

## The Catholic Worldview according to Romano Guardini and its role in Human Ecology

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Recovering a Catholic view of reality is absolutely necessary to move forward in an authentic and “bold cultural revolution”, which is exactly the urgent invitation extended by Pope Francis in his latest encyclical<sup>1</sup>.

In the third chapter of *Laudato si’* the Holy Father repeatedly insists that the world needs a *new paradigm*. The dialectical point of confrontation is the “dominant technocratic paradigm”<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this brief communication is to show the relevance of what Romano Guardini —one of the referential authors of Pope Francis, above all in this part of the document— called a *Katholische Weltanschauung* in the configuration of this new paradigm, which is crucial for the proposal of an authentic human ecology. All of this in the ecclesial perspective of evangelization.

What can the Church offer the world today? It is not uncommon to hear voices discouraged by what we as Catholics could accomplish in order to “*instaurare omnia in Christo*”<sup>3</sup>. In a narcissistic and tired society; in a setting that could even be called “post-human” —where the death of God has supposedly given way for the death of man—; in a culture where all things are considered trivial and reality has been left by the wayside in order to live (consciously or unconsciously) in a kind of “hyperreality”: Does the Church still have something to offer those men and women of flesh and bones who inhabit this culture, yet desire (consciously or unconsciously) to live authentically?

We believe that it does: the Church *does* have something to offer. But she does not offer “something” but rather “Someone”: The Lord Jesus, “He who is the ‘image of the invisible God’” and “is Himself the perfect man”<sup>4</sup>. It is not about a doctrine or a moral code, but a Person: the Incarnate Son of God, with whom each human being, throughout history, is called to encounter. The essence of Christianity —Guardini affirms— is Christ himself<sup>5</sup>. And it is in being placed, by the faith, in the Lord’s “viewpoint” that each Christian receives in the Church a “vision of the world” (*Weltanschauung*). We are talking about a new existential stance, that therefore allows for an outlook that is radically *new*, not only in that it is different from how it could have been before, but in that it is entirely impossible to have been elaborated from

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. *Laudato si’*, 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Laudato si’*, 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Ef* 11,10. Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 22: “*Qui est ‘imago Dei invisibilis’ (Col 1,15), Ipse est homo perfectus*”

<sup>5</sup> “Christianity is ultimately neither a doctrine of the truth nor an interpretation of life. It is also that, but these things in no way constitute its core essence. Its essence is constituted by Jesus of Nazareth, by his existence, his action and concrete destination; that is, by an historic personality” [«El cristianismo no es, en último término, ni una doctrina de la verdad ni una interpretación de la vida. Es esto también, pero nada de ello constituye su esencia nuclear. Su esencia está constituida por Jesús de Nazaret, por su existencia, su obra y su destino concretos; es decir, por una personalidad histórica» (Romano Guardini, *La esencia del cristianismo*, Cristiandad, Madrid 2006, p. 13)].

within the world itself: it is Revelation.

## The technocratic paradigm

It is very interesting to identify the essence of what Pope Francis, in his encyclical, calls the “technocratic paradigm”. If I had to summarize the logic of this paradigm, I would say that it is the logic of “objectification,” of forgetfulness—even with regard to nature and the environment— of the person, and of what being a person means.

“It can be said that many problems of today’s world—the Pope affirms— stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society. The effects of imposing this model on reality as a whole, human and social, are seen in the deterioration of the environment, but this is just one sign of a reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life”<sup>6</sup>.

It is the entire human being, in all of his dimensions and all of his relations—with himself, with others, with the world, and with God—that becomes subjected to this all-invasive technocratic paradigm. It is like a type of “atmosphere” in which we live; it becomes the existential air that we breathe<sup>7</sup>. Eventually it turns into the ultimate criteria for interpreting and valuing all of reality—animate and inanimate, personal and impersonal, individual and social—and it therefore develops before our eyes new dimensions and new dynamisms.

This is not the place to describe every possible consequence of the dynamic of the technocratic paradigm, and honestly, I am not sure that it is even possible to do so in a precise manner. There is a sense of inability to “grasp the system”—that leads many to give up the fight, to go with the flow without resisting—and it has a certain capacity to integrate within itself that which opposes it, devouring and neutralizing it<sup>8</sup>. I would like to simply indicate a few “key” notions found in the Pope’s description of this dynamic: cult of unlimited human power, will of domination and manipulation, pretension of an infinite availability of things, fragmentation of knowledge, enchantment of constant novelties, of fleetingness and superficiality, consumeristic, throwaway logic<sup>9</sup>.

A term coined by Pope Francis that he has repeated many times which, in my opinion, is a way of summarizing this “logic” from an anthropological perspective, is what he calls a “throwaway” culture. In the *Evangelii gaudium*, the Holy Father focuses the problem on the anthropological issue: “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded”<sup>10</sup>. But it is about—the Holy Father always affirms—a mentality “which spares nothing and no one: nature, human beings,

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<sup>6</sup> *Laudato si'*, 107.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis describes it as an omnipresent paradigm (Cfr. *Laudato si'*, 122).

<sup>8</sup> About this aspect of the paradigm, especially with regard to the “society of the spectacle”, the following documentaries are interesting: “Merchants of cool” and “Generation like”: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/media/generation-like/from-the-merchants-of-cool-to-generation-like/>

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Laudato si'*, 102-123.

<sup>10</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, 53.

even God himself. It gives rise to a humanity filled with pain and constantly torn by tensions and conflicts of every sort”<sup>11</sup>. The plague of Islamic terrorism so vividly present in our days has this same logic at its base: “This phenomenon [of fundamentalist terrorism] is a consequence of the throwaway culture being applied to God. Religious fundamentalism, even before it eliminates human beings by perpetrating horrendous killings, eliminates God himself, turning him into a mere ideological pretext”<sup>12</sup>. Finally, the family also suffers the consequences of this de-personalizing logic: “Then too, the family itself is not infrequently considered disposable, thanks to the spread of an individualistic and self-centered culture which severs human bonds and leads to a dramatic fall in birth rates, as well as legislation which benefits various forms of cohabitation rather than adequately supporting the family for the welfare of society as a whole”<sup>13</sup>.

I came across a song, a “piece” of “secular contemporary poetry”, that I believe describes very well what this throwaway culture is all about:

Used to have our love  
And now  
Disposable needs  
Used to have our souls  
And now  
Refined new skins

Take  
Use  
Throw away  
Forget<sup>14</sup>

It is a challenge and a duty to identify the essence of this paradigm and denounce it in its negative elements. But this is not enough. In fact, the Pope mentions the growth of a certain social awareness of the issue, but he also indicates that the human being today finds himself at a “crossroads”: “people no longer seem to believe in a happy future; they no longer have blind trust in a better tomorrow based on the present state of the world and our technical abilities. There is a growing awareness that scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity and history, a growing sense that the way to a better future lies elsewhere. Nevertheless, no one imagines renouncing to the possibilities which technology continues to offer”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, January 12, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, January 12, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, January 12, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Riverside, “Escalator Shrine”, lines 29-38, in *Shrine of New Generation Slaves*, InsideOut Music 2013 (<http://riversideband.pl/en/lyrics>).

<sup>15</sup> *Laudato si'*, 113.

In an era that some authors have called “post-optimistic”<sup>16</sup>, the duty is imposed upon the Christian conscience to “account for the hope that is in you”<sup>17</sup>, and to do it solidly.

### **The Christian paradigm**

In a large part of his work, Guardini has developed the form and content of the Christian paradigm in debate with what he criticizes as a “naturalism” that springs from absolutizing the intramundane reality: “We find ourselves, first of all, with a tendency to consider the world—that is, the context of what can be immediately experienced—as the entirety of what is real and relevant, and proceed, exclusively from this presupposition, to respond to the problems of life”<sup>18</sup>. It is above all in his college lectures—today compiled in various books, such as *Die Existenz des Christen*<sup>19</sup>—where the German theologian displays the richness of the catholic faith in dialogue with the fundamental questions that make up a worldview. And in the heart of this proposal lies the answer of what it means to be a person.

Facing the technocratic paradigm which leads to the throwaway culture and the objectification of the person, the Christian mentality capable of truly generating a “bold cultural revolution”, as proposed by the Holy Father, can only be the logic of “personification”: in which God is a personal God, Communion of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; logic in which man and woman are persons created in His image and likeness, called from their origin to love and come together, broken by sin and reconciled for ever in the Lord Jesus; logic of a world that is the fruit of the same God’s creative love and was entrusted to the responsible (that is, personal) caretaking of the human being; logic of a dynamism that goes from person to person: in God, from God to man and from man to God, and of the human beings between themselves, a dynamism of authentic personal encounter.

It is also this vision of the world—as God’s creation and of the human being as lord of that creation—which is at the base of the entire encyclical *Laudato si’*, Without this vision several affirmations could be easily misinterpreted. “The world—Guardini affirms—is not nature, but ‘craft’; realized with freedom; created by God so authentic and perfect that it could be misunderstood as ‘nature’”<sup>20</sup>.

This “personal” logic, capable of creating a “culture of encounter”, is that which follows from a worldview born of the Church’s faith in Christ: “To believe means to go to Christ from that place where one stands. It means to see with his eyes; to measure

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<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Tomáš Halík, *The Night of the Confessor: Christian Faith in an Age of Uncertainty*, Doubleday, New York 2012, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *1 Pe* 3:15.

<sup>18</sup> Romano Guardini, *La existencia del cristiano*, BAC, Madrid 2010, p. 424. [«Nos encontramos, ante todo, con una tendencia a considerar el mundo —es decir, el contexto de lo inmediatamente experimentable— como lo único real y relevante, y partir únicamente de él para dar respuesta a los problemas de la vida»]

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. Romano Guardini, *Die Existenz des Christen*, Schöningh, Paderborn 1976.

<sup>20</sup> Romano Guardini, *La existencia del cristiano*, BAC, Madrid 2010, p. 429. [«El mundo no es naturaleza, sino “obra”; realizado con libertad; creado por Dios tan auténtico y perfecto que puede ser malentendido como “naturaleza”»]

by his norm. The believer stands beyond the world, simply by believing. He stands with an attitude that is at the same time of detachment and commitment, of denial and affirmation, which corresponds to the tension of his outlook on the world. The believer gazes at the entire world in general, and he sees it as it really is, in its roundness and totality. But really, this gaze is largely independent of the measure imposed by natural experience and its cultural elaboration, so that everything appears in its full splendor. The true believer receives his worldview from the strength of his faith, however limited the rest of his spiritual condition may be. In the believer, to a certain extent, Christ's own stance is renewed. Every true believer is a living instance of the world that reveals itself to him. The believer also has a peculiar extramundane position, a "differentness" of being, without which he would never be able to reach a commanding view. His love is free and at the same time completely faithful, it is the only love that can see through intuition what is essential. He maintains a safe stance with respect to all concrete situations and outcomes. All of this, of course, in the measure that he truly believes"<sup>21</sup>.

Only when we are placed within this "Catholic worldview", nourished by what Karol Wojtyła called an "enriched faith" —which goes beyond a series of repeated clichés or sentimental experiences—, that is, a faith that has completely become life, only then, can we create this "new cultural paradigm", the only base of an authentic human ecology. Pope John Paul II gave us a clear challenge when he said: "A faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived"<sup>22</sup>.

I believe that the challenge to assimilate this catholic worldview is, before anything else, a challenge for each one of us personally: in our prayer, in our formation, in our lives and daily tasks. It is first and foremost a job that is *intra Ecclesiae*. And I think that at the center of this work there should be a re-learning of what it truly means *to be a human person*, and the distinction —so important and yet so forgotten today— between "person" and "thing", considering all of the richness from centuries of reflection about what God has revealed to us in Christ Jesus, and of the experience and coherent testimony with that same Revelation, we all can contribute to that distinction and the understanding of the different strains of logic and paradigms that result.

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<sup>21</sup> Romano Guardini, *La esencia de la concepción católica del mundo*, UNAM, México 1957, pp. 50-51. [«Creer es ir hacia Cristo, y sobre el punto de apoyo en que él mismo está; ver por sus ojos y medir con su medida. El creyente está, justo en la fe y por ella, fuera del mundo. Está en una actitud que es al propio tiempo de distancia y compromiso, de negación y afirmación, como corresponde a la tensión de su mirada sobre el mundo. El hombre creyente ve ante todo el mundo en general, y lo ve como en realidad es, en su redondez y totalidad. Pero en realidad de verdad es esta mirada independiente en amplia medida de la medida impuesta por la experiencia natural y su elaboración cultural, de modo tal, que se le aparece todo plenamente valioso. El verdadero creyente tiene la visión del mundo por la fuerza de su fe, y por humilde que pueda ser en lo demás su condición espiritual. En el creyente renuévase, bien que en medida muy exigua, la posición de Cristo. Todo verdadero creyente es una instancia viviente del mundo, que se devela también ante él. El creyente tiene también aquella peculiar posición extramundana, aquel ser heterogéneo, sin el cual no alcanzaría jamás la visión dominante. Posee el amor libre, y al mismo tiempo por completo fiel, que es el único que puede intuir en lo esencial. Guarda una posición de seguridad frente a toda situación y destino concreto. Todo esto, por supuesto, en la medida en que verdaderamente cree»]

<sup>22</sup> St. John Paul II, *Foundation Letter of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, n. 2, 20/5/1982.