

THE IMPACT OF 'GLOBALIZATION' ON CULTURAL IDENTITIES

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1. FOREWORD

The purpose of this contribution is to analyze the impact that the ongoing globalization process has on the cultural identities of peoples. However, to be able to carry out this analysis it is first necessary to locate the process of globalization within the realm of understanding culture, something which is usually not done. The commonly used definition of globalization comes from the economic realm, from the opening up to free trade and from the growing interdependence of world markets at their different levels. To this definition is usually added the political and institutional dimension, the responsibility of the organisms of the United Nations, multilateral pacts, and regional agreements. In both dimensions there exist, certainly, involved cultural aspects: the so-called 'cultural industry' and 'show business' on the one hand, and cultural institutions protected by law, such as schools, universities and the media, on the other. However, with an approach of this type we only touch the surface of the cultural dimension, since this last cannot be reduced either to the exchange of products or to institutions. Therefore, I would like to analyze at the outset what I understand as culture from the perspective of sociology and how the process of globalization can be defined using this approach.

2. THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

I leave to philosophers the analysis of the ontological dimension of culture and its relationship with the human person as such. I make this indis-

pensable explanation because I do not ignore the fact that the current Pontiff's teaching provided beautiful stimuli for reflection when he declared in his speech to UNESCO that culture 'is a specific way of existing and of man's being'; that 'man, who in the visible world is the only ontic subject of culture, is also its only object and its end' and 'that one cannot think of culture without human subjectivity and without human causation; that, in the field of culture, man is always the first fact: man is the primordial and fundamental fact of culture. And this is man always in his/her entirety: in the integral whole of his/her spiritual and material subjectivity' (Speech to UNESCO, 2 June 1980). 'Globalization', as such, is not a phenomenon that in an immediate or direct way bears upon this sphere of analysis. Rather, it presupposes it, at least in the sense that the human person rationally understands that in spite of his or her different ethnic and historical-cultural origins he or she shares that same rational condition which makes him or her aware that he or she is a free subject and also conscious of the causation of his or her acts, something which includes, as a consequence, his or her responsibility. Although voices have already been raised which seek to question the unity of the human species and also question that all men, by the fact of being such, must be considered as persons, that is to say free fellows and equal in dignity and rights, it is my view that their arguments are excessively directed towards the legitimation of dubious techniques which allow the manipulation of human beings and as a result these voices do not express effective rational arguments.

Sociology, in a more modest perspective, considers the concept of culture as a historical one which was consolidated in Europe during the eighteenth century after a long social genesis and which since then has not only been applied in the European regions but progressively throughout the world. This is not the place to describe the most relevant aspects of this socio-genesis. It is enough to point out that it has been, so to speak, an evolutionary gain in terms of the achievement of objectivity in observing social phenomena, with the consequent possibility of comparing different particular traditions and customs, and this at a time when with the massification of written culture the consideration of social esteem was liberated from a vision derived from the higher levels of a pyramid made up of status hierarchization. After the consolidation of bourgeois culture, what was cultivated could be considered in alternative ways and from a perspective different to that of the nobility. But this was only the beginning of a process that was to be enlarged progressively to other spheres. Not only would life and death, catastrophe and illness, be perceived as constituent elements of

human contingency: they would begin to be defined with suitable and relevant social approaches.

The concept of culture expressed the possibility that social difference could be considered in symmetrical form and not only with those concepts which, due to the ontological load involved, hierarchize one of the two sides of the differentiated: truth/falsehood, good/evil, beauty/ugliness, civilization/barbarity, nobility/ignobility. If, during the sixteenth century, for example, theologians had to pose the question of whether the recently discovered Aborigines of America were really humans at all, thereafter the concept that was employed was that of 'other cultures', without there being an explicit indication through such an appellation of any form of hierarchy. One was dealing, simply, with otherness. Obviously enough, the hierarchization of difference would not disappear completely, and this is true of our days as well. But ethnocentrism, racism and other tendencies of this type began to be easily known as particular points of view which did not depend on the objects being observed but on the perspectives of the observers.

Following Luhmann, we can affirm, in consequence, that the concept of culture expressed an observation of the second degree, that is to say, the observation made by observers. There do not exist, as such, cultural objects which can be differentiated from others that are not such objects. Not even the difference between natural objects and constructed devices is an example of this because all cultures have given to natural objects varied symbolic meanings that can be understood only with reference to their hermeneutic presuppositions. As was to be expressed later in the classic definition by Tylor, practically all objects that have social meaning belong to culture. It is not, therefore, from the object in itself that we can construct a cultural analysis, but from the way in which that object is observed by observers.

What lies behind this observation of the second degree? Fundamentally, two things. Firstly, the self-observation that is structured in the consciousness starting with the differentiation between identity and difference, that is to say, between self-reference and hetero-reference. Secondly, the discovery of the blind point present in every observation produced by the fact that when tracing a difference no observer can be located simultaneously on both sides of the differentiated. When discovering the blind point in others, awareness of one's own blind point can be acquired and hence the need to make comparisons between the different points of view, which in turn feed back to the perception of identity and difference. This is the procedure by which different peoples have acquired cultural identity, either in their identity/difference in relation to their immediate neighbors or in relation to

major regions of the earth: for example, the West/the East, the North/the South, Ibero-America/Anglo-America, Latinity/Germanity, etc. The same approach is usually applied within societies with reference to sex, age, income, productivity or any other socially relevant aspect.

There are as many types of cultures as there are points of view from which cultures can be observed and differentiated. If in certain circumstances one prevails over another, this is the result of the social relevance attributed to these differentiations, which can be recomposed and fed back infinitely. Observing this process from the perspective of social evolution, it could be said that without abandoning them totally, approaches linked to the ontic reality of people, such as sex, age, race, and territory, are substituted for contingent and relative criteria for the purpose of observation, such as productivity, efficiency, speed, objectivity, esteem, and subjective preferences. No approach involving differentiation, however, is completely abandoned. Not even those that have ontological consequences. They are merely reinterpreted from points of view involving a higher awareness of contingency and of the relativity of the observation and classification approaches.

Sociologists seem to be in broad agreement on the use of two major macro-variables to observe this process: on one hand, the passage from oral cultures to written cultures and then to audiovisual ones; and, on the other, the passage from family-segmented social organization to status hierarchized social organization, and, finally, to the functional organization of society. Both variables point towards a fact which has often been observed: that societies progressively replace the invariable approaches of a natural character by which to observe themselves with more flexible and contingent approaches which refer to their own forms of social organization. Whereas in most oral cultures, the mirror by which society observes itself is nature, the cosmos (cosmologies, cosmogonies), the introduction of literacy allows the substitution of this hetero-reference by the self-reference of society for seeing itself and its differentiations, that is to say, by culture, in its dynamic relation of identity and difference. Society, with these new degrees of complexity, acquires an increase in the number of available options for decision-making. Through the duplication in the symbolic sphere of all objects and social relations, culture allows a foreseeing of possible scenarios and the giving of present value to the future. The irruption of audiovisual technology accelerates this same process and this means that society can be aware of the value/cost of the suitability of its decisions.

Culture is also identified with the historical memory of societies. Here emphasis is placed on the mechanisms of the socialization of knowledge

and meaning that form the intergenerational network which provides continuity to social life. Such a vision could not be understood except from the perspective of the observation of observers since in the receptivity of the point of view of tradition by each new generation what has been thought and transmitted is considered inseparable from the analysis of the point of view of those who have elaborated and transmitted them in this way. This allows the new generations to develop a critical approach in relation to precedents and to produce innovation and change in society. However, it is necessary to overcome an extremely lineal vision of this socialization process since one has to keep in mind that the present in society nowadays, which in the context of current life-expectancy covers approximately five generations, involves a state of affairs where each one of these generations feeds back its points of view into those perceived by the others. The historical memory should not be understood, consequently, as a sort of file of past events that can be opened when it is necessary to remember things, but rather as a hermeneutic ability of the present which guides the possibilities of increasing the observation angles of differentiation between identity and difference.

This new form of conceiving culture permits a leaving behind both of the idea that social consciousness is necessarily false or alienated and of the concomitant idea that sees culture as a reflective superstructure of the material conditions of life. With regard to the first idea, it is evident that every observation, as has already been pointed out, has a blind point, where what cannot be seen cannot be seen. But the capacity to observe observers tracing the differentiations, which allows them to observe, makes possible the discovery of the latent structures of our own and other people's observations, so that alienation, far from remaining a sort of black hole to which every consciousness succumbs, provides an opportunity for feeding back the differentiation which one observes with new differentiations that were not originally perceived. With regard to the second idea, the concept of 'value-added' is applied equally to the exchange of material objects and to the exchange of intangible ones, and both of these categories have a cultural dimension that can be observed. Culture, indeed, corresponds to the duplication of objects as soon as they are observed, but such a duplication reflects nothing more than the point of view of the observation and for this reason the ideas of infrastructure and superstructure have been abandoned by sociology.

Having made these observations about the sociological point of view and cultural analysis, I would now like to consider the current phenomenon of 'globalization'.

3. *'Globalization' from the Perspective of Culture*

From what has been said above, it can be inferred that in the analysis of the impact of 'globalization' on culture it is very unsatisfactory to understand the phenomenon of globalization as an increase in the exchange flows of international trade, either in the sphere of merchandise or in the sphere of capital and financial flows. Although it could be understood that in this increment of trade there are goods included that in general terms could be considered as being cultural ones, for example books, musical works, designs of wardrobes and advertising, we have already pointed out that no object by itself can be considered separately from the culture in which it has been produced.

The fact that the access to new technologies takes place in differentiated form in the different regions of the world and that the distance between the included and the excluded has been increased is also no cultural fact in itself. It is possible that the new awareness of the value of information and the increment of trade in intangible goods makes it more evident that the capacity to add value appropriately to the goods is the basis of the difference in levels of productivity between countries, between regions of the world, and between branches of production inside a single country. However, there is nothing new in this fact because the beginning of the modern world, when the interest on capital was seen as legitimate gain and not as usury, opened the road to a social differentiation rooted in a monetary economy with its consequent obligations of efficiency and competitiveness to attain the maximization of the value of goods. Perhaps it could be sustained that this differentiation has reached such magnitudes that it is by now irreversible, and that for the same reason ideologies which proclaimed that the equality of human beings was the purpose of all the efforts of the political community have lost their foundations. But for the reasons enunciated above, the idea of equality is in itself an observation approach which has a blind point, and it cannot escape the paradox that the observer is unable to locate himself or herself on both sides of the differentiated. The question of how equal the equals are is in the consciousness of people every day in the most varied environments, precisely because they experience that behind equality approaches, society, in fact, traces differentiations.

It is necessary to explore the question more deeply and to ask whether behind the so-called globalization process there is a new 'quality' that deserves to be analyzed or whether we are only face to face with quantitative increments of interchanged goods, due especially to the fact that the

economic value of suitable information has become more evident. To answer this question, which is in itself highly complex, exceeds my possibilities and the confines of this paper. There is no other alternative, as a result, than that of enunciating some hypotheses in the hope that they will stimulate a debate that can supplement and correct their deficiencies.

3.1 Changes in the Relationship between Human Beings and Machines

Differently from other social phenomena of great range that the world experienced in previous centuries, one of the significant novelties of this present phenomenon is that the political will that drives this process and the ideologies that have been elaborated to advance it were largely preceded by the technological innovations that occurred after the invention of the 'homeostatic' machine. Such innovations did not only change the scope of the production of technological instruments: what is even more important is that they also changed the procedure itself of gathering information, of analysis, and of decision-making. This was truly a silent revolution that sprung from scientific laboratories and was then extended to all the spheres of social life, progressively embracing all human activity.

We can state that technology suffered a radical transformation when the machine stopped being conceived of as an instrument whose ends were imposed on it externally by the user's will and became a machine, as is the case today, that incorporated within itself the possibility of defining alternative ends. Automatization has not only meant the creation of novel intelligent machines with the capacity to build or to control other machines, but also machines designed with the explicit intention of imitating the functions of human intelligence which have homogenized and standardized in a growing way the operational definition of what is properly a rational decision, in contexts of variable circumstances and with different levels of available information.

I sustain, therefore, the hypothesis that an essential characteristic of social evolution at this stage of human history is that men and machines are no longer completely foreign in relation to one another. Both look for information, they store it, they process it, and they use it according to a rational protocol of decision-making. Under typical conditions and in a predetermined range of problems both act in an equivalent way. This new type of interrelation has changed the scope of the human phenomenon since complex alternative scenarios for all kinds of decisions can now be simulated in machines at a speed that human beings on their own could never reach.

Whereas during a large part of the twentieth century a pronounced 'uneasiness in culture' was perceived in relation to the development of technologies that displaced the central position of the human being in social life and the validity of Protagoras's assertion that 'the human being is the measure of all things', it has been the technological revolution itself that has once again placed human beings at the center, although in a way that was totally unforeseen by ideologies. The re-centering of the human being is not now proceeding by virtue of the Kantian 'legislative will' with its attempt to transcend the contingency of social life through formal universal principles, but because of the social capacity to process contingent and differentiated information which is appreciated precisely for its difference and redundancy. Information in itself is now defined as a capacity to connect differences, and, for that reason, is a very cultural act.

3.2 *The Attempt to Organize Social Life in 'Real Time'*

The main consequence of the above mentioned technological change is that the ability to organize social life in 'real time' has been created, although merely in an approximate form since absolute simultaneousness constitutes a principle of impossibility. The very term 'globalization', in this sense, is not very appropriate since it suggests spatial unification more than simultaneousness in terms of time. Nevertheless, it is in this last dimension that the novelty introduced by new technologies can be appreciated.

The 'uneasiness' that has produced this transformation has not been so much with culture as with ideological thought. Thus the postmodernists have proclaimed the end of the '*metarécit*' or the 'decline of ideologies'. And, in a certain sense, they are right, although the arguments they use to arrive at this conclusion are certainly debatable, particularly when they assimilate the interpretation of the Christian event of salvation to an ideology of history, to a '*metarécit*', which completely denaturalizes its eschatological and sacramental dimension. However, if we do not deal with this aspect but just remain in the sphere of ideological thought, it seems right to affirm that this ideology was built on the basis of the differentiation between the past (which included the present situation) and a future which was still to be built. As stated in the well-known comment of Marx to Feuerbach, 'up to now philosophers have interpreted the world, but now we have to change it'. This distance between the lived past and the 'wanted', 'dreamed of' or 'planned' future made present time an insignificant moment of social temporality, a mere formal connection.

The approach to 'real time' allowed by the new information technologies brings, on the contrary, a higher consciousness of present time as the moment when decisions are linked and the future is anticipated. The future stops being a mere conceptual representation of what is conceivable and could occur and comes to constitute the current meaning of the coordination of decisions. By ideological thought this is perceived as the 'end of history'. By the contingent elaboration of information, on the contrary, it is an opportunity to give present value to the future. This largely explains the progressively greater importance acquired by the monetary economy in relation to the real economy, a development due precisely to the fact that it anticipates the future. It also explains why the value of '*carpe diem*' has been so strongly asserted in recent decades. Some observers have interpreted this with reference to hedonism and the implicit materialism of consumer society, which evidently makes sense. But it could also be pointed out that it is a symptom that present time now has a new social gravitation, its own value, that it does not represent a mere arrival point or a mere starting point.

I have the impression that this important change has also been a source of tensions for intergenerational dialogue. For those who were socialized before these changes took place, youth still represents a future project, despite the fact that the juvenile period has been extended very much, as a consequence, among other factors, of the increase in life expectancy. Young people, on the other hand, rebel against this vision, since, socialized in this new social context, they justifiably think that present time also belongs to them and they claim the necessary social space for their own decisions and representations. Even the category of 'young people' in itself is too undetermined because the appraisal of present time leads to an increasing shortening of the period of age in which shared references exist. If Ortega y Gasset still thought that the distance between one generation and another was approximately fifteen years, nowadays it seems that this quantity of years is excessive.

Bound up with this phenomenon, one is also aware of a certain indifference among young people when facing a long duration historical memory compared with what usually happened in the cultural transmission of points of view among the elder generations. Particularly, the expectation of intergenerational encounter has moved from the past to the present time, with corresponding difficulties that this encounter will actually happen. The adults cannot take for granted that they will enjoy the respect of young people because of the sole fact that they are older

and, as such, the holders of wisdom about life. Young people, on the other hand, do not accept being defined as inexpert because of the sole fact that they are young. The possibility of organizing social life in 'real time' brings about, in consequence, an understanding of the intergenerational dialogue more as a reality underway than as a long duration process in which each generation delivers its relay (testimony) to the following one at the moment of its retirement from the social scene.

3.3 *Decision-Making, Ethics and Social Governance*

The sole fact that the phenomenon that caused the novelty of nowadays did not have its origins in the political sphere, the habitual place of understanding the decision-making process in relation to the common good, represents in itself a huge political challenge. It would be enough to check the reiterated fact that current politicians/policies are forced in most cases to legalize the social effects of new facts which are created without any political intention. Political discussion runs the risk of becoming more and more a speech of *ex post factum* legitimation, with an evidently decreasing social relevance. Its traditional concern for the education of virtue among citizens has had to give way to consequentialist orientations due to the fact of being often surprised and surpassed by events that are difficult to foresee in terms of their significance before they actually happen.

It is not the task of this paper to engage in a political analysis of these transformations but merely to refer to their cultural significance. In this respect, I would like to mention first the relative loss of trust and of moral certainty provided by historical tradition and national culture. These are constantly challenged by the uncertainty of the future and the administration of risk has become one of the strategic nerves of social governance. And, although there still exists what could be called 'a country risk' or 'nation risk', their calculation and administration are judged more from the present situation and its variability rather than from historical tradition.

'Globalization' has brought with it a growing homogenization and standardization of the procedures of decision-making in the political, economic and scientific sphere or even in daily life, notwithstanding the insuperable discrepancies that could exist between the reasons proposed by people for making these decisions. This essentially represents a change in the form of giving legitimacy to the decisions that affect people and society in general. Sociologists have called this '*legitimation through procedure*', applying this concept at the outset to the impersonal and bureaucratic organization

of the state and of large associations which precisely due to their impersonality were able to apply their procedures in a range that transcended boundaries and cultures. But during this second phase that we are living through today, the standardization of procedure is even deeper since it does not only embrace the social institutions of great scope, but also, as has already been stated, the new intelligent machines with their interactive ability between themselves and human beings.

This new form by which to bestow legitimacy on decisions has not been relegated to topics linked with the practical and material aspects of human existence, but has even been extended to some topics of the metaphysical tradition, such as the dignity of the human person. This was shown prophetically, in a certain sense, by the approval of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights by the UN in 1948, a consent that was achieved on the condition that the liberty of people and states to adhere to the truth contained in its juridical dispositions was guaranteed even though there was no explicit foundation. However, it is the lack of a foundation in itself that hinders having an objective framework by which to understand the new anthropological challenges introduced by technology: assisted fertilization, human cloning, experimentation with embryos, the production of transgenic products, etc. The typical preoccupation is what, how, when, and where, but not why. How can we not remember Nietzsche who almost one century ago defined 'nihilism' as a way of thinking which '*lacks purpose, it lacks the question why*'? In fact, one century later, there are many people who are trying to modernize Nietzsche with the idea of 'weak thought', that is, post-metaphysical thinking which by deliberately giving up the search for a foundation presumes that it is in a condition to tolerate any argument, without exclusions of any type.

However, although there are good reasons to define the culture that accompanies the globalization process as nihilistic, we are not in the presence of a phenomenon that can be explained by the diffusion of a philosophy or of a particular ideology, such as juridical positivism, neo-liberalism, economicism or scientism. No 'ism' is able to mobilize productively and creatively society as a whole, less still on a planetary scale. This is something much more complex linked with social evolution in itself; with models of growth and development; with the form of governance of society. The principle of '*legitimation through procedure*', certainly, does not require metaphysical foundations, it does not need to criticize or to substitute them: it only standardizes within society an approach of rationality which is valuable for its results. Because the ends of human acts are excluded

from the procedure in socially relevant decisions, these are transferred to the subjective realm of the private conscience and sought to be understood with concepts like preferences, values, pleasures, wishes, convictions.

The search for the legitimacy of human acts has been the perennial topic of social and political ethics. The current novelty resides in the form of organization of society, which tries to solve this topic. At the level of the complexity of premodern societies it was sufficient to found rational judgment in fidelity to the inherited cultural tradition of the ancestors, that is to say, in habits and customs. The increment of complexity brought about by the massification of written culture and by the emergence of empires on which 'the sun never sets', is required to add to customs the recognition of the majesty of written law (the 'rule of law') under the principle of jurisdictional sovereignty. However, the increment of complexity in the current globalization process no longer has as its main cause the 'legislative will' but technological innovation, and, very particularly, complementation and mutual potentiation between the human being and the intelligent machine that he or she has created: the machine of information.

The perplexity caused by this new order does not only affect some particular cultures, primarily those linked to the Christian tradition which are especially sensitive to the anthropological and ethical dimensions of human coexistence. At a world level we observe the paradox that while, on the one hand, the 'rule of law' recognizes more complex and sophisticated rights whose jurisdiction in quite essential aspects has been the subject of an attempt at internationalization, extra-legal behavior has been growing in all environments: corruption, the traffic in illicit substances, tax evasion, the suspension of workers' rights, organized crime, violence, and war. It is enough to have the information, the organization, and the technological 'know how', to do whatever it is possible to engage in, to find an accepted place in society, and finally, to achieve its form of juridical legitimation. As with ethics and politics, rights and law are also becoming a legitimation *ex post factum* in many areas of life.

Will culture be able to have enough strength to articulate the *ethos* of tradition with these new challenges? It is difficult to give a simple answer to this question. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that culture, more than the institutional juridical order, is in a better situation to make a contribution in this respect. Globalization has brought with it a relativization of national cultures as such, but it has compensated this weakening with a multiplication of the observation points that are structured from universal perspectives. The tradition of high religions has found

great reinforcement at the present, thwarting the prophecy of the 'death of God'. It is sufficient to refer here to the recent Jubilee of the year 2000 with its impressive direct and indirect impact on the entire world. Something similar of a different degree can be affirmed of the other high religions. To this should be added the important cultural initiatives of civil society which have also achieved a world articulation. I am thinking of the initiatives of pro-life movements, ecological movements, the initiatives for the defence of children and the elderly or of the handicapped. I do not ignore that next to these initiatives there have also been articulated others in the contrary direction, such as Satanism, for example. But the relative weight of some or others is not determined beforehand by economic or political factors. Their vitality depends on the dynamism with which their approaches of identity and difference are proposed as a definition of their observation point and on the way in which they are perceived as being reasonable by the population that observes.

If at a certain historical time culture was appropriate to the legitimization of a peculiar form of national State, the process now underway has liberated it very substantially of that load. As John Paul II emphasized at the UN Assembly of 1995, culture is a realm for the exercise of human sovereignty, especially in its interrelation with those other subjects with whom the human being is objectively linked. Nobody can expropriate this space of sovereignty, as is demonstrated by peoples who despite being subjected to the invasion of foreign powers were able to survive precisely because of their culture. The depth of the cultural bond depends above all on the interpretive wealth of the observation point it offers, and the globalization process has helped to liberate it of the institutional contexts characteristic of States. The re-evaluation of present time as a place that anticipates decisions about the future increases the strength of culture as the reference and articulation point of most fundamental ethical topics.

3.4 Education in the New Context of Communication Technologies

The subject of education merits a section apart because of its essential link with culture, that is to say, with the transmission of a point of view for the observation of the world. Those who work in this sphere experience changes daily. As is the case in all the remaining sectors of social life, the globalization process is lived out in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, education has been pressed more than ever before by the accreditation of immediate achievements linked to the expectation of a productive per-

formance in the labor environment. This is simple enough to verify in the relative deterioration of classic education and its growing substitution in the preference of the plaintiffs for technical disciplines of high social prestige motivated by expected profit for the corresponding formation of human capital. But on the other hand the speed of technological obsolescence shows that, in the medium and long terms, those who have a better basic formation and a greater capacity to understand the complexity of social life have greater possibilities of understanding and adapting to social changes. So, paradoxically, the same requirement of updating and efficiency reserves an outstanding place to those disciplines that have sufficient detachment to observe the human phenomenon in all its factors.

New technologies allow students to adopt a much more active role in their learning process, both in relation to the search for electronically available information as well as in relation to the possibilities of communication with those people who are responsible for the subjects of their interests. This has brought more flexibility in the curricula and the consequent possibility of almost personalizing their own plan of studies. As in all other markets, the supply of, and demand for, education have been relatively deregulated and everything leads one to think that such deregulation will be further increased. This places young people under the obligation to improve their capacity to discern from the subjects that are offered, and this is a new stimulus for the reinforcement of culture as a point of combination of self-references and hetero-references.

I find that the greatest cultural impact that has taken place in this realm because of the globalization process is the redefinition of the intergenerational dialogue in the form already outlined. The traditional definition of scholarship at all levels as a community of teachers and pupils in search of true and useful knowledge continues to have full validity. However, when learning is also going to be brought near to 'real time', with its implicit evaluation of present time, the references to tradition, which are specifically what teachers transmit, are no longer interesting if they are not connected to an alive and ongoing experience. Knowing can no longer be identified, therefore, with the already known. In this regard, the encyclopedia can substitute teachers to great advantage since none of them can equal the availability of references in an interconnected world. But what is irreplaceable is a transmission of that learning experience that really satisfies the demands for truth, goodness and beauty, which constitute the wisdom of each culture, which, due to its own nature, is personalized in each member of the community of teachers and pupils.

I think that in this respect the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* has made a wonderful contribution, with its double exhortation to pass from knowledge to wisdom and from the phenomenon to its foundation. The increasing number of the available points of view by which to differentiate reality and to recombine their elements from the perspective of each science or art can lead to fragmentation, to hyper-specialization, and to the loss of a global sense of reality. To know more of less and less is a tendency characteristic of the complexity of the very society that organizes knowledge with contingent approaches and with multiplex purposes. Nevertheless, this tendency further reinforces the countertendency of seeking observation approaches that allow the articulation and the synthesis of these fragments. The above-mentioned encyclical identifies the sapiential tradition precisely as that capacity for synthesis capacity because in not conforming itself to an arbitrary reduction of reality and seeking the ultimate meaning of everything, it reveals that what was differentiated can only be understood from the difference that in the beginning differentiated it, and, therefore, from the unity of what was differentiated.

As has already been explained, the capacity to observe observers, which we term 'culture', implies a capacity for self-observation. The globalization process has allowed us to understand with much greater clarity than ever before that a global observation point in which an omniscient observer can locate himself or herself and in front of which all the events of the world can be laid out in their significance cannot exist. As the functioning of Internet shows, the acceptance of this premise has been in fact the condition of its capacity to interconnect all the existent computers in a global net. Something similar happens in the sphere of culture. The awareness of self- and hetero-references prevents any observer from wanting to consider his or her culture as the culture of cultures. We only have as a synthesis capacity the elementary human experience of the rational condition that looks for the knowledge of oneself simultaneously with the knowledge of the world. This first wisdom, which is not deducible from any other and which Heidegger formulated accurately in his statement to the effect that 'the ontic condition of *Dasein* (of the human being) is ontological', is the one that guides knowledge to its end (to its wisdom), providing abilities for synthesis and recombination by which to unify everything that is broken into fragments or differentiated.

The recovery of the sapiential tradition that John Paul II proposes allows us to understand once again in human history that only by knowing wisdom can we give wisdom to knowledge. I find that this is the core of

what nowadays is at stake in the educational process, especially in the intergenerational dialogue between teachers and pupils, which changes progressively its gravity center from what is already known to knowledge itself, to the present time of intelligence that inquires into reality in search of its meaning. From Aristotle onwards we have known that the 'real time' of human intelligence is the act and it is this sense that we understand his statement that 'intelligence in act is, in a certain sense, all things'. The possibilities opened up by globalization in relation to the simultaneousness of present time provide us with the opportunity to understand and to carry out in our own experience the essential act of intelligence.

4. CONCLUSION

I am aware of the incompleteness of the analysis that has been presented here. In my defence I could point out that there are not enough empirical studies to allow us to make an evaluation of the global impact of 'globalization' in the sphere of cultural identities. Defensive images are usually generalized in relation to the period that finishes without there being an appropriate perception of the new opportunities that are opened up by this process, or on the contrary, apologetic speeches are disseminated about the future which are lacking in any rational foundation.

I have wanted to demonstrate what, from my particular observation point, constitutes the essential nucleus of what the globalization process is. It is not that the interdependence between peoples or the multicultural character of humankind have been recently discovered. The real novelty, from the cultural point of view, is the generalization, by means of intelligent machines, of a standardized protocol for the production of rational decisions rooted in the capacity to combine self- and hetero-references, to compare and simulate at the present time possible scenarios of the value-added and of the administration of a competitive and reversible temporality. Such suppositions, when operating in a context of the fragmentation of information, identify the rational decision with that of a player who wants to take advantage of his or her time in relation to his or her rivals. This has become a generalized discourse which differentiates winners and losers. However, this tendency to fragmentation, as soon as it operates in a cultural context determined by the capacity to observe observers, that is to say, of observing those who trace these differences without being able to locate themselves simultaneously on both sides of the differentiated, is counter-

balanced by the opposed tendency which observes the unity of what is being differentiated and which looks in 'real time' at the wisdom of knowledge. This is the consciousness of a 'human ecology', to employ the happy phrase of John Paul II, which would not be possible except in the evolutionary context in which we are currently living.

That in the culture of the future one or another tendency will prevail is, certainly, an open question, a challenge to human freedom. When the dimension of wisdom becomes hidden, the inherent competitiveness in the use of information in 'real time' ends up in the crude neo-Malthusianism of the natural selection of the strongest or in the legitimation of the 'tyranny of the strong over the weak'. Personally, I do not think that it is inevitable that in the end this point of view will prevail as regards the observation of the human phenomenon, although a great deal of evidence as to its generalization and extension do exist. Understanding a culture's point of view allows us to discover that in a complex society there co-exist different possibilities of tracing a difference to observe and that it is unavoidable that an observer that observes observers becomes aware of the blind point of the difference with which he or she observes the observed. The possibilities of observing 'globalization' from the perspective of an authentic 'human ecology' founded in the undisposable character of each person and of his or her dignity is a fully valid perspective entrusted to the freedom of who observes in this way. However, what a society that seeks to live in 'real time' demands is not a new 'humanist ideology' that expresses a dream of the future but rather a verifiable present experience which adds value to the quality of life of those who are linked to it.