this cult.

Christianity, brought to Europe, was supposed to change the consciousness and thinking of this continent, to transform people from obe-

dient and punitive into agapic and forgiving and to truly create a continent like a family. Was this process difficult? Certainly yes, because Europe was at the beginning of its formation. Quasi-wild, barbaric tribes were pushing each other from the steppes of the East towards the civilized world of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire therefore offered a good infrastructure: laws, education, constructions, philosophy, thinking, much superior to the Eastern ones, but it had not managed to form that European consciousness, in which everything would be structured on the state-empire-family-nation system. „The judgment of conscience is the law given by God to our nature, which shows us what we must do and what to avoid”¹.

Everything was structured on another system: state-emperor-obedience-laws, which then could not be removed from the political consciousness of the peoples of Europe, who copied this formula. Christ had wanted something else, namely to create that consciousness² of the human-divine family, in which all would be one, in a spiritual egalitarianism and people would live and relate to each other according to the model of equality. The desire was therefore to create a House of Europe instead of nations, empires, states, kings or emperors.

The second paradigm, that of states led by autocrats or dictators, was imposed and the peoples entered the same socio-political order. Christianity became more of an external aura than a way of life, as Christ had created and demanded. The pagan model would impose itself in Europe, because it was the most accessible. In other words, the system of laws with coercive applications, through which discipline and obedience were imposed, was easier to implement than awareness³, which was a difficult process, requir-

1 Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii și cuvântări*, translated by Pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1986, p. 211.

2 „Conscience is an unsleeping judge, which God has placed within us to rebuke us for our hidden deeds”, Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Epistola către Romani*, Omilia IV, in *Omilii la Epistolele Pauline*, vol. I, trad. Pr. D. Fecioru, Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1990, p. 63.

3 „Das Gewissen, sagt Karl Barth, ist der Ort, an dem der Mensch vom Ruf Gottes berührt wird. Es ist kein Gesetz des Menschen selbst, sondern das Echo des göttlichen Willens“. Karl Barth: *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. Studienausgabe, 30 Bände und Registerband*. Theologischer Verlag, Zürich 1993, p. 249. Paul Tillich also says that «conscience is the expression of the divine presence within man. It reveals the sacred structure of being and shows us that we are called to good.» Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 84.

ing time and love. It was easier to impose laws and obedience, inducing fear in people, than to convince them to do good from conscience, from their heart. Consequently, laws and norms were created, with different names, (nomes, canons, codes, etc.), all with the character of imposing obedience and submission to the superior. Any disobedience was punished, considered as an attempt to unbalance the state order. But what state or what order? Who was the one to consider that this order was the will of God?

To give weight and power to this state order, led by a king or emperor, they were anointed, religiously consecrated, to give them extra weight in everything that meant the state or empire where they imposed order and obedience. I do not know if God wanted this type of arrangement of obedience, since He said that all people are equal and the apostle Paul argued that „there is no longer slave or free, but all are one in Christ” (Galatians 3, 28).

I propose in my analysis to offer another way of thinking and social organization, much closer to the agapic call of Christ, although the rather poorly argued historical criticism will attack me. But the truth must be told. Since that post-Romanesque system of leadership through obedience and laws was imposed, the Church had to adapt. As such, ideas were offered through which the secular power would be confirmed and flattered, as the protector of the Church, although there was no need, since Christ alone defends the Church through His Sacrifice. As such, in order to flatter the imperial power, the emperor was called „episcopus ad extram”, although for the status of bishop an epiclesis is needed in the charismatic, ecclesial plane. And the charismatic epiclesis offers the liturgical service, or the emperor did not have it. In other words, they were titles without coverage.

On the contrary, the fact that the emperor fought for the unity of the Church does not give me Orthodox pride, because Orthodoxy is the revelation of Christ and He knows how to steer the ship of His Sacrifice. Not understanding this divine reality, the defense of the faith was left too much to the emperors, which often led to wars and useless sacrifices. I have said and repeated this: if we prayed more deeply and did not quickly anathematize those who made mistakes for the moment, perhaps we would be more united and spiritually fulfilled today. We anathematized them perhaps also because this was required of us, because the emperor did not want a divided empire, which he could not count on in times of war. He wanted a monolithic construction, subject to laws and obedience, which would pay taxes or perform labor and wars. The church came in like a glove in this policy of

submission, which also required obedience to our elders, according to the Epistle to the Romans chapter 13, verse 1.

This system has been perpetuated in history until our days. This obedience to laws and rulers was constantly demanded, and obedience even led to the offering of life to the superior. There were wars in which so many young people died (and still die) with their lives in front of them, just because the superior demands it. It is not he who dies, the one who caused the tension of the war, but those innocent people whom he then calls heroes. They are certainly heroes, because they die in the fight that they did not want and for which they are sacrificed like lambs. But what is the name of the one who sent them to die? Still a hero?

The mission of the Church, however, was different: to make the human world aware of why Christ was incarnated. There was no need for warrior emperors, who „in the name of Christ” would put so many young people to death. The only war that I consider justified is the one of defense, when you defend your home, family, nation and country. Any other aggression, which leads to the death of others (innocent people) is not in the spirit of Christian love. That is why our voivodes (Stephen the Great and not only him), marked these battles by building churches, because the greatest calling was prayer, which gave strength to defend the nation. Unfortunately, so many battles were fought only out of pride, which were then argued through religious invocations, with flags and crosses, but in which Christ was not present.

Let us take an example: the papal state. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the papacy arrogated to itself the leadership of Rome and the West. The quarrel over the investiture marked this struggle for leadership and imposition. The battles fought in the West meant bloody quarrels, a reality that Christ certainly did not want as long as he asked us to turn the other cheek. Instead of returning to the simplicity of an authentic Christianity, the papacy ignored the voice of Luther and other reformers and the result was the split of the church, which was already split from Orthodoxy, and from that moment on, the ruptures did not stop. How simple it would have been if there had been dialogue and return, if there had been no arrogance and impositions of submission or blind obedience. Catholicism lost a lot then. To recover, they did not attempt a reform in itself, a return to what Christ wanted: humility and simplicity, but invented a new order, which through perfidy managed to „convince” other populations to attract

them to Catholicism. And so the Greek-Catholic Church appeared, which remained an obstacle in the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Rome. A permanent dialogue of the arrogant, starting from the unchristian expression „who is greater in the Christian world”. The answer is simple: only Christ is greater, we are his sons, in the obedience of love. Any dialogue or conference about the weight of the patriarchates is parallel to Christ’s longing „that all may be one, Father”. In this struggle for primacy, it was forgotten that only one is the head of the Church. To this day, people try to argue who is greater and hypocritically call themselves „servus servorum Dei”.

Let us return to our topic. The current world, imposed as a model, is not the world of Christ, even if we have tried to embellish it and talk about the symphony between the Church and the (Byzantine) empire. The attempt to argue with the fact that the emperor led the patriarch’s horse by the bridle to the Holy Liturgy and then both entered the service (that is why „On Our Master and Bishop” is sung) is not a strong argument, because there were moments when the patriarch and the synodals were an obedient instrument in the emperor’s hand. Let us think, however, about what Christ demanded of humanity through His sacrifice.

The Christian world was to remain the world of love, the world of agape, in which people could feel each other in this spirit. When Saint Peter shows Christ that they have two swords there, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the reply is sharp “enough”. Not necessarily that there were enough weapons, but that this way of thinking, defending God with weapons, is not in the divine plan. The Church does not defend itself with weapons or with anathemas. Her way of working and mission is awareness and her weapon is prayer and grace epiclesis.

Because these things were not understood, in history, spiritual leaders believed that armies defended the faith, but they saw that any conflict creates even greater gaps in the system of religious thought and experience. Europe was divided by these struggles, in which the presence of faith was the argument for war. I have said many times: if there was more prayer, there would be more unity and love between Christians.

The Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which attacked Christianity, certainly started from here: a Catholic Church that was too rich (almost a third of the lands of France were in the possession of the Church) and prelates who were too secular in their Christian living. Ob-

viously, thousands of priests should not have been massacred just because their church had land, but when people are tricked into seeing in Christianity and the Church the cause of their evil, then they do so with hatred. And today we experience this state of hatred from many of those who see in the Church and Christianity their state of pauperization.

What is surprising is that people are so easily manipulated that there is not much difference between eras: even now there are people who would like the Church to cease to exist, because, in their mind, the priests are the cause of their suffering. Perhaps the social mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church should be more publicly shown, although its mission is much more concrete in the sacramental space.

What would have been the authentic Christian way of organizing and structuring the socio-political structure of Europe? If we had followed the model of Christ and if we had implemented it in history, we would certainly have succeeded in having that perfect society that we wanted. What was this sublime model of an authentic Christian society and how could it be achieved today? It is difficult to achieve because it requires a real Christian consciousness. What does this Christian consciousness mean? „Conscience is the voice of God and His gift in man, which illuminates the path of righteousness when it is pure”⁴.

First of all, it means the awareness of God’s presence in everything that we do and exists. It is the awareness that we are never alone, but God is with man through His grace, through His angels and through His omnipresence. The moment we have this awareness, we will discover in every person the image of God and thus we will relate to people as to divine images. During the services we notice that the priest incenses people as he incenses icons. Why? Because people are also icons or divine images. We carry within us the image or icon of God from creation, which becomes opaque because of sins, but it remains, it does not disappear. To incense this image means to place it in its sacred value, with which it was created. Through this image/icon we can enter into dialogue with God and become dialogical beings towards each other.

What is happening today in the world of spiritless matter is a denial of the divine image within us. We are transcendent beings through crea-

4 Isaac Sirul, *Cuvinte despre nevoință*, Cuvântul 55, in *Filocalia*, vol. X, translated by Pr. D. Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Română, Bucharest, 1981, p. 254.

tion and through this image, which gives meaning to our lives. We have the soul that raises our existence beyond the ephemeral and tragic and gives us the expectation of eternity, which we already feel within us. The moment everything becomes opaque, hides under the veil of matter and momentary pleasure, man loses his meaning and happiness as a creational state. The world becomes increasingly distant from God because it no longer retains within it the luminous image and the dialogue with Him, entering ever deeper into selfish monologism, so deafening but at the same time so unheard of in the heavenly spheres.

The crisis of the world is actually the crisis of the ego, broken from God and broken from communion with people⁵. Man broken from God enters the egoistic state, of the one who believes that everything that is due to him. He no longer has that gracious dialogue with creation and with God, but has become a man of monological self-sufficiency which is actually a counterfeit of communion. People become lonely and increasingly isolated from each other although the means of socialization abound. This shows that without God any dialogue becomes a monologue or a verblativity without a sacredness in it. More specifically, our verb no longer transmits anything but the noise of syllables. It is not the spoken verb that is needed today, but the lived verb comes from the Logos incarnate and sacrificed for the life of the world. Without this Logos the world loses its logosity and enters the state of deaf and deafening verblativity.

The crises of the world are due to this lack of dialogue within humanity, because we live in a state in which no one listens to anyone and everyone speaks. Interhuman relationships are based on listening to the other and on deciding together on the future of the world, society, family and the person in general. But dialogue if it is not revelational does not create the emotion of listening to the other. Only then will people stop in their chaotic dynamism, at the moment when the logos of the other creates the emotion of a discovery, of a revelation through which people stop in their tracks and desire that state of divine heuristic. At that moment, beyond the gracious dialogue, the image of the image or the creational icon within us (*animus in oculis habitat*) also appears and this image is seen through the

5 About the recovery of man through the rediscovery of Christian consciousness, theologian Alexander Schmemmann said: „Christian consciousness is born in the Church, through participation in liturgical life, where man rediscovers the true measure of his existence before God”, *For the Life of the World*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973, p. 87.

Christic gaze of each one. We experience this encounter as a recovery of the paradisiacal state, in which the logos between God and creation was mirrored in our image and through this image we enter into the divine word. The language of heaven will not be a world-famous Esperanto, but will be the language of the image, the logos within us through which we speak and understand each other because it is the only language given to us by God. It is called the language of divine grace through which humanity becomes „full of grace” and as such has another telos or purpose in earthly existence. There will no longer be that competition that we boast about and that we weaken as the authentic Christian state (praised by Max Weber), which is, however, totally false. True Christians are not in a competition, not even a soteriological one, but we are complementary, in our walk towards eternity. We live our lives as on a path towards eternity in which we do not compete but support each other on this path. Your salvation is not singular, but together with others. You fall alone but you rise in communion with others.

The current crises can be easily recovered if there were that awareness of each one about our meaning in existence. Why are we in the world and what is our path? We did not come here to compete, nor to enter into a permanent disjunction that leads to tensions and wars, but to dialogue graciously, to support each other on the path to eternity. We live to smile and in our smile God laughs. In our word God whispers and calls us. Any annoyance must be seen as a temptation on the path to eternity. The program of an education of conscience should be the first goal of a school or university transcript. Education of the formation of consciences, in the sense of looking for the beauty in the other before looking for simple information in the definitions of science. „Conscience,” says St. Maximus the Confessor, „is the natural voice of the mind, which, enlightened by God, shows what is good and what is evil.”⁶

We are living a false crisis that, however, in our spiritual blindness, we see as very serious. It can be removed very quickly when we see ourselves as creations, whose purpose on earth is to return home, to the eternity for which we were created. We need to relearn the language of grace, through which we listened to God, through which we spoke among ourselves, humans, and with all creation. A re-education is needed that starts from the

6 Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Capete teologice, economice și morale, in Filocalia*, vol. II, translat by Pr. D. Stăniloae, Bucharest, EIBMBOR, 1981, p. 85.

family, and the family must rediscover its purpose for which it was united on earth: not for sex and pleasure, but for beings who will become eternal. Then the educational system continues through schools of consciousness in which science is combined with training, information-training, so that those who study become people of life maturity, aware not of competition between people but of their complementarity. The earth is enough for all and can feed each of us. What it cannot feed is our hatred. Hatred destroys it too and it suffers with us because of this human hatred and greed. Hatred means the lack of love, the absence of God in the life of humanity, because He is love and cannot exist in hatred. The lack of love actually means the lack of God and without love we can no longer define ourselves as His creation, but a demonic amalgam in a permanent struggle of interhuman disjunction. What is experienced and promoted today is a cosmeticization of evil, hatred and the state of conflict between people and nations.

In conclusion, this agapic recovery of the human self is needed, through an awareness that man is a divine image, an icon of God, who can only live in a loving relationship with creation⁷ and with humanity in general. Without this return to the love of Golgotha, people will perceive Christianity only as an ideology among other philosophies, without exemplifying through their lives the sacrificial love of Christ. Europe cannot recover otherwise. The proposed deconstructivisms, the WOKE-type movement, the destruction of the history of the continent and its spiritual values, are not answers to the current crises, but will further deepen this disjunctive state. The return to authentic Christian consciousness, based on total love and dialogue between people, is the chance to recover an authentic atmosphere.

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7 „Love is the perfect fulfillment of the Law and the beginning of the true knowledge of God” said Saint Basil the Great, *Omilii și cuvântări*, trad. Pr. D. Fecioru, Bucharest, EIBMBOR, 1986, p. 132.

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