

Fostering Transformation: Towards Authentic Christian Identity in a Commuting World

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Incoraggiare il cambiamento.

Verso un'autentica identità cristiana in un mondo pendolare

► SOMMARIO

This paper, after elaborating the significance of the term «commuting» and after enumerating succinctly the characteristics and challenges involved in a commuting world, goes on to describe Christian Identity from the perspective of “commuting”. Such a Christian Identity is fundamentally founded only on Jesus Christ and His Kingdom values which are manifested through faith in Him and in His Community. This article, after highlighting the core features of Christian Identity, elucidates the process of transformation towards an authentic discipleship, the hallmark of Christian Identity. Moving on, the paper presents briefly the possible emblematic types of Christian Identity which demands more a faithful commitment to Jesus Christ and to His Reign, than mere compliance.

► PAROLE CHIAVE

Commuting; Christian Identity; Emblematic types of Christian Identity; Search for Meaning; Transformation.

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Introduction

“Christopher Columbus reported to his king and queen that *the world was round* and he went down in history as the man who first made this great discovery”.¹ Thomas L. Friedman of Discovery Times returned home after making a documentary on Infosys, one of the jewels of Indian Information Technology and confided to his wife that *the world was flat*.² Such opposing perceptions can be attributed to shifts in perspective, due to changing times and circumstances, or contexts.

The Catholic Church, which seemingly had always held on to immutability as a strength, with the Second Vatican Council apparently began to foster “an embryonic inversion of this tendency”³ relative to the trend of immutability. The changes promoted by Vatican II may be expressed incisively in the following contrasts: regularity versus radicality, rigidity versus flexibility, conformity versus creative commitment, etc. The clash between opposing currents of traditionalism and innovation continues to be perceived even today.

The theme under discussion “Fostering Transformation: Towards Authentic Christian Identity in a Commuting World” once again evidences the possibility of being studied either from static or dynamic perspectives. The challenges posed today by the fast-moving techno-scientific world obliges each one of us to approach Christian Identity from a more dynamic perspective rather than understand it either as static or as unchanging reality.

This paper, after a brief statement of what «commuting» means, goes on to enumerate succinctly the characteristics and challenges involved in a commuting world. From there it goes on to describe Christian Identity from a «commuting perspective», that is fundamentally possible only when Christian Identity and Meaning are envisioned in terms of Christian Faith within a Christian Community. Highlighting the core features of Christian Identity, the paper moves on to elucidate the process of transformation towards an authentic discipleship and presents briefly the emblematic types of Christian Identity which demands more a commitment to Jesus Christ and to His Reign, than mere compliance.

1. ‘There and Back Home Again’ – The Crux of the Commuting World

“If Content is King, then Context is God”, affirms Gary Vaynerchuk in his Inbound Marketing blog.⁴ Context shapes meaning and is an important factor in all forms of communication. No matter how brilliant one’s thoughts are, if one does not publish them in the right fora, it has no relevance and value. Right understanding of any message relies on the context in which it is communicated. Techniques without context remain abstract concepts and are less than they could be. Everything is interpreted within some context. One of the finest fruits of the Second Vatican Council has been its attempt to make the Church and her mission relevant and meaningful to the challenges of the times, that is, the ability to proclaim Christ’s message keeping in mind the context in which such a proclamation is carried out. The theme of

¹ Th. FRIEDMAN, *The World is Flat*, Penguin Books, London 2005, 5.

² Cfr. *Ibidem*.

³ M. FAGGIOLI, *Vatican II – The Battle for Meaning*, Paulist Press, New York 2012, 6.

⁴ <http://www.inboundmarketingagents.com/inbound-marketing-agents-blog/bid/214177/Gary-Vaynerchuk-If-Content-is-King-then-Context-is-God> (accessed on 07-03-2017).

this paper “Fostering Transformation: Towards Authentic Christian Identity” is situated within the context of a «Commuting World».

The term «commute» in this paper signifies the reality of moving to a specific fixed or semi-fixed destination and returning to one’s permanent or semi-permanent location; in other words, shuttling from one point of reference to any other place regularly or daily or periodically. Commuting is an exercise in repetition. Often it turns out to be making a preferential choice between «home» or «job»; and in order to shorten the trip between the two one is almost forced to re-modify one of them.

Not everyone reacts in the same way to the verb «commute». For some, it connotes everything that is good: freedom, equality and rationality; an opening of the human mind and spirit; human dignity, etc. For others, while not denying that it brings some positive aspects, «commute» connotes more hardships, stress, pain, constant movement, etc.

Given the constraint of space, I will briefly enumerate the major characteristics of living in a «Commuting World» and attempt to apply these to the theme under consideration.

- Commuting requires a permanent or semi-permanent point of reference.
- Commuting is a complex phenomenon and that complexity is to be respected. Commuting is not monolithic. It takes on and continues to take on many different expressions. There is no «one and only» kind of commuting.
- Commuting involves more a process than a state of being or living.
- Commuting, from the perspective of morality, is ambivalent. It is neither simply «a culture of stress» nor is it simply «a culture of enjoyment».
- Commuting implies a fundamental choice and involves a choice between cynicism and hope. The choice between cynicism and hope is, in the last analysis, ultimately a Faith choice, one that has enormous Christian consequences.

Together with these primary characteristics the following major challenges are also encountered.

- Commuting presupposes a «constrained choice» as opposed to a rational choice.
- Commuting tends to promote a consumerism of «use and throw».
- Commuting fosters a certain indifference or devaluation of others and one’s neighbourhood.
- Commuting often reduces a better utilization of time.
- Commuting frequently promotes compulsive attributes.

These characteristics and challenges need to be looked at from a Christian perspective. God still loves the world hence Christians are asked to be in the world and look at all the happenings from the viewpoint of Christian Faith.

2. Identity as a “Being-in-Becoming” at Three Levels

Identity like commuting has a well-defined border within an environment that surrounds it; it has «continuity» all along its course; and that moves with autonomy under its own impulse and momentum.⁵ The “process of identity construction implies a gradual development of a

⁵ Cfr. A. FERRARIS, *La ricerca dell’identità*, Giunti, Firenze 2002, 5-6.

comprehensive self-interpretation which make it possible for the individual to experience life as a meaningful project”.⁶ Such a construction of identity takes into account one’s past state of being (infancy, childhood, pre-adolescence, etc. in a specific family and in a specific context), and the effort to choose and appropriate traits, scopes, motivations, values, etc. in which the cognitive and affective elements, the unconscious factors and social pressures also come into play. Through this process, the individual also seeks to delineate a future that offers a possibility of a «being-in-becoming» person.

Identity is a *complex psychic dimension* that expresses itself at different levels. The *Self-Identity* or *Ego-Identity* is a synthesis between the image that the individual has of oneself and the others (others, understood as being distinct and different from oneself), in relation to desires, aspirations and sentiments and how mutable the self is. “*Personal identity* can be conceptualized as a process in which the individuals draw on both internal and cultural resources for their self-understanding and self-expression [...]. Personal identity is both a given, unchanging entity and at the same time a life-long process of continual change”.⁷ Practically speaking, Personal Identity is a product of various Identities more or less integrated among themselves. The individual is a being with a pluri-identity, in the sense that one brings together within oneself a Familial Identity, a Regional Identity, a Trans-national Identity, and eventually a Confessional or Doctrinal Identity. In this sense, some authors indicate name, sex, family, religious or spiritual dimension, culture, ethnicity, profession, work, mode of dressing, psychological and sociological identity etc. as dimensions or components of Personal Identity.

Such a conceptualization perceives Identity as a *dynamic process* and interplay between internal/personal resources and external/cultural elements; it looks at self-perception as being distinct and differentiated from the others, with a set of varied characteristics notwithstanding their similarities but distinguishing one from the other individual; it allows a self-perception and a self-evaluation that is characterised by personal coherence and a continuity that persists in time, provoking through this, a feeling of being a unique individual who has his or her own reality. Therefore Identity should not be imagined to be a concrete «thing»; it is rather a psychic structure which has its own internal organization and temporal continuity.

Attributive Identity, which is ascribed to the individual by the others and/or by society, highlights how the «others» have an important role as active spectators; how the others and/or society can validate or invalidate the Individual Identity or some aspects of it, more or less important for their own psychic integrity and for a coherent image that the individual has of oneself; how the others and/or the society can impel the individuals towards certain forms of Collective Identity or to the contrary, and enthuse the construction of a distinct and Autonomous Identity. Such an Identity, apart from responding to the query: «Who am I?» involves also a sociological dimension (of belonging or membership), given the fact that the individual thinks of oneself as distinct and at the same time as belonging to a culture, group or a society of reference. Hence the key to understanding «Identity» involves also the analysis of the interactions between the individual and the culture or the group.

Consequently *Social Identity* is concerned with connecting identity formation with social and cultural roles that the individual acquires in the course of one’s life, which can change under

⁶ L. ENGEDAL, *Homo Viator. The Search for Identity and Authentic Spirituality in a Post-modern Context*, in K. TIRRI (Ed.), *Religion, Spirituality and Identity*, Peter Lang, Bern 2006, 48.

⁷ M. CRAWFORD – G. ROSSITER, *Reasons for Living. Education and Young People’s Search for Meaning, Identity and Spirituality. A Handbook*, ACER Press, Victoria – Australia 2006, 124, 92. (Italics added)

the actions of the internal and external forces of varied kinds (memberships and roles that can be in perfect accord with one's own deep self or in partial or total discord).

Personal Identity and/or Social identity has two relevant functions: a *defensive* function which refers to the internal resources that the individual can fall back on in times of stress or trouble and these come into play when attacks, whether physical, psychological or both, are made on individuals; and a *projective* function "the way in which it (identity) projects or displays the characteristics of the individual (or group) stands for. It describes or publicly announces identity and shows what the individual (or group) stands for".⁸

Identity, be it at the personal, and/or group and/or social level, can undergo transformations in time; it can be stable or transitory, strong or weak. Such change processes can also induce moments of crisis which are often termed as «Identity Crisis». Identity Crisis is generally observed when what an individual is, does not correspond anymore to how the individual lives, because the way in which the individual acts is not anymore a logical expression of what the individual has chosen to be or to become, and the reasons that justify those actions are no more good enough.⁹ In the course of one's life, it is possible to experience one or more Identity Crises; while resolving one, a person enters into another; to feel suffocated with an identity imposed on the individual while looking for an identity that someone else holds; to be induced into or turned against a Collective Identity, by external forces.

3. Search for Identity Demands Search for Meaning

The search for meaning is an innate characteristic of every human person and is closely tied to the understanding of Identity since the process of Identity Construction implies the gradual development of a comprehensive self-interpretation which makes it possible for the individual to experience life as a *meaningful* project. The concept of meaning is difficult to define without in some way repeating the same or similar expressions. Hence a brief enumeration of the typologies of meaning, based broadly on personal and cultural meaning will enable us to highlight the inter-relatedness of these two fundamental concepts.¹⁰

Under Personal Meaning, one can further distinguish between Structure-Function and Components. From the perspective of *structure and function*, the following aspects are offered: Meaning as an explanatory theory at the personal and interpretative level; Meaning as personal motivation; Meaning as justification of thoughts and behaviour; Articulated Personal Meaning; Implied Personal Meaning; Emotional Meaning; imagination's contribution to Meaning and intuition's contribution to Meaning. Under *components* of Personal Meaning, one can distinguish Meaning as a set of values, as beliefs, as religious beliefs and as the provider of Ultimate Meaning.

Personal Meaning is often sustained and reinforced also by the social interactions and by the cultural artefacts (Cultural Meaning). While the persons absorb the Meaning from the culture, they, at the same time, help to maintain and/or change the Cultural Meaning. It is a two

⁸ *Ibidem*, 94.

⁹ Cfr. M. HOLLIS, *Models of Man. Philosophical Thoughts on Social Action*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977, 106; E. ERIKSON, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Norton, New York 1968, 295-320.

¹⁰ For more details see J. VALLABARAJ, *Faith-focused Mentoring as a Paradigm for Youth Catechesis. Towards the Articulation of a Frame of Reference*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2012, 145-152.

way process. The *Cultural Meanings* are involved in the communication of beliefs, either to give meaning to the needs of the members of the community, or with a view to securing the continuity and the effective functioning of the organisation. Within the *Cultural Meanings*, persons also need to recognize the influence of power that exists within human and social relationships and activities. The contextual influence over *Personal Meaning* can derive also from the *Political Meaning*, *Ideological Meaning* and the *Hegemonic Meaning*.

The composition of *Meaning* includes knowledge, understanding, interpretation, belief, attitudes, emotions and values; all these interact with the personal dispositions, interests, needs and prejudices of a person. While it is possible to analytically distinguish these aspects, if the division is exaggerated, the unity and the coherence of the human person can be compromised. In other words, *Meaning-Making* is “the activity of composing a sense of the connections among things: a sense of pattern, order, form and significance. To be human is to seek coherence and correspondence. To be human is to want to be oriented to one’s surroundings. To be human is to desire relationship among the disparate elements of existence”.¹¹

4. Christian Faith as Meaning-Giving and Meaning-Making

The Quest for *Meaning* is a phenomenon as old as humanity. Only humans can ask questions about the meaning and purpose of their lives. Providing meaning and purpose in life is a fundamental role of every religion or ideology.

If Christian Faith is the grace-filled human response to the Word of God who interpellates it, then it becomes the primal force that frames, colours, orders and relates the activities of everyday life. It serves as the centre of power, value and affections. It becomes the unifying key to one’s patterns of *Meaning* by presenting a fullness that is experienced as a sense of relatedness among self, others, the world and Jesus Christ. Christian Faith as *Meaning-Giving*, brings to the fore the sensitivity to life that not only transcends, but also permeates and strengthens one’s very existence from within, among and beneath. Such a *Meaning-Making* process enables Christians to affirm Jesus Christ as the Truth and Trust. Such a Faith “involves a change of life, a «*metanoia*», that is a profound transformation of mind and heart; it causes the believer to live that conversion... Adhering to Jesus Christ, in fact, sets in motion a process of continuing conversion, which lasts for the whole of life”.¹² Christian Faith as *Meaning-Making*, conveys both its infinitely transcendent and profoundly immanent nature. “Faith is an activity that at once reaches infinitely beyond and intimately within the particulars of existence”.¹³ Christian Faith as *Meaning-Making* also orients one’s life as vocation and therefore becomes guiding mover of life, for ethics and moral life. As such, it engages both the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of life. Christian Faith as *Meaning-Making* is both a noun and a verb.¹⁴ “«Faith» is a noun. It is a *thing*. It is that understanding of life’s ultimate meaning that is central to every person’s sense of identity and purpose for his or her life. But «faith» is *also* a verb

¹¹ S. PARKS, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams. Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 2000, 19.

¹² CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, nn. 55, 56.

¹³ PARKS, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 25.

¹⁴ Cfr. *Ibidem*, 20-26, 31-33.

in the sense that it is never static and is always in process”.¹⁵ Thus Christian Faith changes, develops over time, undergoing transformation and growth towards mature authentic Faith, which “composes meaning in self-conscious engagement with the repeated dissolution and re-patterning of one’s perceptions of the fabric of life, in the dynamic re-conceiving of the assumed connections among persons, things, ideas, events, symbols, the natural and social order, space and time”.¹⁶

It is very evident that the Reign of God represents perhaps the most important crossroads of all the dimensions of Christian Meaning: theological, Christological, ecclesiological, ethical, and hence the summary of the temporal and definitive rapport between spiritual and material, between the initiative of God and human action, between the unlimited bounds of salvation and the ordained and visible structuring of the Church.¹⁷ Hence, the Reign of God represents the economy of salvation as such, and merits to be made the *guiding meaning and principal and principle* of the Gospel Lifestyle of every disciple of Jesus Christ.

5. Christian Identity as Becoming Authentic Disciple of Jesus Christ

The formation of Christian Identity is a dual process that involves on the one hand, the process of identification and on the other, a process of negotiability. The term «negotiability» refers to the capacity to negotiate meanings as well as to have control of the conditions that make negotiation possible.

Identification is, at the same time, participative and reificative (a process with which one gives form to experience by producing objects that freeze that experience into a material entity). The reificative process consists of «identifying as» *disciples* of Jesus Christ or with the Catholic Church. The participative process, instead, involves «identifying oneself with» Jesus Christ.

Identification as disciples of Jesus Christ often begins with religious socialization within the family. This religious socialization necessitates a process of appropriation or re-appropriation which ought to oblige the individual to an evaluation of goals, the values and the convictions transmitted by the Christian family living in a secularized society, influenced by various explicit and hidden factors. The process of appropriation or re-appropriation ought to give rise to and affirm a «radical conversion» by initiating a process of permanent transformation towards an authentic encounter with Jesus Christ that leads to an unconditional discipleship within a community of disciples.

Believers in Jesus Christ confess their Faith, not only through an intellectual consensus, but also in committing their lives for the cause of Jesus and His Reign through various vocations. “According to God’s plan, all of us Christians are to find fulfilment as human beings. This is our *human vocation*. We are also to find fulfilment as Christians, living out our baptism and its summons to be holy (communion and cooperation with God), to be active members of the community, and to bear witness to the Kingdom (communion and cooperation with others). This is our *Christian vocation*. Finally we must discover the *concrete vocation* (as lay person, consecrated religious or ordained minister) that will enable us to make our specific contribution

¹⁵ K. STOKES, *Faith is a Verb. Dynamics of Adult Faith Development*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic Connecticut 1989, 7.

¹⁶ PARKS, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 33.

¹⁷ C. BISSOLI, *Regno di Dio*, in J. GEVAERT (Ed.), *Dizionario di catechetica*, Elledici, Leumann (TO) 1986, 533-534.

to the construction of the Kingdom. This is our specific Christian vocation. In this way we will carry out our evangelizing mission in full and organic way”.¹⁸

To configure oneself truly to Jesus Christ, it is necessary that the individuals assume responsibility of becoming authentic disciples, a commitment that endures the whole lifetime. In a society that is disintegrating, the primary programme of authenticity and of development aims at the significance of personal integrity (Creative Interiority). In a pluri-centric society, in which the hierarchical structure is substituted by the structure of network, it becomes necessary to re-learn the rules of relationships, being aware of the authenticity of the subjective uniqueness, recognizing the value of the others precisely because they are different. Such relearning calls for new modalities in order to construct the “we” wherein the individual re-evaluates his/her own autonomy (Horizon of Sharing). In a society subject to risk of exasperated individualism, the paths of authentic and mature discipleship passes through a sense of responsibility towards others, above all, towards the least and the most needy (Horizon of Responsibility).¹⁹

6. Beyond Mere Commuting – Core Features of Christian Identity

The reality of commuting implies that the commuters do seek or sustain either explicitly or implicitly certain ideals or goals or objectives for which the individuals are willing to sacrifice and forgo many of less important aspects. Such ideals or goals of Christian Identity in a commuting world are manifested through the following central features.

- *A disciple who seeks continuously to embrace a holistic personal faith:* Christian Identity will not be merely due to a tradition passively received or sociologically imposed. A holistic faith demands one’s who being – head, heart and hands. It is lived at personal, interpersonal, community and world levels.
- *A disciple who is culturally inserted:* Authentic discipleship is possible only when the disciple knows the essential components, their significant expressions and respects one’s cultural values and riches.
- *A disciple who is constantly proactive:* A proactive disciple perceives the gradation of values and lives these values coherently with wisdom. The disciple conducts him/herself with realism and responsibility and constantly acknowledges the animating presence of the Holy Spirit.
- *A disciple who cherishes Scripture and Tradition:* An authentic disciple acknowledges and values Scripture and Tradition as symbiotic sources of God’s revelation and draws on them with critical and creative application while interpreting them within the community and in dialogue with life in the present world.

¹⁸ P. HOLLAND, *Vocation*, in J. KOMONCHAK et al. (Eds.), *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Theological Publications of India, Bangalore 1999, 1091-1092. Italics added.

¹⁹ G. SALONIA, *Maturità*, in J.M. PRELLEZO – G. MALIZIA – C. NANNI (Eds.), *Dizionario di Scienze dell’Educazione*, LAS, Roma 2008², 716.

- *A disciple who fosters and lives the positive understanding of personhood:* A Christian anthropological vision encourages the disciple to affirm and celebrate the whole person and all people.
- *A disciple who develops a sacramental outlook:* An authentic disciple cultivates the habit of sacramental imagination by acknowledging all life is good and is a gift and an invitation to a covenantal relationship with God. Such a disciple is called to be a good steward of the earth and nature.
- *A disciple who is committed to the Christian community and to its mission:* A «private» disciple is a self-contradiction since to be a disciple is to be in relationship with other disciples of the community and to be engaged in the mission of the community.
- *A disciple who is committed to justice and to social responsibility:* An authentic disciple upholds both the person and the society without favouring one over the other, but holding them in mutuality. Such a discipleship is characterized by cultural openness and the spirit of collaboration, ethical sensibility and social consciousness, commitment to social and political values and solidarity with the poor.
- *A disciple who is open to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue:* In the current pluralistic context, Christian Identity is to be manifested and practised in the midst of diverse religions and cultures. This requires an openness to accept others and their differences without compromising one's own identity.
- *A disciple who is truly «catholic»:* To be «catholic» demands that the disciple reaches out with love to everyone, that is to care and to love beyond one's borders.²⁰

Such ideals or goals of authentic Christian Identity ought to initiate a process of continuous transformation.

7. Transformation as Profound Change towards Authentic Christian Identity

Transformation as profound change combines inner shifts in people's values, aspirations and behaviours with «outer» shifts in processes, strategies, practices and systems. The word «profound» stems from the Latin *fundus*, a base or foundation. It means, literally, «moving towards the fundamental». “In profound change there is learning”.²¹ Hence transformation towards authentic Christian Identity can be envisaged as the ongoing process of profound change by which Christians examine previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values and fundamental frame of reference acquired or assimilated through religious socialization so as to make them better validated, more inclusive, judicious, open, reflective and emotionally able to change or reorder one's thoughts, emotions, actions and practices.

This process involves four basic closely interrelated movements: 1) a movement that questions the present perspective; 2) a movement that explores alternatives; 3) a movement

²⁰ For more detailed explanation of each of these see J. VALLABARAJ, *Educazione Catechetica degli adulti. Un approccio multidimensionale*, LAS, Roma 2009, 138-143.

²¹ P. SENGE et al., *The Dance of Change. The Challenges of Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations*, Doubleday, New York 1990, 15.

that seeks to apply the transformed perspective, and 4) a movement that reintegrates and grounds the new perspective.²² Transformation towards Authentic Christian Identity becomes transformative when Christians acknowledge the promotion of the *Reign of God* as their *Meaning Perspective*, *Jesus Christ* as their *Definitive and Decisive Frame of Reference*, *Discipleship* as their personal and community *Identity* and *Diakonia*, *Koinonia*, *Martyria* and *Leitourgia* as signs of being at the service of the *Reign of God*.²³

Transformation towards Authentic Christian Identity has both a personal and a community dimension. The *individual* or *personal* dimension is envisaged as becoming empowered disciples of Jesus Christ, the Word, who interpellates, i.e. growing or maturing in Christian Faith as the ultimate source of Meaning-Giving and of Meaning-Making. The *community* dimension, according to Rademacher, maintains that “the Church is in its inner core community (*Gemeinschaft*); in its outer core, however, it is society (*Gesellschaft*). The society is the outward manifestation of the community; and the society exists in order to promote the realization of the community”.²⁴ Hence promoting Christian Identity from the community dimension implies promoting Authentic Disciples-in-Community and becoming a genuine Community-of-Disciples.

8. The Process of Transformation towards Authentic Christian Identity

The process of transformation as profound change towards Authentic Christian Identity essentially consists of three fundamental movements: Identification through Engagement, Identification through Imagination and Identification through Alignment.

Identification through Engagement – Engagement means the active involvement in mutual ongoing process of negotiation of meaning through practices which give and promote Identity. Identification begins and grows through engagement in Christian practices (liturgical, para-liturgical and private devotions) which call for active and meaningful participation in those practices. Hence, at the basis of the Identification Process through Engagement there is a direct experience of mutuality characteristic of communities of practices. Identification through Engagement is a two-way process of giving and receiving which can be very fulfilling.

Identification through Imagination – Imagination is an important source of identification, a source that extends the process beyond engagement in various ways. Imagination refers to a process of expansion (self and community) through transcendence of one’s time and space and creation of new images in accordance with Authentic Christian Identity. Imagination consists of three dimensions that are fundamental to understand the formation of identity. Imagination is a process; it is an act of naming and is participation in the ongoing creation of life itself.²⁵ Imagination does not connote a fantasy or a flight from the reality or an erroneous conclusion that contradicts the sense of reality and Faith. Imagination is not merely an individual process. The creative character of imagination is anchored to the social and to the community experience.

Identification through Alignment – Alignment is a modality of identification and belonging. The process of alignment binds time and space towards an extensive construction, in such a

²² Cfr. P. CRANTON, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, University of Michigan, Wiley 2006, 67-76.

²³ Cfr. VALLABARAJ, *Educazione catechetica degli adulti*, 124-135.

²⁴ As cited in A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, expanded version, Doubleday, New York 2002, 41.

²⁵ Cfr. PARKS, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 104-105.

manner that the participants enter into connection through a coordination of their energies, of their actions and their practices. Through alignment, individuals agree to be part of something big, because one does what is needed to interpret one's role within the bigger picture. Alignment combines often loyalty and submission and hence produces a delicate mixture of participation and non-participation.

Formation of Authentic Christian Identity becomes more meaningful through the modes of belonging, which, in turn, promote a learning Christian Community. Engagement, Imagination and Alignment are important ingredients of any Christian Community. The task of Engagement basically pertains to the work of forming Christian Communities of practice. The task of Imagination is to explore, take risks, etc. by enabling one to move back and look at one's Engagement through the perspective of an outsider. Alignment, instead, promotes the ability to coordinate perspectives and actions in order to direct one's energies to a common purpose, the promotion of Reign of God as proclaimed and manifested by Jesus Christ.

The interaction between Engagement and Imagination results in *reflective* Christian practices. The combination between Imagination and Alignment produces the ability to act as disciples of Jesus Christ, keeping in mind the broader and richer perspective of the being *in the world and for the world at the service of the Reign of God*. The combination of Engagement and Alignment brings about coordination of the various Christian perspectives (*diakonia, koinonia, martyria* and *leitourgia*).

9. Emblematic Types of Christian Identity

The process of Christian Identification in today's world passes through a free combination of four (community, ethical, cultural and emotional) typical dimensions that constitute the Collective Religious Identification which, in turn, offer six Christian Religious Identity profiles.

The Community Dimension (indicators that define the specific, local and particular): It concerns a set of social and symbolic demarcations that define the confines of the Christian Disciples and Christian Communities and offer the possibility of distinguishing «those which do not form part of» from «those who form part of» the Christian Community. This Community Dimension recalls and affirms the formal and practical definition of the belonging, for example, being baptized. These community definitions can be more or less extensive or intensive, for example, the Church that fixes minimum obligations for its faithful, while demanding a radical change of life for its new members.

The Ethical Dimension (universal values, individual conscience): This second dimension concerns the acceptance on the part of the individual the values attached to the Christian religious message that the Catholic tradition carries with it, legitimised by Jesus Christ, the Truth and rooted in a long history. This ethical dimension of identification can also be disassociated from the previous dimension. The values of the message, inseparable from universal values that are recognised, can be endorsed even without belonging to a particular community of faithful clearly identified. For instance, the ethical value of love proposed in the Gospels can be recognised and endorsed by a person as a value even without necessarily belonging to a Catholic Faith Community.

The Cultural Dimension (the collective memory of knowledge, art, etc.): It embraces a set of cognitive, symbolic and practical elements that constitute the patrimony of Christian tradition – the doctrines, the books, the knowledge and its interpretation, the practice and the ritual codes, the intellectual history and legends of the group, the representations and the modalities of thought resulting from the practices of the community, the food, clothing, sexual and therapeutic habits etc. associated to the belief system, the arts, the aesthetic productions, the scientific knowledge developed in connection with such beliefs etc.

The Emotional Dimension (an affective awareness of a «We»): The fourth dimension concerns the affective experience associated with the process of Christian Identification: the feeling of fusion of knowledge or a deep emotion. The new fact that is experienced emotionally, that produces a collective sentiment of «we», the result of which does not always measure up to the community belonging that guarantees, through a cycle of feasts and other events, a reactivation of customs, etc.

The articulation of these four dimensions is normally controlled by the Church; at least ideally, it becomes the guarantor for maintaining an equilibrium among these four dimensions against the tendencies of a single dimension to dominate over the others. The interaction and tensions among these four fundamental dimensions can promote six facets of Christian Religious Identity. We shall describe them briefly.

Affective Christianity: This first type of identification establishes itself on the axis that binds the *emotional dimension* and the *feeling of community belonging*. Feasts (Christmas, Easter, Good Friday celebrations, parish feast, pilgrimages, the World Youth Day, etc.), with a strong emotional content, play a vital part, offering intense moments of sharing with the others in the community. In such a Christian Religious Identity, one finds wide range of Christian attitudes that can, at times, be more or less questionable, given the fact that the spiritual search often remains at the level of emotions and dependent on them. Nevertheless, the collective enthusiasm and exaltation produced by the grandeur of the gathering are, for some definitive moments, the prime reference of a religious identification left behind by the event.

Patrimonial Christianity: This type of identification establishes itself on the axis that connects the *cultural dimension* and the *community dimension*. It unites the awareness of a community belonging and that of having a cultural heritage. This awareness creates a radical separation between the hereditary group and the others. The Christian Identity claimed here does not primarily correspond to an ethical commitment or a faith conviction but expresses, above all, the search of a togetherness that is social and cultural; those concerned aspire to preserve this as they consider it the bearer of values, which binds them to each other.

Humanitarian Christianity: This type of identification emerges in the encounter between the *emotional dimension* and the *ethical dimension*. It is sensitive, above all, to the injustices in a world, which multiplies the marginalized, and in response, appeals to the active charity of the individuals. These persons represent a tendency that is strongly open to a preference for concrete action towards a militant commitment to truth and justice. Their sensitivity is generally a-political, if not sometimes even anti-political. The religious identification explicates itself on the plane of action, where values recognized as religious can be concretely put to work.

Humanistic Christianity: In this type, enter into play the *ethical* and *cultural dimensions* of identification. Particularly present among the intellectuals, this type allows a strongly

individualized identification with the Christian Tradition that can entirely escape a mediation of a strong community. The recognition of the cultural roots, combined with the acceptance of a set of universal values, is at the root of this identity. The problem of acceptance of the Church and more in general the acceptance of the Christian belief (in God, sin, salvation, the divinity of Christ and so on) is, at times, pushed to a second place within this perspective, sometimes even totally ignored. This type of religious identification does not define certain concrete community belonging, except the attachment to the human family that assumes a universal meaning of Gospel ethics.

Political Christianity: Rising from the axis that connects the *community* and the *ethical dimension*, this type implies and calls for an active intervention of the Christian Community as such on the public scene in order to defend, promote and realize the values which require their attention. It holds together the people who consider themselves heirs to a particular mission, a militant mission of the Church in the world that, not only does not coincide very often, but even enters into contradiction with the so-called Catholic identity.

Aesthetic Christianity: A special combination of the *cultural* and *emotional dimensions*, gives rise to this type of religious identity. One inserts oneself into the fascination exerted by the great heights of the spiritual history of a country, where one finds the traces of a cultural and symbolic universe to which one can have access through the contemplation of the artistic and architectural masterpieces that this universe has left us. In these cases, the bond of attachment to the other believers or a community insertion is often subtle and less explicit, but nevertheless an importance is attached.²⁶

Naturally these above descriptions of profiles of Christian identity do not tend to provide an exclusive and exhaustive framework of Religious Identity. But the essential point here is to remember that, when one dedicates oneself to a trajectory, one does not work on a substantive or stabilized identity, but it is necessary that one provides oneself with a sufficiently flexible tool to indicate the steps of a process that by definition cannot be fixed into a definitive description.

The Christian Religious Identity today is in movement or in commuting stage and hence, all are invited to make efforts to understand and engage this movement or commuting process.

Conclusion

One can say that Jesus was no stranger to commuting. His commuting through Galilee, Samaria and Judea had the ultimate goal of reaching Jerusalem where His culminating acts of passion, death and resurrection would take place which would transform the whole world and its history. This same Jesus invites everyone to a profound change that will manifest one's authentic identity as His disciples in a Community of Disciples. Fostering an Authentic Christian Identity is possible only when disciples are willing to move away from compliance to commitment. Compliance is often confused with commitment. People in a state of compliance generally support vision and fulfil merely what is expected of them. Instead, commitment

²⁶ The following description is a re-elaboration of the thoughts expressed in D. HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Il Pellegrino e il convertito. La religione in movimento*, il Mulino, Bologna 2003, 49-70.

“describes a state of not only enrolled but feeling fully responsible for making vision happen”.²⁷ The differences between the varying states of compliance (genuine, formal, grudging, non-compliance, apathy) can be subtle. Genuine and formal compliance induces a behaviour that is similar to enrolment and commitment. In a word, people who are genuinely compliant, perceive the benefits of the shared Christian vision and do everything expected of them, but are prone to follow the «letter of the law». They tend to play by the «rules of the game» both formal and subtle rules. The committed person brings an energy, passion, and excitement that cannot be normally generated if the person is only compliant, even if genuinely so. The committed person shares the responsibility for the Christian Identity and Vision, and so does not play by the «rules of the game»; but he/she is even prepared to change the rules if they stand in the way of becoming authentic disciples with the Christian identity and vision. A genuinely compliant person *accepts* the vision, while the committed individual *truly wants and creates* the Christian Identity and vision.

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²⁷ P. SENGE, *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Century Business, London 1992, 218.