



TIME IS GREATER THAN SPACE: THE PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL AND ECCLESIAL CHANGES, IN FRANCIS' MAGISTERIUM

O tempo é superior ao espaço: o princípio das mudanças sociais e eclesiais, no magistério de Francisco

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"Time is the messenger of God" (EG, n. 171)

ABSTRACT: The present article examines the four guiding principles of the social dimension of evangelization, in particular the promotion of the common good and social peace, according to the teaching of Pope Francis contained in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: a) Time is greater than space; b) Unity prevails over conflict; c) Reality is more important than idea; and d) The whole is greater than the part. It intends to fill an interpretative gap on the subject in question, since scholars have been content to expose the principles without clarifying them, or have even used them indiscriminately and ambiguously. Based on insights into philosophical reflection on time, the author develops a philosophical-theological reflection and interpretation that demonstrates the scope and challenge that the four principles present for social life and for the proclamation of the Gospel, dialogue among peoples and world peace.

KEYWORDS: Time. Creativity. Evangelization. Dialogue. Peace.

RESUMO: O artigo examina os quatro princípios norteadores da dimensão social da evangelização, em particular, da promoção do bem comum e da paz social, segundo o magistério do Papa Francisco, expresso em sua Exortação Apostólica

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Evangelii Gaudium: a) O tempo é superior ao espaço; b) A unidade prevalece sobre o conflito; c) A realidade é mais importante do que a ideia e d) O todo é superior à parte. Pretende-se suprir a uma lacuna interpretativa sobre o tema em questão, uma vez que os estudiosos têm se contentado em expor os princípios sem esclarecê-los ou mesmo os têm utilizado de forma indiscriminada e ambígua. A partir de conhecimentos sobre a reflexão filosófica a respeito do tempo, o autor desenvolve uma reflexão e interpretação filosófico-teológica que demonstra o alcance e o desafio que os quatro princípios apresentam para a vida social e o anúncio do Evangelho, o diálogo entre os povos e a paz mundial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Tempo. Criatividade. Evangelização. Diálogo. Paz.

Introduction

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), surprised many readers by listing four principles capable of promoting the common good and social peace, but whose meaning seemed mysterious to some, abstract to others, and at the extreme, far from a theological, biblical, and sapiential perspective. They are: a) Time is greater than space; b) Unity prevails over conflict; c) Reality is more important than idea; and d) The whole is greater than the part. Woven from dualities that are not simply listed in the exhortation, but formulated with a clear distinction of importance and prevalence, they take on the sense of guiding principles, applied by Francis to the scope of social action. More than dualities, in fact, each principle is inhabited by a dynamic polarity, a tension between two elements – time-space, unity-conflict, reality-idea and whole-part.

The present study draws on insights linked to philosophical reflection on time, to deepen the understanding of the four principles by placing them in the context of the “social dimension of Evangelization”. Therefore, unlike the studies I have been able to consult on the subject, my approach is not reduced to presenting or summarizing Francis’ exposition, nor to explaining the influences and sources that marked him. Regarding this last topic, the inspiring sources of Francis’ original thinking were initially presented by Scannone, whose research is integrated and expanded by Borghesi, which, in turn, was summarized by Prodi.¹ I highlight the Pope’s two main sources regarding the specific theme of principles or polarities, namely the French philosopher Gaston Fessard and the German theologian and philosopher Romano Guardini. Also, the Uruguayan polymath Alberto Methol Ferré, the Argentine philosopher

¹ See: SCANNONE, 2016; BORGHESI, 2017 and PRODI, 2019.

Amelia Podetti, the German-Polish philosopher and theologian Erich Przywara, the Belgian philosopher André Marc, the French theologian Henri De Lubac, the French historian Michel de Certeaux and the French philosopher Maurice Blondel should be cited. The latter is known by the young Bergoglio, indirectly, in the expositions of Father Miguel Angel Fiorito, recognized by the now Pope Francis as a master on the path of dialogue and discernment. Note the contemporary character of the authors with whom Bergoglio dialogued during his youth and intellectual maturity. All the aforementioned are authors whose thought represents admirable effort of the dialogue of faith with the modern world, and vice versa. Everyone was attentive to the issues of men and women who live the daily dramas of our urbanized societies. This historical-critical observation stands out all the more if we remember that Pope Francis' academic training took place after the Second Vatican Council, the moment when the Church finally decided to explain itself and open up to dialogue with modernity, following precursors such as Blondel and Guardini. Bergoglio did not hesitate to face this challenge.

The polar formulation given to the principles – time-space, unity-conflict, reality-idea, whole-part – stems from an understanding of the structure of reality, gathered by Bergoglio in his doctoral project, when he came across the work *Polarity: Essays on a Philosophy of the Living Concrete* by Romano Guardini. It is worth noting, however, that the definitive formulation, as found in *Evangelii Gaudium*, predates the papal election of Cardinal Bergoglio, as seen in his 2010 speech *Hacia Un Bicentenario*. Therefore, we are facing a thought that has been developed and tested throughout decades of studies, dialogues, and pastoral practice. The study of the sources, therefore, helps the scholar of Francis' magisterium to approach the hermeneutic horizon of the Bishop of Rome and to understand the challenge that he poses to the Church today. However, it runs the risk of concealing the originality of his thought, which consists in fostering the understanding of the Church's evangelizing action, placing it "along the way".

Therefore, I want to go a step further in philosophically and theologically interpreting the Pope's thought, showing how the principles match the very structure of ongoing processes in societies and in the Church, how they constantly connect with the Scriptures, as well as clarifying the surprising and revolutionary scope of what is proposed in numbers 217 to 258 of the *Joy of the Gospel*. This task should start with a discussion about other interpretations given to the theme, but the fact is that they practically do not exist. The authors I have consulted so far value the principles, present them faithfully to the Pope's text, apply them to various circumstances, but do not clarify or interpret them². This leads to more or less correct applica-

² In the bibliography, readers will find the sources consulted.

tions, by the way. Others accuse Francis of departing from the tradition and inspiration of the Scriptures, on this specific point that we are concerned with, of not being theologian enough but, again, without explaining what shocks them. They seem to be concerned with the modernity and openness of the language that surrounds the magisterium of the current Pope, and do not realize the sapiential depth of his teaching³. Even Juan Carlos Scannone, the most complete and capable interpreter of Francis, when dealing with the first polarity (time-space), states that: “at first glance it does not seem clear what Francis intends when he states the priority of the first over the second,” that is, of time over space (SCANNONE, 2017, p. 177). And, in his text, he does not clarify what “at first sight” obscures the interpreter, but only presents the principle in question, as do the other authors.

An initial response to critics who consider Francis little inspired by the airs of Scripture and the sapiential tradition can be found in the context in which the text of *Evangelii Gaudium* was born. From 7 to 28 October 2012, the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was held, with the theme “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”. In echoing the conclusions of that assembly and writing *The Joy of the Gospel*, Francis gives it the subtitle “on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world”. This simple change constitutes a considerable shift in perspective. It is not only a matter of *transmitting the faith*, but of *proclaiming the Gospel* and sharing “joy”, “a stupendous horizon” and “a delightful feast”. For “the Church does not grow by proselytism, but by ‘attraction’”, evokes the Pope in the first pages of the *Evangelii Gaudium*, quoting his predecessor Benedict XVI. The Gospel will undoubtedly be proclaimed to those who approach the Church and wish to live in it (catechumens), or to those who have left it, having once been part of its body (baptized); or in the support of those who struggle to live their own faith authentically at the crossroads of life; but, above all, it must be announced to the “world”. And if many do not believe, but welcome this vigorous seed, the Gospel will have done its work in the hearts of the people. In other words, the Word becomes incarnate at the heart of a world that is now secularized. And the Word becomes secularized, going until the end of its self-giving movement or incarnation. Faith will certainly be born as a theological gift, grace, or miracle, but only to the extent necessary to produce new fertile seeds, new and good transforming yeast (MIRANDA, 2017, cap VII). This leads us to two important assumptions, to understand well the text that we will soon analyze.

The first is that the Church is “in the world”, understood here as the public space or society. Therefore, the liberal and individualistic thesis that would prescribe the realm of “privacy” or the “heart” as the only space available for religious experience in modernity is totally rejected.

³ A summary and example can be found in MEIATTINI, 2016.

The verb *prescribe*, used here, is fundamental. Indeed, one of the forms of “secularization” in the contemporary world is the private and individualistic character that religious belief assumes in various slices of society. But this is a matter of fact, *not of law*. In other words, there is no reason, at the theoretical core of modernity, that compels believers to withdraw to the sacred temple of their consciences, only there to profess religious faith, be it shared or individualistic. On the contrary, the facts show that religions are becoming increasingly public in today’s democratic social contexts. The norm proclaimed by Francis is clear in this sense:

No one can demand of us that we relegate religion to the secret intimacy of people, without any influence on social and national life, without worrying about the health of the institutions of civil society, without no opinion about the events that affect citizens (...). An authentic faith always implies a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave something better in our passage on the earth (EG, n. 183).

The privatist prescription, moreover, is largely ideological, since it wishes to remove from the public sphere any critical instance that leads to the questioning of practices that are contrary to the multi-millennial values of religious traditions. It is precisely in the defense of these values that the Christian churches have increasingly stood out in recent decades. Just think of the movements in defense of human rights, indigenous peoples, democracy, the right to life, socio-environmental justice, etc⁴. That brings us to the second assumption, which completes and clarifies what we have just said.

The Catholic Church, in a process that has already spanned more than a century, has defined itself regarding today’s pluralistic culture as a member of civil society, in collaboration with other groups and people of good will, in the joint search for the common good and justice. The “world” in which it finds itself is no longer the imagined “Christendom,” but the world of secular states, the only ones capable of ensuring freedom of worship, the plurality of values, and the value of personal conscience, in any cultural context. Therefore, it makes no sense in our day to dream of a Church that is a state religion, as in the case of the Anglican Church, or of theocratic states, as in Islamic contexts. These images, real and with some respectable examples, are not sources of inspiration for the contemporary self-understanding of Catholics, whose public place has become the pluralist society. And, it is in this context that the Gospel must be proclaimed.

As can be seen from what I have said above, the excerpt in which I will study the Apostolic Exhortation is clear and well defined. My study does not apply, therefore, to traditional and ancestral cultures, present, for

⁴ The perspective defended here is widely developed and documented in CASANOVA, 1994 and 2019.

example, in our territory, and which form another set of “worlds” where the Gospel can and should also be proclaimed. The “world” to which the exhortation is addressed is limited, although its force and influence cross geographical boundaries and invade other worlds, often violently and destructively. Proclaiming the Gospel in “today’s world” becomes, consequently, a challenge and an urgency of universal reach.

But once these assumptions are clarified, how can the four principles enunciated by Francis help? Placed in the context of the “social dimension of evangelization”, they are fundamental for an announcement that is audible and understandable to contemporary citizens. Also, they are at the same time the guide to the form and pace that this evangelization needs to take, as *The Joy of the Gospel* tells us:

There is a bipolar tension between fullness and limit, (...) tension between the conjuncture of the moment and the light of time (...): time is greater than space. This principle allows working for the long term, without obsessing over immediate results. (...) to assume the tension between fullness and limit, giving priority to time. (...) Giving priority to time is about *starting processes, more than having spaces*. (...) Time governs spaces, illuminates them, and transforms them into links of a chain in constant growth, without paths of return (EG, n. 222.223).

1 The social dimension of evangelization

It was defined above what being present in the “current world” means, for the Catholic Church and, in general, for Christians attuned to the ongoing cultural process in modernity. Evangelization has been said to be an urgency and a necessity in this world. But, does evangelizing have a *social dimension*? Yes, “*Kerygma* has inescapably social content: at the heart of the Gospel is community life and commitment to others. The content of the first proclamation has immediate moral repercussions whose center is charity” (EG, n. 177).

The social dimension is not, therefore, a consequence of individually assumed faith, but is a dimension of the act of faith itself. It is not a matter of a “social doctrine” that would be deduced as a second requirement of faith, but of the structure of the *Kerygma* itself or the first proclamation. This understanding, moreover, suits the title of the document, which speaks of the “joy” of the Gospel. The Jesuit pope recalls, in his titles, one of the central themes of discernment, compiled in an exemplary way by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises* (SE). The “joy” or “consolation” is a state of fullness or “peace” that accompanies the encounter and relationship with God and neighbors. Ignatius teaches that joy is relationship; and sadness, isolation or, to use Francis’ words, “self-referentiality” and “bitterness”. The joy of the Gospel is nothing more than the encounter with Christ and the

meaning of life and the transforming power that flow from this encounter. We are facing a unique event, with its three moments, named in tradition as faith (encounter), hope (meaning) and charity (strength). Faith in God and neighbor, hope in God and neighbor, love for God and neighbor. Inseparable moments from the acceptance of the gift of Christ, who is Himself in our lives (SE, n. 313-317). Is it not true that God created them man and woman, that He revealed Himself to a people and that He redeemed mankind? The encounter with the God of Christian revelation cannot, therefore, be "individual". However, it is deeply "personal", that is, it occurs with the integral human being, body, soul and spirit, life of relationships with the cosmos, the other and God (VAZ, 2020, p. 353-443).

Yet, there is a deep wound "in the current world", wound of many worlds throughout human history and that, today, takes on an especially painful form; the exclusion of crowds from social coexistence, the practical denial of human dignity. Desolation, loneliness, abandonment are realities that challenge the proclamation of the Gospel, as understood above. Charity, the bond of social friendship and, above all, love for the abandoned are not isolated gestures of the evangelical way of life, but its core. Charity is communion, relationship, appreciation, responsibility, reciprocity. Charity implies donation, sharing, finally, becoming poor to enrich those who have nothing, with food, education, opportunity. The Christ of the Gospels speaks thus to our hearts: "Learn to share and thus enter into a deep relationship with me, present in the brother". What he asks of us is not "inner detachment", but the effective giving of being and having, real acceptance, deep recognition, and consent to the other (SE, n. 230-237). There is no other way to redo the "social dimension", an inseparable context of evangelization, which, in turn, strengthens and enhances this dimension. But how?

Each generation has the mission of generating "people", that is, "a culture of encounter in a multiform harmony" (EG, n. 220). This is how a society could unite and emerge in the world for action, from an identity woven in a long historical process. Only as "people", in Francis' semantics, does society attain meaning, that is, meaning and even mission or purpose within humanity (SCANNONE, 2016). For example, the people of Israel, in the time of the prophets, understood their meaning and mission among the nations: to be the suffering servant, the very incarnation of divine mercy (VOEGELIN, 2014, Part 4: "Moses and the Prophets"). Such a mission is the result of a long process and road. The social dimension of Evangelization is this process and long road. In order to go through it and accomplish it, it is important to respect four principles, which we will clarify below: "time is greater than space," "unity prevails over conflict," "the reality is more important than the idea," and "the whole is greater than the parts." These are principles that spring from the social doctrine of the Church, now understood as an explanation of the social dimension of *Kerygma* and

which are capable of promoting “peace in every nation and in the whole world” (EG, n. 221). This is what is at stake when we reflect, together with Francis, on evangelization in today’s world.

2 Time is greater than space: the changing social dimension

The first principle is the foundation of the others: the intuition of time. Questions related to qualitative and real time, as opposed to abstract and quantifiable time – I will explain this distinction later – had been under investigation for several decades when Guardini, finally, wrote *The Polarity: essay of a philosophy of the concrete living*, one of the texts that inspired Francis’ magisterium when he dealt with the social dimension of evangelization and the four principles. In the introduction to the French edition of *The Polarity*, Jean Greisch cites, as decisive influences on Guardini’s work, the philosophers Georg Simmel, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, in this order (GUARDINI, 2010). Interestingly, Heidegger’s *Being and Time* was published in 1927, two years after the publication of *The Polarity*. Is this an affective lapse of Greisch? In any case, the presence of a philosophy of life, exposed in duration, is evident in Guardini’s writing. Compare, for example, the introduction to Bergson’s book *The Creative Evolution*, published in 1907, with the first pages of chapter II of *The Polarity*. The convergences are impactful. Francis’ thought gathers these and other sources, showing that the Pope had gone through a long search for correct understanding and action in his ministry as a Jesuit priest and bishop of Buenos Aires, before his election as bishop of Rome. This is the philosophical and theological horizon that must be considered in order to interpret and clarify the first principle, as formulated by Francis, which I shall now do.

The fundamental question is: how to understand the time of life? In our everyday language, we speak of time by referring to the hours on the clock, which are spatially marked and numerically counted, as are the days, months, and years. This is the abstract and quantifiable time, repetitive and without qualitative records. In it, one hour is the same as another, only a number of minutes – sixty – that is repeated and added up to compose, for example, a 24-hour day. On the contrary, lived time is continuous and indivisible, it passes and cannot be repeated. In it, one moment differs from another, it lasts differently. An hour of joy, for example, does not have the same psychological duration as an hour of pain. This qualitative time accumulates in memory and generates surprising novelties as it passes. It is not just the psychological time of an individual consciousness, but the qualitative and temporal dimension of all realities, each lasting according to its own rhythm. The passage of time intertwines a qualitative multiplicity of states and processes in a

unity, as in the case of personal existence, or in the history of a people. For one person, to exist is to pass and to realize oneself, to be enriched or impoverished while passing, without ever being able to remain always the same, regarding actions and knowledge, feelings and visions of the world, although being the same person, in one's intangible mystery. To exist is to realize oneself, unfold the enigma that one is and thus weave a reflected identity, which can be narrated, and which philosophers call *ipseity* (BRUAIRE, 2010, p. 51-82). And we must say the same, though in an analogous way, of the historical processes of societies that, in weaving their own identity, live through time and become a "people" or a nation. Qualitatively different eras accumulate in the history of peoples. Times of crisis and prosperity, of wars and peace, of encounters and conflicts shape the identity of every nation.

It is true that static and territorialist views of society threaten processes, as they see all multiplicity or "difference" as synonymous with oppositions and fragmentations. The advocates of "unity without diversity" are mistaken when they do not consider the temporal background of living reality. In wanting to defend a static unit, they end up reducing everything to calculation and predictability, dominance and manipulation, production and consumption. It seems to them that the creative and unpredictable time of social history would create chaos, denying the necessary order. Yet, in reality, all they can do is create irreconcilable and conflicting polarities in the social environment, because immovable unity is always a limitation that creates oppositions of unities. On the contrary, the temporal view and the dynamic feeling of life in society consider that there is movement, intertwining and integration of differences, without the violent need to reduce them to a uniformity. Therefore, societies that accept "time" as a reality greater than the limitation of "space" are called *open societies*⁵.

If we understand what is stated above, Pope Francis' denunciation becomes clear that the "sin of socio-political activity" consists in "privileging the spaces of power over the times of processes" (EG, n. 223). The consequences are deleterious: "Giving priority to space leads to the madness of having everything resolved in the present, trying to possess all spaces of power and self-affirmation" (EG, n. 223). Francis denounces this madness also present within the Church in the form of "spiritual worldliness." Walter Kasper summarizes the problem clearly, especially regarding the clergy,

⁵ Concept coined by Henri Bergson, in his classic study of social philosophy, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, in particular in chapter IV, with the distinction between open society and closed society. This fundamental distinction was integrated into the current philosophical and theological vocabulary and is widely used by Francis in the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, in chapters I and III, "The Shadows of a Closed World" and "Thinking and Generating an Open World".

“who rely on possessions, influence, privilege, organization, planning, doctrinal or disciplinary security, authoritarian elite consciousness, or socially splendid lifestyle” (KASPER, 2015, p. 105). On the contrary, “prioritizing time means engaging in processes rather than having spaces” (223). Do those who often quote this last phrase of *The Joy of the Gospel* in political, institutional speeches, or homilies, understand its transformative, social, and even ecclesial reach and power? Wouldn't a Church that asserted itself as a perfect, unquestionable society, territorially organized in spaces of command, rigidly hierarchical from head to toe, from bishops to parishes, be a Church desirous of self-assertion and power? If there is something, or much of it, in the various ecclesial “worlds”, Francis' magisterium and synodal effort become a good fight to set the Church on her way as a pilgrim people of God.

This temporal and dynamic view does not imply the denial and annulment of space, as would be the case in a logic of simple contradiction. What we want to indicate by the prevalence of time, in the tension between the time-space poles, is that the necessary spatial organization of human life – the territory, the city, fixed institutions, laws, quantifiable goods, etc. – should not be the ultimate criterion of the common good and peace in society. We live in space, but when we guide our actions by expanding or conquering greater territory, wealth, legal privileges, etc., we fatally close our hearts to the other, interrupting the paths of dialogue, in the silence and fixedness of things. Now, life is movement and duration. Death, halt and end. The poles, interrupted by the intervention of the contradiction in reality, usually imply the exclusion and domination or even the removal and elimination of the other. The organization of space for life and coexistence requires time, understood here as the duration and unity of a qualitative and procedural multiplicity. Thus, the idea of poles in tension, which are unified at a higher level, provides the way of thinking and acting that transposes the limits of a merely conceptual logic to propose an authentic logic of the concrete and vital reality, as the philosopher Maurice Blondel had proposed in his text *Elementary principle of a logic of moral life* (BLONDEL, 1997, p. 365-385).

To live temporally is not to postpone solutions, nor is to foresee and control them in perfect strategic plans, with calculable deadlines. The timeliness of the principle in question is not that of hours, months or years. To live temporally is to inaugurate solutions and participate in them, in duration, gaining a new perception of reality as dynamism, creation and change. To understand that our actions are part of processes, that they are formed by multiple forces in interaction, that the interactions of forces modify each other reciprocally to generate luminous novelties. This view of reality allows the proliferation of differences and of multiple actors, since it does not intend to reduce multiplicity to a unit of stationary position, but to integrate the wealth of the multiple into another unit: that of the

process. Thus, without aiming at a total and sudden transformation of people and societies, the priority of time opens historical and consistent paths towards the fullness or fulfillment of mature and unique peoples, with new political, economic, labor, cultural or festive possibilities. This view is *not* utopian. It is true today, in which unprecedented processes are underway and invite us to enter their currents. I cite some of the most important ones, as an example.

This is the case of *democracies*, which are *processes of government and of decision-making*, despite the authoritarian risks that always lurk in them. If we look carefully at the history of peoples, we will see that the unrealized ideal of universalist democracy is recent. The Greeks, for example, were, in reality, an aristocratic and exclusionary democracy, as they admitted slavery. Democratic novelty is one of the ongoing processes in the world today. Thinking and living in duration, according to the priority of time, would mean immersing oneself in this process of democratic construction and actively participating in it. But there are other and even broader paths opened recently. Let us think for a moment about the defense of *human dignity*. It is a *process of coexistence*, a way of living in common with others, so diverse in everything, but equal in dignity and rights. This is another recent invention of humanity, deeply rooted in the Gospel, which is imposed as a duty and a struggle in the face of so many enemies who turn everything into a space of domination. This challenge summons all political forces, because “we are still far from a globalization of the most essential human rights. Therefore, world politics cannot fail to place among its main and indispensable objectives that of effectively eliminating hunger (...) and human trafficking” (FT, n. 189). And, there’s more. It should also be considered that the *process of socio-environmental integration*, as a *planetary ecological consciousness*, is underway. Against immediacy and greed rise the affirmation that “everything is connected” and the search for harmonious coexistence, of authentic rootedness in the rhythms of dear Earth, as Francis argues in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* (LS).

The drama of a policy focused on immediate results, supported (...) by consumerist populations, is driven to produce short term growth (...). One forgets, therefore, that ‘time is greater than space’ and that we are always more effective when we are more concerned with generating processes than with dominating positions of power. Political greatness is manifest when (...) we uphold high principles and have the long-term common good in mind (LS, n. 178).

On this path, in the case of “our world,” science plays a most important role. It consists of a new *process of knowledge*, which arose from high ideals of service to life and human liberation from the natural yoke. By greatly expanding the forces and fields of humanity’s domination, *science and technology* today stand as a challenge to freedom and reason, because scientific power and knowledge do not capture, due to methodological limitations, the meaning of human existence in society. At most and at

best, technoscience can describe the meaning, which comes from other sources, and interpret its function. Our world is, therefore, thanks to the growth of the field of human action through the mediation of science and technology, in the midst of *a process of growing responsibility*. New problems that weren't known in the past, resulting from this amplification of the field of action, challenge us daily, such as the use of virtual communication networks (PIMENTEL, 2015). What human meaning will we give, what mature response will we formulate to this and other interventions that our modern processes of action and knowledge present to us?

To answer this question, Francis invites us to enter the paths in which time is greater than space, guided by pastoral discernment. Important steps, regarding the papal magisterium, were taken in the years following the publication of the *Joy of the Gospel*. The principle of the superiority of time illuminates important statements in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (AL), when Francis comments on and applies the "principle of gradualness" to acts of freedom in marital situations that do not represent the objective ideal of ecclesial law, but which can be recognized with great assurance as the best response that pilgrims of love should give at this moment in their lives and, consequently, on their current path of sanctification (AL, n. 301-306). Francis therefore reflects on *The Joy of Love*, "remembering that time is greater than space," to "reaffirm that not all doctrinal, moral, and pastoral discussions need to be resolved by magisterial interventions" (AL, n. 3). Likewise, in the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, making use of the vocabulary of the "process", the Pope opens us to the creative flow of time, because "every day we are offered a new opportunity, a new stage" to "initiate and generate new processes and transformations. Let us be an active part in the rehabilitation and support of wounded societies" (FT, n. 77)⁶.

3 Unity, reality and the whole

The analysis of the first principle, its foundation and application, would already be enough to understand the perspective adopted by Francis, in which the social dimension of evangelization in today's world can and must contribute to the transformation of societies and the generation of "peoples" with an identity and action in the history of humanity. However, the other three principles, supported by this first, explain aspects that clarify it and make it more precise, as a theological-practical criterion of the

⁶ At *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis consistently adopts procedural language to place the first principle into the field of fraternity and social friendship. Ver: n. 51, 77, 151, 158, 143, 179, 180, 184, 196, 217, 225, 226, 266, 280, with emphasis to n. 231.

Church's action. It should be noted that abstract readings of the principles, adopting them as parameters of the theological method without further explanations and applications, run the risk of emptying them (PASSOS, 2018, p. 56-59)⁷. Still, in this sense, the complete and articulated exposition, making time the guiding thread of the four principles, seems to me to provide a safer and more effective interpretation. In his 2010 speech, *Hacia Un Bicentenario*, the then Cardinal Bergoglio orders the principles into 3 sets: a) Tension between fulness and limit, which encompasses the first and second principles (time X space, and unity X conflict); b) Tension between idea and reality, which corresponds to the third principle (reality X idea); and, c) Tension between globalization and location, which corresponds to the fourth principle (whole X part). This distribution, however, does not annul my fundamental intention, which is to interpret and articulate the principles from their procedural and, therefore, temporal dimension.

Does unity prevail over conflict? That conflicts are present in society, and that we urgently need to enter into new agreements to manage them, is clear. However, a social vision in which conflict was described as the natural and original state of societies would confuse the realism of the finding of structural conflicts, on the one hand, with the foundation of human sociality, on the other hand. If humans can enter into agreements, there is an undeniable precondition, that is, human sociality is original, we are social beings, linked from the beginning by ties that allow us to resolve conflicts. But, to understand this, we must return to the first principle and note that reality is a temporal process, that is, the changing unity of an irreducible multiplicity. Only in this sense can the great conflicts be interpreted as opportunities, so to speak, to rearrange unity in society. A view, so common in modernity, that conflict is the irreducible initial fact of human relationships leads, in practice, to considering that the solution can only be imposed by force, by the policies of hegemony and domination, by the dialectics between master and slave, by arms and by war. However, this vision prevents the emergence of the new in social life because it fractures the people and preaches polarization that is destructive, authoritarian and, in the worst cases, murderous. The temporal unity of multiplicity yields, therefore, to the temptation of the static and uniform unity of the fixed and intolerant position. In fact, the human heart is even more vulnerable to this image of the war of everyone against everyone. By the movements it inspires and directs, the image of war shatters any hopeful future, especially for the marginal youth of societies, deprived from an early age of the minimum conditions for flourishing. In fact, growth in love and friendship, seen as a path of discernment and the blossoming of freedom, is the main challenge of relational life.

⁷ Text that should be contrasted with the correct use, in my understanding, made by PRODI (2019).

Conflicts, as long as they are lived on the horizon of empathy and unity, can become open roads and with a sense of life (FUMAGALI, 2019, p. 57-74). Jesus himself faced unexpected conflicts, especially with his mother and relatives, but realized in them the opportunity to propose higher ideals, capable of generating unity (GALLI, 2018, p. 65). On the contrary, irreducible conflict knows only the moment when it is necessary to win at any cost. Those who survive in it have no plans for society, because they must react to the new dangers that arise every day. As a result, all kinds of creative processes are denied. The action is guided by strategies of territorial domination and expansion, of legal and financial advances and conquests. Only when the temporal unit is assumed do “the tensions and opposites reach a multiform unit that engenders new life” (EG, n. 228). It is undoubtedly a unit in tension, the only one capable of keeping all the virtualities in play, so that they all contribute to the ongoing social processes. Interesting applications of this principle, in the sense of a relational and harmonious unity, are found in Casula (2018, p. 64); and, above all, Coda (2019, p. 58-66), who places the third principle as the first step of an existential knowledge of God, which would transform theological thinking into “relational and relating, effective and performative” (p. 59). Likewise, Rupinik (2019) describes the path of spiritual life on the horizon of aesthetics and concludes “that the meaning of spiritual life is to become beautiful” (p. 134), like those who are an image of God and find him in all things. Unfortunately, it is noteworthy, the history of many societies (of all?) is marked by painful conflicts that have left wounds and can prevent unity. It is necessary, therefore, to look beyond and see these facts as painful deviations, which can be remedied when we work guided by the principle of unity.

It is necessary, therefore, to put aside preconceived ideas and probe reality in its vital and spiritual depth, according to the movement of the incarnation of the Word and our relational knowledge of God. To see that the reality, in this sense, is more important than the idea, as the third principle tells us. Yes, reality imposes itself and the idea reflects it, “reality simply is, the idea elaborates itself” (EG, n. 231). Reality surrounds us, involves us, and above all, we are in it, we participate in a community of being. The risk of thinking “detached” from reality leads to the generation of ideologies, formalisms, angelisms, violent impositions that are self-destructive, certainly, but that rather destroy and kill. Human thought arises from reality and wishes to return to it. It is movement that acts to illuminate, elevate, displace and create life. We participate in the whole, not as simple “parts”, but as active, thinking and free members, who only exist and live in the whole. The whole is greater than the part, states the last principle, as a synthesis of what was reflected before. “The whole is more than the part and more than the mere sum of the parts (...). It is neither the global sphere which nullifies, nor the isolated partiality which sterilizes” (EG, n. 235). The whole is interaction, process, history, being captured in the originality of its movement, rhythm and singularity. It

is in this sense that each society must be considered an organic whole, alive, beautiful, open and receptive to what comes. It is relationship and can be an image of God. The part can only remain part, closing itself to any change. The whole is the open society, the part is the movement of closure and sterility, which, thinking it is the whole, threatens openness.

Therefore, we should not live too obsessed with limited and private issues. We must always broaden our gaze to recognize a greater good that will benefit everyone, but we must do so without evading, without uprooting ourselves. It is necessary to sink our roots into the fertile soil and history of our place, which is a gift from God. We work on the small, on the neighbor, but with a broader perspective. Likewise, a person who preserves their personal peculiarity and does not hide their identity, when they cordially integrate a community, do not annul themselves, but always receive new stimuli for their own development (EG, n. 235).

It is understood that Francis declares his preference for the image of the “polyhedron” rather than the image of the “sphere”, which he clearly rejects. The sphere is the classical symbol of perfection, of the ultimate finished and flawless, of the absolute whole. The polyhedron, however, especially the irregular one, does not have the homogeneous properties of the sphere in which, for example, any point on the surface is at the same distance from the center. The different sides and different measurements of the polyhedron symbolize the irregularity of people and real situations. This sensitivity as a pastor allows the Pope to integrate, both in social processes and in evangelization, people who make mistakes, because they too “have a contribution to make, which must not be lost” (EG, n. 236). Recall, moreover, Francis’ constant denunciation of the presence of “Pelagians” and “Gnostics” within the Church, whose pride consists in declaring worthy only the members of a supposed moral – Pelagian, or intellectual – Gnostic, elite (FRANCIS, 2015). Contrary to what the “elites” think, it is precisely a non-exclusionary image of the Church that is the condition for understanding in what very specific sense one can and must speak of the vision of totality, inherent in the Gospel. The path does not correspond to the homogenization of all, but to the generous acceptance, because the Gospel “does not cease to be Good News until it is proclaimed to all, until it fecundates and heals all the dimensions of man and integrates all at the table of the Kingdom. The whole is greater than the part” (EG, n. 237). It is, therefore, a totality of gift, a universality of giving of life, acceptance and regeneration, which is only realized in history and, consequently, in the intensive time of giving.

Conclusion

The temporal perspective opens the community to dialogue, as a common search for recognition and consent in society. The duration of the proces-

ses, the attention to reality, the construction of unity, the acceptance of all are dynamics that require deep understanding and, therefore, long and constant dialogues. This perspective, inaugurated in the 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, was developed in *Fratelli Tutti* (FT, n. 198-224), in the chapter in which Francis deals with “Dialogue and Social Friendship” as a daily path to the blossoming of open societies. It deserves a separate study, that I intend to carry out in the future. Here, I only offer an interpretative key that allows us to understand the nature of the dialogical process. First, it should be noted that dialogues are opened in essence. Dialoguing is not, strictly speaking, to debate or to confront arguments with the rhetorical intention of moving an assembly or interlocutor in a certain direction; and even less with the intention of beating an opponent. Whoever seeks to win or convince, outside of games or advertising, presupposes knowing the truth and, sometimes, even condemn their interlocutors to the perpetual imprisonment of the cave, capable only of capturing shadows... However, a closer look shows that we all live in the world, in a field without trenches and without privileged points of view. We all live exposed, even when trying to hide ourselves. And, we are expressive beings, even if lost on some solitary island; this is our primordial situation. If the dialectic which clarifies and leads to argumentation, if the rhetoric which convinces and unites in particular situations, have their place in social life because of the difference in experiences and the time that makes some wise and others not, dialogue is not therefore annulled. It shows itself in its difference because it consists in the bet, so often won in history, that something new can arise when there is an authentic encounter and reciprocal willingness to learn and to discover in common what is good, in its strength and beauty. In dialogue, time as a process, living reality, the unity of multiplicity and wholeness as a gift offered to all guide us towards communion, mutual understanding, consent and acceptance. Disconcertingly welcomed, lived to its fullest intensity in the surprise and revolution of the beatitude of mercy (KASPER, 2015, ch. 4-5; SCANNONE, 2017). In dialogue, openness to the other is contagious and inspiring. Tensions and conflicts can be assumed and gathered to generate paths of more life. The good news is that this ideal of dialogue is not far from us. It takes place in many areas that are worth enumerating (EG, n. 238-258).

Thus, for example, in the public sphere, formed by society, the State, and the powers, Christians can bring the Gospel as their own contribution to the gestation of processes in which fair institutions and norms emerge to defend and promote coexistence, work, and the flourishing of the people, in their uniqueness, as well as the flourishing of the citizens. In the intra-ecclesial sphere, the courage to dialogue purifies power in the Church and strengthens the people of God in their confrontation with everyday life. In the ecumenical sphere, dialogue is witness in processes that enrich the understanding of the mystery of faith shared among Christian churches (TERRAZAS, 2019). In the inter-religious sphere, finally, the appreciation,

safeguarding and promotion of the values of the various religions bear witness to the common human openness to God, lived as admiration in the face of the symbolic richness of the most diverse beliefs. In all spheres, possibilities thus arise for collaboration among those who are different because we all, and especially the discarded of the world, open our destiny in existence, having to fight against the fate that is imposed on us and that can only be humanly faced in fraternal communion.

Pope Francis constantly mentions how the four principles and dialogue can change the dynamics of the Catholic Church, leading it to “take on the possible processes and the long road” (EG, n. 225), to live in the insecurity of time, in pilgrimage and departure, in openness and encounter. If this occurs, it seems to us that novelties will be born within the ministries, in the promotion of synodality, in community life forms and in the grateful and serene inclusion of those who err (REPOLE, 2018). Then, a Church more transparent to the mystery must come about, transparent as a “source” that freely waters the arid lands of our societies at war with the living water of the Gospel of Peace (VAZ, 1968).

Acronyms

AL = *Amoris Laetitia*

EG = *Evangelii Gaudium*.

FT = *Fratelli Tutti*

LS = *Laudato Si'*

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