

GLOBALISATION AND SALVATION OF THE “CITY” IN PAUL’S THINKING

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Abstract

The stake of our research is related to the understanding of Paul of Tarsus’s personality in the first century context, century that was deeply marked by the ancient globalisation phenomena. Alongside with Plato and Aristotle, Paul of Tarsus, known as Apostle Paul, has decisively influenced the European culture. As long the modernity keeps the thinking of these giants of the universal spirit, we believe that the current problems can be better understood through the experience of those historical times that were extremely complex. In this study, our attention is focussing on the theme of the city. In the multi-cultural world of the first century, that was facing the “globalisation” phenomenon, after the spread of the Roman Empire ideology, there were many fears related to losing the identity of the “mother city” that had direct references to the “inner city”, fears with roots in the Greek cultural model. How were they addressed and solved by Paul of Tarsus of Cilicia in the first century is the question to which we seek an answer in this article.

Keywords: St. Paul, cultural context, Hellenism, Judaism, inner city, mother city, universal city.

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Introduction

The cultural context of first century is a researched subject of great scientific interest. Although an impressive number of researchers of various fields have carefully investigated this part of the human kind history, the information volume that this period can offer to the universal culture seems inexhaustible. This interest has multiple justifications. Firstly, we are assisting to the delineation of the great influences that will be exercised on the European culture through the Christian movement, alongside with the Hellenism and Judaism of the same period. Secondly, the problems of the first century are very similar to those of our times. David Gooding was stating that “our modern world, with all its scientific and technological progress, is not essentially different than the ancient time”².

It is already a unanimously accepted fact in the scientific environments that the globalisation phenomenon is fully found in the period that we are referring to, that is the first century³. Through our investigations, we want to understand to what extent the great thinkers of the period have perceived this phenomenon and placed themselves in relation to it. Paul’s writings especially can be, in our opinion, a “window” to understanding the first century globalisation, but also a guide mark for understanding the way that Apostle Paul had perceived this phenomenon contemporaneous with him.

Out of the data we own about the human in Paul’s time there results the fact that he was marked by fear, uncertainty and an overwhelming self alienation. The cause of these anguishes is due to the “opportunity” of belonging to a great “city”, delimited this time by the Roman Empire’s borders. The dimension of the new space, called by us “universal city”, through the travelling and living conditions, becomes overwhelming and generates existential anxieties. This anxiety is deeper than for the man that belonged to a mother-city governed and protected by the gods of that region. Due to dramatic experiences that the humans lived in the cultural context of the first century, the solutions offered by the so called “*salvation philosophies*” appeared.⁴ Paul’s epistles represent a part of this range of saving solutions.

A last aspect that we are mentioning is related to Paul’s work. In the specialized literature, his epistles are named occasional letters that treat “urgent problems”⁵ of the first Christian communities. The debated problems are real “windows” to the globalisation phenomenon in Paul’s time. Thus, Paul of Tarsus in Cilicia does not elaborate a philosophy treatise as an alternative to the existent works. Yet, he is forced to propose various concrete solutions to the real problems

² David Gooding, *Loyal to the truth, 1st* volume, translation by Mirela Rădoi, Logos Publishing, Cluj, 1995, p.9.

³ Cătălin Turliuc, Maria Nicoleta Turliuc, „Challenges and effects of globalisation”, in Alexandru Zub, Adrian Cioflâncă (editors), *Globalism identity dilemmas*, Publishing House of „Al. I. Cuza” University, Iași, 2002, p.24, 27.

⁴ Vasile Muscă, „Plotin and the salvation philosophy”, in Plotin, *Enneade I-II*, translated by Vasile Rus, Liliana Peculea, Iris Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p.21.

⁵ Merrill C. Tenney, *Overview on the New Testament*, Europontic Printing Office, Cluj, 1998, p.114.

that man, the Christian man this time, is facing in the same crucible of the first century globalisation. The way that the Tarsus scholar conceives his solutions shows his deep anchoring in the Hellenic-Jewish-Roman thinking of his time. Thus, the novelty that Paul proposes in the Christed rescue programme is in agreement with the anthropological and axiological dialectical perspective of both Greek philosophy and Judaism, anchored in the Old Testament literature.

Globalisation – babylonization

Our first objective is to understand the extent to which globalisation is perceived by Apostle Paul. In other words, we are wondering if the apostle of the “Gentiles” was aware of this phenomenon and eventually we want to discover the major source through which he understood the globalisation of his time.

Our approach is aiming at the intellectual education background of Apostle Paul. It is known with sufficient precision that he was born in Tarsus of Cilicia in a wealthy Jew family that owned both Tarsus citizenship and the most wanted, the Roman citizenship⁶. Furthermore, according to the information offered by Strabo, the prestige of Tarsus was marked of a powerful philosophy school. This was rivalling with the Athens and Alexandria schools. The Tarsus philosophers were the most wanted in Rome⁷.

At the basis of his intellectual profile, as Paul himself states, is his strong orientation to the “strictest sect” of the Pharisee⁸ “religion”. The maximum mark of these “schools” was obtained “under Gamaliel⁹”, the prestigious Rabbi. According to the available data, it can be said that a major contribution to the intellectual education of the Tarsus scholar was brought by the Old Testament literature.

Therefore, our research is entitled to analyze this type of literature. Several perspectives on the *Old Testament* seem to take shape as arguments in this chapter. Firstly, any possible territorial expansion of a people or any element that could lead to a global cultural unity is openly incriminated by the authors of the Hebraic writing. The famous story about the Tower of Babel¹⁰ is more than relevant in this context. Furthermore, a first approach of the global world shows up in the description of the antediluvian world, before the flood. The entire destiny of the first post-Eden Biblical human, Cain, seemed relevant to us regarding the appearance of the globalisation germs – firstly, he founded a city and then, after 5 generations, a real expanding civilisation and culture appeared. In the Biblical text vision, these are the germs that lead to the world global unity, considered to be a generalised evil that determines the brutal intervention of Yahweh.

Secondly, the experience of the Assyrian-Babylonian exile has deeply marked the Hebrew minds. In their writings, the Jew prophets make direct reference

⁶ Josef Holzner, *Paul of Tarsus*, translated by Iosif Bișoc, Sapientia Publishing House, Iași, 2002, p. 14

⁷ Strabo, *Geography III*, translated by Felicia Vanț-Ștef, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 284.

⁸ Acts 26, 5.

⁹ Acts 22, 3.

¹⁰ Genesis 11, 1-9.

to the globalisation phenomenon, through what they call Babylon threat. We mention here only the writings of the prophet Isaiah¹¹. The perspective of the prophet Daniel is also interesting. The apocalyptic descriptions of his dreams present the “globalisation” phenomenon in a non-hospitable light. All the empires that the prophet refers to are likened to the most frightening beasts¹². Moreover, the New Testament literature takes the Hebrew perspective and projects the Babylon city as a future world capital on which both the world trade¹³ and the world politics will depend. The descriptions of John’s Revelation have references beyond the Roman Empire borders. The visionary author describes a world as prosperous and interdependent as it is revolting in the space of the moral values.

In Paul’s writings, you can notice that, although he understands both the Babylonization phenomenon and the problems raised by it, the author is cautious in his references and he uses a slightly codified language for it. For instance, when he refers to the society, the image of a global empire under the domination of the evil worlds takes shape. In the same way, in an eschatological language, Paul announces the entrance into the world of “the man of Lawlessness” as absolute leader of the earth¹⁴.

We believe these brief remarks provide us the minimum certitude by which we understand that Paul of Tarsus was familiar with the globalisation phenomenon in what was called the world domination by the Babylon spirit.

Paul’s program for saving the “city”

As I mentioned at the beginning, Paul’s writings are part of the “saving programs” typical for his time. Three main characteristics seem to dominate Paul’s program.

The first is related to the deeply Christed dimension. Thus, Paul’s perspective brings for the first time in the universal thinking the focus on a Person who is both guarantor of the moral essences and their absolute manifestation, but also substitutes of the fatidical “rest” present in all the other programmes. The second characteristic is related to the manner in which he is building up his program. Paul of Tarsus follows the harmony with the unity of thinking of his time offered by the Hellenic-Jewish-Roman culture. By this, he sees in the solutions of these programs a “sequence” of God’s universal revelation. His program, focussed on Jesus, is the climax of the revelation by the incarnation of the Logos. The third characteristic is given by the “city” concept, that spiritual space to which the human is bound and to which he is forced to exercise a continuous offensive in order to ensure his happiness.

Regarding the “city” concept, Paul’s epistles let transpire several references so that we might understand the way that the author understands and uses it. Paul prefers to use, instead of the “inner city” concept, which is specific to Plato’s

¹¹ Isaiah 13 and the following chapters

¹² Daniel 7-8.

¹³ Revelation. 18.

¹⁴ 1Thessalonians 2.

philosophy, the “inner being” concept ¹⁵(τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον). The relationship of synonymy between the two terms is highlighted by Plato himself¹⁶. He uses with the same meaning the expression “the being inside the human being” (ὄθεν του ἄνθρωπου ο εντος ἄνθρωπος). Furthermore, through his program, St. Paul offers the inner transformation in what he calls “temple” of the Holy Spirit. The believer¹⁷, the local church¹⁸ and the universal church are three situations in which this term is found.

Paul’s salvation program considers the crisis inside the city that the Greek philosophy is treating in detail. In this direction, I have pointed out three specific characteristics of St. Paul’s vision. The first is the author’s focus on restoring the human relationships. The crisis inside the city is affecting the relationship by which the humans define themselves in the first place. Briefly, the relationship with oneself corresponds to the inner city, the relationship with the neighbour to the mother city and the relationship with the authority to the universal city. The second characteristic is connected to the proposed solution. This time we do not have a corpus of ideas, a new doctrine, but a Person that, through his dimension, can bring the healing of the relationship. The third aspect is given by the expansion of his program to the new dimension to which the human being is exposed, that I have called universal city.

Saving the inner city

As I have mentioned above, the inner city is the inner being both in the epistles and in Plato’s writings. In his consistent position in relation to the culture of his time, Paul integrates Plato’s anthropology into the new Christ-centric vision. Therefore, through the novelty proposed by the author, we have named the saving city approach a Paul’s anthropology issue. Here are several details.

In Romans, Paul discusses about the *inner being* ¹⁹(τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον). In the *Republica* dialogue, Andrei Cornea translates with the same expression *the inner being of the human being*²⁰ (*Resp 589.a. ὄθεν του ἄνθρωπου ο εντος 589.b ἄνθρωπος*). Thus, the “inner being” concept is common to both texts. Another common element is the way this “inner being” relates to the law. In Paul’s epistle we find the affirmation: *For in my inner being I delight in God’s law*²¹ (*συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον*). A similar expression is found in Plato’s text: *There is in the human being a contradictory impulse simultaneously... one part is ready to obey the law, as the law commands*²².

¹⁵ Romans 7, 22.

¹⁶ Plato, *Republica*, in *Works*, 5th volume, edition taken care of Petru Creția and Constantin Noica, Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing, Bucharest, 1986, 589 a,b.

¹⁷ 1Corinthians 3, 16.

¹⁸ Ephesians 2, 21.

¹⁹ Romans 7. 22

²⁰ Plato, *Republica*, 589 a,b

²¹ Romans 7. 22

²² Plato, *Republica*, 604 b

In both texts we see that the law (*νόμος*) is an obedience guide mark for the inner being. According to Paul's anthropology, inside the inner being there is a "part" that "wages war against the law". St. Paul names it *the sin living in me*. In the philosophical text, Plato names the same "entity" as follows: ... *while the beast and wild part, stuffed with food and drink*²³ or ... *in every man there is a terrible, wild and wicked aspect of desires*²⁴. The general solution proposed by Plato is to tame it as long as it cannot be eliminated from the human being. The novelty brought by St. Paul is that humans are born with this "entity" that is dead until the man meets the law. Once they meet, "the sin" comes to life and *I have died*. In Paul's thinking, it seems that the death that he is talking about is connected to the "helplessness" of doing the absolute good. This limit is the main source of the inner crisis.

In the fight with the sin or with Plato's beast, the humans need additional resources in order to overcome at least in a satisfying manner. In St. Paul's opinion, the inner crisis casts the human being in disastrous complications. We are mentioning *the love of money*²⁵ mentioned by the apostle. He sees it as *a root of all kinds of evil*. By extension, it seems to be the main cause of babylonization (globalisation) in the author's vision.

For solving the inner crisis, Plato proposes philosophy as the main resource. St. Paul proposes a Person that has overcome the power of sin. Furthermore, the Person proposed by Paul brings peace with oneself and with God²⁶. This is possible by the substitute role assumed by Christ. The fatigued "rest" resulted from the good made by the humans in the situation of a besieged "city" is "transferred" to the account of the Person recommended by Paul as solution.

Understanding the salvation program recommended by Paul is essentially a mystical metaphysics issue. The act of faith necessary for accessing this program is a metaphysical intercession of "understanding"²⁷. The inner city „built-up" in this way seems capable of facing the complicated phenomena of life, and in their list we can also include the babylonization, respectively the globalisation.

Saving the mother city

The "mother city" concept is found in Plato's text²⁸ and its meaning has the size of the Greek philosophy. St. Paul uses him in his theological argumentation²⁹. In the same time, he often refers to the concept when he responds to the human's problems raised by the city where he lives. In Paul's vision, the good of the city depends in the first place on the quality of the interpersonal relationships. Paul observes that they have reached disastrous dimensions³⁰. The healing of the relationship with the neighbour is the concrete action that he proposes. The

²³ Plato, *Republica*, 571c

²⁴ Ibidem 572 b

²⁵ 1Timothy 6, 11.

²⁶ Romans 5, 1.

²⁷ Hebrews 11, 1-3.

²⁸ Plato, *Euthyfron*, 2 c.

²⁹ Galatians 4, 26.

³⁰ Romans 1, 29-31.

approach of this process is one of Paul's axiology issues. Again, he opposes to a code of ethics the same Person that is both model and resource. In this approach, we see that he gives priority to the family relationships. Briefly, the husband is Christ's representative and is called to love his wife³¹ following Christ's model for the Church. By this type of solution, Paul cannot be matched by the people of his time and in our opinion he remains more than relevant over the history of mankind.

The way that Paul relates to the city also bears a strong pattern of the Old Testament. The Babylonian exile has produced most unexpected attitudes in the Hebrew minds. One of them is related to the relationship with the city where they were exiled. We are mentioning here a memorable passage of the book of prophet Jeremiah. *Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper*³². After centuries, marked by the prophet's authority, Paul would recommend to the believers of his time: *I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*³³.

The Christed dimension brought in the interpersonal relationships as solution for saving the mother city is fabulous. Paul's axiology emanates from the incarnated Logos and, according to our analysis, it is more than efficient. From loving your neighbour, Paul recommends loving your enemy³⁴. The resonance of this axiological approach has deeply marked the great art creators of the European culture and represents a real source of reflection on the human crisis today.

Saving the universal city

The "universal city" concept is not found in the Greek philosophy. I have resorted to this wording based on the analysis of Rome during Paul's life made by Eugen Cizeck. In the chapter entitled "*City and against city*"³⁵, the author is analyzing the crisis of the "eternal" city that resulted when the expansion of the Roman power began to spread beyond its borders. The author shows that, due to this expansion, the "against city" phenomenon appeared. The new conquered region was intended to become an extended expression of the great city, Rome. This reasoning offered by Eugen Cizek is the basis of our "universal city" concept.

Paul's salvation program is addressing including the crisis from the "great city". The author mainly aims at restoring the relationship with the authorities. Paul's logic in this domain is marked by the Jewish-Christian eschatological thinking. Basically, the corruption of the authorities and the generalized crisis were perceived by the collective mind as signs of the end of history. Things seemed to be out of control, predicting the disaster of the universal city. In Paul's epistles, this

³¹ Ephesians 5, 25.

³² Jeremiah 29, 7.

³³ 1 Timothy 2, 1-2.

³⁴ Romans 12, 20.

³⁵ Eugen Cizeck, *History of Rome*, Paideia Publishing, Bucharest, 2002, p. 19.

type of concerns is treated³⁶. To this crisis, Paul proposes the solution of restoring the relationship between the universal city inhabitants and the authority.

Paul's approach is eschatological, supported by the rigour of the Roman law. In his vision, "the apocalyptical" end of the empire does not depend on impersonal laws. The end is a Person and it depends on the right that this Person has gained over the world. Paul's demonstration that "the last Adam" would justify this right is an absolute novelty. "The rest" that I have mentioned above and also mentioned by the Greek philosophy is actually a juridical problem in discussion. Plato uses the expression "as far as it is given to a human to possibly do" every time he refers to the human's limit in living virtuously. The way that Socrates dwells on the piety and impiety matter shows clearly that Euthyifron's problem remains. In other words, the human faces situations in life when he cannot avoid impiety.

Following Plato's logical frame, we see the approach of the same problem in Paul's writings. Paul's novelty is related to the transfer of the "case" in God's "yard". Briefly, the solution of the divinity is just the assumption of the accusation by Man Jesus Christ. Through this act of assumption and substitution, the last Adam obtains the right on this world. In a few words, this is Paul's thinking according to which the end, "Omega", is a Person with full rights on this world. Regarding the restoration of the relationship with the authority, Paul assures the believer that, in such a divine legal framework, "the authority of the city" is managed in accordance with the divine "economy" rules. Therefore, the relationship with the authority of the city is practically an attitude towards the One that holds the management of the world organization.

In conclusion, the problems related to globalisation in the cultural context of the first century were perceived both by Paul and the world that he lived in. The salvation programs of that time support this idea. Paul approach for resolving the crisis has several peculiarities that are worthy of note. Firstly, Paul's attitude avoids reductionism and the exclusiveness characteristic to this area. Paul is building the new program on the Hellenic-Jewish-Roman way of thinking.

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³⁶ 2Thessalonians 2, 1-12.

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