

Transformations of Social Control in Pandemic Times – Reasons for Hope Beyond Science: Editorial

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At the beginning of the 20th century the notion of ‘social control’ was used in the sense of the capacity of a social group to regulate itself. Later, however, it was increasingly understood to mean the repression of the collective over the individual. Postmodernity has brought new forms of social control which are exercised through new forms of communication. Paradoxically, however, postmodernity also seemed to be heading towards the exaltation of the individual in their absolute freedom. The 20th century pushed, in the name of science and progress, the secularization of Western societies, often distancing people from their traditional community ties, including ties to the ecclesial community. Thus, the postmodern individual initially appeared free of ancestral community pressures. However, subtle new forms of social control have replaced traditional ones. Mechanisms such as social media, new forms of work and sexual exploitation, or the impossibility of maintaining privacy in the face of the power of private and public corporations, thus expose the individual to the asocial elements. Frequently, these new social control mechanisms (a clear

example being the leadership of the WHO in the policies implemented worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic) are presented to us not as repressive, but scientifically and paternally protective. In this context, the vindication of religious freedom and the community experience of faith represent decisive touchstones for the vitality and validity of a social and political order in which the personal being is truly the highest value.

The authors of this monograph are professors, some of them with twenty or thirty years of university teaching, others halfway between Generation X and Y, but all with a deep vocation as teachers called to understanding the world around them. A vocation to collaborate with their students so that the seed of love for the knowledge of reality and the joyful experience of contact with the truth may bear fruit in them. Such an experience only makes sense as a shared experience. And this is what the authors of this monograph usually do: share their concerns, worries, and research. In formal terms, this shared experience has been developing in recent times under the mantle of research projects such as the one that forms the basis of this issue of *Scientia et Fides*: “Social Control, Postmodernism and Political Community” (COSOPOC). Sharing the results of their research is also a way of inviting the specialized public to this experience without forgetting that the first circle of this community work is formed by the students themselves, whom this monograph aims to serve as a stimulus in their personal trajectories as students, as future professionals and, above all, as people in charge of their actions and responsible and capable of facing the worrying challenges that face us all.

Unravelling the nature of these challenges is something to which this monograph aims to contribute. Beyond the official discourses, which come up with slogans as tiresome as they are unoriginal (“Horizon 2020”, “Agenda 2030”...), the authors of this issue of *Scientia et Fides* approach the issue with a desire to include problems in their historical continuum. Hence the abundance of references to what great past and modern thinkers were discovering along the way. And so, too, the vital attention to the “present”, understood not as an incessant rain that blurs our windscreen no matter how quickly the wipers move, but as attention to the “real ex-

istence”, wherever and whenever. Because even in the era of the digital synoptic, the truth lies in the reality of things.

The authors focused their attention on both the before, during and aftermath of the pandemic context. In particular, they tried to show how such a context influenced the emergence of new forms of social control. In this sense, the frequent reference to current “global” thinkers, such as the Italian Giorgio Agamben or the Korean Byung-Chul Han, illuminates our understanding of “present” without falling into mere sterile presentism. But a lucid understanding of social control also requires, of course, looking back at the teaching of the “classics”: from Tocqueville, Durkheim or Ross to the inescapable Foucault, Deleuze or Bauman.

In his article “The transformation of individualism and loneliness in times of pandemics” Javier Barrycoa shows the need to overcome the outdated dialectical analyses that opposed the mass and the individual, since forced isolation during the pandemic confirmed that the solitary individual is also extremely mimetic. Faced with the narcissistic cynicism of the solitary inmate, Barrycoa vindicates the power of the word, both in the Aristotelian and Thomistic sense, as the foundation of personal communication and the authentically human life. Along this same line of study of the current forms of loneliness and its real effects, Enrique Anrubia’s article “Understanding loneliness in pre- and post-pandemic times” shows that pandemic isolation did not bring about the generalized individualistic attitude towards life, but rather that it only revealed it. For this, he analyses the Swedish case as a model of individualistic modern western society. The disappearance of traditional community ties often implies the transformation of the work environment into a substitute for a family or even religious community. In his “Pandemic and desacralization: the new political order founded on the bare life”, Stefano Abbate reveals the precariousness to which the postmodern individual is subjected through the loss of symbolic referents in the political sphere. This loss of the “shelter” was accentuated throughout the pandemic through confinement, social distancing and the “pestification” of social life. The reduction of the individual to bare life is thus completed thanks to the suspension of law and the exceptionality of the pandemic. Finally, the author

reflects on the incompatibility of the Catholic faith with the paradigm of bare life. But such reductionisms are accentuated by artificial intelligence, virtual metaverses and transhumanism, which open the door to a world in which the extremes of hyper-individualism and hyper-control meet, as Marcelo López Cambroneró develops in his article “Metaverse, Religions and Metahumans: a window to a hypercontrolled post-pandemic world”. A clear example of postmodern hypercontrol is the total control of space through the extreme measure of mass confinement and security measures related to the physical space of mandatory separation between individuals, both in the public sphere and in the private environment. Miguel Ángel Belmonte shows how, in his article “Lockdown, social control of space and religious freedom”, the antiseptic control of space distorts essential aspects of the dynamism of social life to the point of putting religious freedom itself at risk through the interference of health authorities in the holding of liturgical celebrations. Finally, Jorge Martínez, in his article “The issue of social control in late modernity: alienation and narrativity” highlights the importance of personal testimony, often experienced within the community, and of the biographical-narrative experience in facing the challenges with which postmodernity confronts us.

The reader will undoubtedly find many of the reflections presented in this monograph very disturbing. It is far from the authors’ intention to encourage despair or blind distrust. Not only do their approaches expressly include some lines of action consistent with an experience of friendship and social coexistence and a renewed recognition of the other in all their personal dignity. There is also in all of them a profound hope that goes beyond the limitations imposed by a reality from which it would be easy to flee. After all, as Psalm 127 says, *unless the Lord builds the house, the guards stand watch in vain.*