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## CONTEMPORARY EVANGELIZATION CHALLENGES BASED ON THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

**Abstract:** Developmental tendencies are not conducive to spiritual growth, especially among young people. This is due to a diminished attachment to values rooted in tradition and to technological progress. Saint John Bosco was already aware of the seriousness of this issue. By adapting the preventive system in his oratories, he emphasized that the educator of children functions as a friend—one who not only supervises but also supports. Even in his time, Bosco recognized that globalization could bring both benefits and risks. This process reminds us that we live in a “global village”, where everyone has the right to live and profess their faith. At the same time, it highlights humanity’s growing preoccupation with the value of money. This article encourages reflection on the importance of God’s role in our lives and on the spiritual impoverishment that occurs when spirituality is lost, all framed within the context of the spirituality of Saint John Bosco.

**Keywords:** John Bosco, evangelization, globalization, spirituality, loss of spirituality, preventive system, education.

Leaning into the topic of modern challenges that man is receiving from the world, we can conclude that the need for authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ is increasingly relevant. Christ’s witness is to preach the Gospel where it is lacking or misunderstood by man, especially the young. The Church needs experts on modern problems of the world.

Increasingly, we see in our surroundings the expansion of atheization, the phenomenon of globalization and various spiritual threats to man. Thus, we need as many evangelizers as possible, who will know how to fill any deficiencies in

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man with the love and closeness of the Lord God. Increasingly, the trends of the modern world, which a young person considers a guide in life, are contributing to the problems in the education of young people.

Problems in education that arose in a secularized world also applied to the time of St. John Bosco – the educator of the young, who wanted to mold people to be good Christians.

## 1. GLOBALIZATION

Beginning to consider globalization in the modern world, it is worth starting with the very definition and meaning of this word. Globalization have an impact not only on individuals, but the entire world. Its manifestations include:

the increasing globalization of capital and the appearance of global markets; the increase in global migration of people; the growing importance of technical information in the process of production, consumption and leisure activities; the growing awareness of environmental and ecological issues as issues that concern the whole Earth, the growing awareness that politics transcends the boundaries of nation-states<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, it can be seen that globalization is the center of the modern world. However, when talking about this phenomenon, it is necessary to consider it in theological terms. For the Church, the phenomenon of globalization brings a lot of opportunities, but it is also necessary to see the other side of the coin, that is, the dangers that pose a threat to modern Christianity. The very concept of globalization came into general use in the 1980s. At the beginning of the spreading phenomenon, these proponents sought to solve all sorts of problems that threaten world security, the fight against terrorism. At that time they wanted to equalize the economic level of rich countries with poor ones. Although this was very difficult there were many obstacles in the way<sup>2</sup>.

John Paul II described the phenomenon of globalization this way:

Globalization is not a priori good or bad. It will be what people make it. No system is an end in itself, so it must be consistently proclaimed that globalization, like any other system, must serve humanity, must serve solidarity and the common good<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> T. ZASĘPA, *Globalizacja – mass media – Internet* [in:] *Internet i nowe technologie – ku społeczeństwu przyszłości*, ed. T. Zasępa, Częstochowa 2003, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> S. BIELECKI, *Teologia znaków czasu*, Kielce 2006, p. 197-200.

<sup>3</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, *Globalizacja i etyka. Przemówienie do uczestników VII Sesji Plenarnej Papieskiej Akademii Nauk Społecznych*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 22:2001, no 6, p. 42-43.

It can be seen, as Pope John Paul II points out, that globalization is becoming a very rapidly developing cultural phenomenon:

The market as an exchange mechanism of the carrier of a new culture. Many observers draw attention to the expansive, even aggressive nature of market mechanisms, which increasingly reduce the area of free, public action of the human community at all levels. The market imposes its way of thinking and acting, shapes behavior according to its scale of values. Those who are subject to its influence often see globalization as a destructive flood, threatening the social principles that kept them safe and the foundations of the culture that gave direction to their lives<sup>4</sup>.

You can see how aptly the successor of Christ observes that today's world progress and all sorts of changes are happening too fast. It is globalization that is imposing a new style, which is not always good, but can threaten to destroy structures.

Speaking about globalization, it is worth considering the threats it poses to Christian spirituality. It all stems from postmodernism. Already John Paul II, in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, states that human being is the first path on which the Church should walk as it fulfills its mission<sup>5</sup>. There are two symptoms of modern globalization:

If globalization today is proving to be an unstoppable fact, if individual states and nations are unable to secure their economic and social order on their own, the question arises: under what conditions and with what values can one agree to various forms of integration with other global communities?<sup>6</sup>

Thus, globalization is neither good nor bad, taking into account its structural dimension.

It is worth asking: what does the globalization process mean in practice? M. Muscat defines the phenomenon as:

The surrender of a certain amount of power once exercised by various communities into the hands of corporations and organizations, whose accountability is becoming increasingly difficult to hold. This means that the decision-maker does not have to reckon with the consequences of his actions. Promote diversity rather than homogenization and specialization, which globalization is increasingly emphasizing<sup>7</sup>.

An important feature of globalization is the unification of the modern world. This applies to every person, without exception. It respects the rights of individuals,

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> See JAN PAWEŁ II, *Encyklika Redemptor hominis* (4.03.1979), no 20-25.

<sup>6</sup> P. GÓRALCZYK, *Mundializacja – rozwój czy dekadencja?*, „Communio” 2001, no 4, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> M. MUSKAT, *Globalizacja jako utopia naszych czasów* [in:] *Globalizacja i my. Tożsamość lokalna wobec trendów globalnych*, ed. R. Piekarski, Kraków 2003, p. 90-91.

societies and nations. John Paul II, at the VII Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on the problem of globalization, spoke of two inseparable principles. First,

on the inalienable value of man, which is the source of all human rights, of all social order. Man must always be an end and not a means, a subject and not an object or a market commodity. Second, on the values of human cultures, which no external power has the right to disregard, let alone destroy. Globalization must not be a new form of colonialism. It must respect the multiplicity of cultures, which, within the universal harmony of peoples, are like different interpretative keys of human life. In particular, it must not deprive the poor of what remains most precious to them, including their religious beliefs and practices, since authentic religious convictions are the most expressive manifestation of human freedom<sup>8</sup>.

One can see in the Pope's words the great task the Church has to fulfill. It is up to modern people to uphold their lives, dignity and faith. Without these assets, globalization will become a part of human exploitation, disrespect for human life and the destruction of Christian culture.

A person living in the world and having faith, who is experiencing the processes of secularization in the age of globalization, is at great risk of losing his identity of vocation, he is in danger of becoming spiritually lost. It can be hypothesized that whoever throws God to the margins of his life departs from the realization of God's plans. Political and economic life, on the other hand, can enslave a person, as is happening in modern organizations that combat religious values and, above all, God himself.

A man who loses his identity of faith falls into spiritual confusion. He has to search for ideals in the modern world, because what he lives by puts him in the great dilemma of choosing the world or living with God. John Paul II writes about this in his exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*:

So many people give the impression of being confused, uncertain, without hope, the state of mind of many Christians is similar. Numerous disturbing signs have appeared at the beginning of the third millennium on the horizon of the European continent, which, although it is full of signs and testimonies of faith, and its community undoubtedly lives in greater freedom and is more united, is feeling the effects of the havoc that ancient and recent history has wrought in the deepest tissues of its peoples, often giving rise to disillusionment<sup>9</sup>.

In further reflections, the Holy Father writes about the danger of losing Christian memory and heritage, accompanied by religious indifference and practical

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<sup>8</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, *Globalizacja i etyka*, no 4.

<sup>9</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, *Adhortacja apostolska Ecclesia in Europa o Jezusie Chrystusie, który żyje w Kościele jako źródło nadziei dla Europy* (28.06.2003), no 7.

agnosticism. Modern man is bringing spiritual life to the background or destroying it altogether through today's voice of various organizations that do not fully promote faith in God<sup>10</sup>.

Although at the time of Don Bosco the concept of globalization was not yet defined, the problem itself existed. As we know from the pages of history, the late 19th century for Italy was a period of enduring various political and social changes imposed by foreign powers. The changing regimes were destroying the old order of the state. It was a time of political upheaval. Then spiritual, social and economic life suffered great losses. Only after the collapse of the French empire did Italy rebuild its state. However, the struggle against the Church and the loss of faith in the people could not be stopped. Italy stood in the service of liberalism. In turn, this one had anti-clerical and anti-Catholic sources. For Don Giovanni Bosco this was very important, because the formation of the new congregation and the lack of faith in the people caused many difficulties and obstacles. However, the saint did not give in to these structures opposed to the Church and created a great work that continues to this day.

Today's man, listening to the voice of the world, increasingly confuses concepts and does not know what path to follow in his life. Aptly noted Jacek Kicinski, who states that man is increasingly succumbing to the modern fashion of relativism and liberalism. Through such an attitude, the image of the Lord God is blurred in man, and all this causes him to be unable to distinguish between what is good and useful for him and what is a threat to his spiritual life. This is a great challenge for the entire community of believers, which should become a sign of God's love for others. Jacek Kicinski states important opportunities for the spirituality of the modern Christian. He writes about making an analysis of modernity and making a diagnosis, the need for shared responsibility for all who belong to the Church. The goal of this is to strengthen in faith and love all people<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. SPIRITUAL LOSS

The modern world, which is highly secularized, seeks to make people lose their faith completely. More and more often we can see in schools, work environments or state institutions how much rebellion and anger there is towards Christ and the Church. Increasingly, we can see that the crisis of faith is affecting younger and younger people, who, drawing from the environment various ideologies, can lose their faith. There is a crisis of faith in the world today, which is a spiritual collapse of the Church people. Man does not properly understand the world and himself in

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> J. KICIŃSKI, *Duchowość misji współdzielonej. Studium w świetle współczesnego Magisterium Kościoła*, Wrocław 2013, p. 136-137.

the context of faith. All this is connected with the lack of identity of one's vocation. There is then a loss of humanity in the inner as well as the outer dimension<sup>12</sup>. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*:

Faced with a life that is born and a life that dies, man is no longer able to ask himself about the most authentic meaning of his existence, accepting in a truly free way these watershed moments of his being. He is only interested in action, and therefore seeks to use all technological advances to program and control birth and death, extending his dominion over them. These primordial experiences, which should be lived, then become things, and man claims the right to possess or reject them<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, one can see how emphatically the Pope emphasizes the value of human life. He speaks of the great tragedy that increasingly afflicts modern man, when he crosses out God in his life. This exclusion of God by people takes place inside of people and then reality is distorted. Human life is exposed to many dangers. Man becomes a powerless individual fighting against himself. Lack of strength to fight evil can cause serious problems in life. Saint John Paul II in his exhortation *Christifideles laici* highlighted the poverty of life without God, writing that:

Whole countries and nations, where once religion and Christian life flourished and gave rise to a community of living and dynamic faith, are today put to a severe test, and are sometimes subject to a process of radical change due to the spread of indifferentism, secularism and atheism. This is especially true of countries and peoples belonging to the so-called First World, where material prosperity and consumerism, albeit mixed with situations of intimidating poverty and deprivation, foster and adhere to the principle: «live as if God did not exist». Well, religious indifference and a complete lack of practical reference to God even in the face of the most serious problems of life are phenomena no less disturbing and destructive than overt atheism. And even if Christian faith is still preserved in some traditions and rituals, it is gradually losing its place in the most crucial moments of human existence, such as birth, suffering and death. As a result, modern man, faced with mysteries and unanswered questions, is overwhelmed by disillusionment and despair or even the temptation to eliminate the source of these problems by putting an end to human life<sup>14</sup>.

Increasingly, the greatest spiritual threat to modern man is the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of «God yes, Church no». Young people choose this line of thinking because it is very convenient for them. Creating a vision of God within

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<sup>12</sup> W. SŁOMKA, *Podmiotowy charakter osoby – godność człowieka* [in:] *Powołanie człowieka. Być człowiekiem*, ed. T. Bielski, Poznań – Warszawa 1974, p. 82-95.

<sup>13</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, *Encyklika Evangelium vitae o wartości i nienaruszalności życia ludzkiego* (25.03.1995), no 22.

<sup>14</sup> IDEM, *Adhortacja apostolska Christifideles laici o powołaniu i misji świeckich w Kościele i w świecie dwadzieścia lat po Soborze Watykańskim II* (30.12.1988), no 34.

themselves allows them to make their own choices and enjoy life as much as their disjointed faith allows. Human experience shows that man alone cannot establish a relationship with God. S. Zatwardnicki, addressing the topic of atheization, writes:

Many of those who reject the Church do so out of simple ignorance. In turn, by giving up being in the Church, they rebel more against an invisible institution than an invisible organism. These people are like those poor people to whom, when you point a finger at the moon, all they see is a finger<sup>15</sup>.

In Don Bosco's time, the problem of spiritual confusion was very common. Young people had no one to pass on the faith to. Often, led by the Italian liberalized world, they did not know God, did not take the sacraments because the state was not favorable to the Church. The Holy Educator reacted to the problem of the widespread rejection of God and, by winning over the youth, taught them the basics of the faith and fought against atheization, which was taking on increasing structural dimensions in those days<sup>16</sup>.

Translating Don Bosco's teachings into the modern years, we can draw much inspiration to combat spiritual dangers. Many young people need guides to point them in the direction of life. A life with God and one another.

### 3. EVANGELIZATION

The modern world does not understand the Church, rejects God and creates for itself its own image of morality and ethics. Today man will not believe in God, will not accept the Gospel and will not convert until he meets authentic witnesses of Christ. Increasingly, we must look for preachers of the Word of God who will testify with their lives to their adherence to the Master. Nowadays there are many forms of evangelization: pilgrimages, retreats, theological symposiums, individual meetings, preaching Christ on the streets of cities and many others. Then you can experience human kindness and help. Every person must want to be evangelized in order to evangelize others, often poor, lost people<sup>17</sup>.

An important element in evangelizing other people is living the Word of God. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* states that:

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<sup>15</sup> S. ZATWARDNICKI, *Katolicki pomocnik towarzyski, czyli jak pojedynkować się z ateistą*, Warszawa 2012, p. 144-146.

<sup>16</sup> F. DESRAMAUT, *Ksiądz Bosko na tle swoich czasów (1815-1888)*, Kraków 1998, p. 201-208.

<sup>17</sup> I. DEC, *Kościół ewangelizowany i ewangelizujący*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 2013, vol. 160, no 1 (626), p. 90-92.



The Word of God is for the sons of the Church the food of the soul and a pure and constant source of spiritual life<sup>18</sup>.

Thus, we see how important the Word of God is in the life of a person who wishes to evangelize others. A person who lives the Word of God on a daily basis becomes more mature and grows in relationship to God and neighbor. While the Word of God is born in a person's heart, renewal takes place. Then the awareness of living the Word and abiding by the Word is born in us. When the Lord God works in a person, there is rebirth by faith. New life is an indispensable condition for evangelizing others. A man of faith, living by faith and preaching Christ is able to understand another person, understand his problems, needs, concerns. Only by accepting with love the Word of God will we be able to shape our personality<sup>19</sup>. More and more often in church movements or priestly and religious circles you can hear the question: what are the ways to communicate the Gospel to modern man, especially the young? In answering this question, one often falls into individualism. It is worth preaching the Gospel communally in the ecclesial area. Individualism can lead the one who wants to evangelize to lose all sense of responsibility for people (cf. IL 39). We received the command to preach the Gospel to all people from Jesus Christ:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. [...] And behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world (Mt 28:10.20).

So it is the duty of every Christian to evangelize those who are most in need of God's truth, which they do not know, and which we, as people of faith, can give them. Nowadays we are increasingly encountering the concept of New Evangelization. It is a new way of proclaiming and living one's faith in the face of the ideas of this world<sup>20</sup>. In the time of Don Bosco, the Turin educator, the need for evangelization may not have been so well known conceptually, but in practice the emphasis was on proclaiming Christ through one's faith. Don Bosco evangelized primarily children and young people. It was with them that he began his formation, because he knew that the good of the future Church depended on them. They were the ones who were often lost, poor and not knowing or believing in God, who needed a word of encouragement and faith. The educator, preaching to them the teachings of Christ, brought them to the Church especially by his own example. J. Kicinski, discussing the issue of evangelization, writes:

<sup>18</sup> SOBÓR WATYKAŃSKI II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Objawieniu Bożym Dei verbum* (18.11.1965), no 21.

<sup>19</sup> K. WONS, *Wiara i kryzysy w świetle Słowa Bożego*, Kraków 2011, p. 83-98.

<sup>20</sup> B. DROŻDŻ, *Nowa ewangelizacja wobec dramatu sekularyzacji*, „Życie Konsekwowane” 2011, no 5, p. 25-35.



The proclamation of the Good News in a particular environment and culture should be carried out primarily through the witness of a personal life imbued with authentic Christian faith. [...] In this way, Christians living in different environments by their lifestyle, as it were, provoke others to ask questions about their lives, motivations, meaning and ultimate purpose<sup>21</sup>.

It can be seen that various modern threats are leading to change the Christian world. They want to impose a new lifestyle that leads to loss. Entering the path of evil causes a lot of damage to the spiritual life of a young person in particular.

In order to help a person who is lost, we must take the initiative to proclaim Jesus Christ, or evangelization. By reaching out to the other person, we can help them discover the good and renew their relationship with God.

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<sup>21</sup> J. KICIŃSKI, *Duchowość misji współdzielonej*, s. 230.

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## WSPÓŁCZESNE WYZWANIA EWANGELIZACJI W ŚWIETLE DUCHOWOŚCI ŚW. JANA BOSKO

**Streszczenie:** Trendy rozwojowe nie sprzyjają rozwojowi duchowemu, zwłaszcza młodych ludzi. Wynika to z mniejszego przywiązania do wartości zakorzenionych w tradycji i postępie technologicznym. Już św. Jan Bosko zdawał sobie sprawę z powagi tej kwestii. Dostosowując system prewencyjny w domach, wskazał, że wychowawca dzieci pełni rolę przyjaciela, który nie nadzoruje, ale wspiera. Duchowny już w swoim czasie dostrzegł, że globalizacja może przynieść zarówno korzyści, jak i zagrożenia. Proces ten uświadamia nam, że jesteśmy „globalną wioską” i każdy ma prawo do życia i wyznawania swojej wiary. Pokazuje jednak również skupienie człowieka na rosnącej wartości pieniądza. Niniejszy tekst dotyczy ponownego zastanowienia się nad znaczeniem roli Boga w naszym życiu oraz duchowym ubóstwem człowieka w przypadku utraty duchowości, a wszystko to w kontekście duchowości św. Jana Bosko.

**Keywords:** Jan Bosko, ewangelizacja, globalizacja, duchowość, utrata duchowości, system prewencyjny, wychowanie.