

Christian Person – Modern Industrial (Corporate) Society A Dialectical Contradiction

Christos TEREZIS
University of Patras (Greece)

Resumen

En este trabajo se demuestra que la posición del cristianismo en la humanidad este respecto está en desacuerdo radical con el fenómeno moderno de la masificación y la competencia financiera, tal como son presentados e interpretados por los miembros de la Escuela de Frankfurt y por Marcuse en particular. Basándose en el aspecto de la persona como una formulación consciente de las particularidades individuales y de las relaciones sociales, se discuten las formas más comunes de aproximación a este tema antropológico, que se refieren a las dos áreas teóricas. Ambos están involucrados en un intento de crítica para mostrar cómo los seres humanos no van a ser encerrados en la formalización de las situaciones superficiales y, también, cómo van a poder entrar a la profundidad de su existencia. Cabe señalar que sus representantes consideran estos movimientos como más importantes para que un ser humano pueda resistir a los poderes, que tienen como objetivo su manipulación y la aniquilación de su conciencia. Discutimos también algunas extensiones de las teorías anteriores con referencias a la construcción de un sistema político democrático basado en el valor de la libertad como un logro individual y colectivo. Por supuesto, respetamos las diferencias entre los dos campos teóricos, dado que el cristianismo es, por definición, un sistema teocéntrico, en el marco de la cual la Iglesia actúa como el área principal, donde sus principios se implementan y se proyecta hacia una transformación social.

Abstract

In this paper it is shown that the positions of Christianity in the East concerning humanity are in radical disagreement with the modern phenomena of massification and financial competition, as they are presented and interpreted by the members of the School of Frankfurt and Marcuse in particular. Based on the aspect of person as a conscious formulation of the individual particularities and the social relations, we discuss common ways of approach to this anthropological topic, which relate to the two theoretical areas. Both are engaged in a critical attempt to show how human beings will not be imprisoned in the formalization of superficial situations and, also, how they will gain entrance to the depth of their existence. It is noteworthy that their representatives consider these move-

ments as most important so that a human being can resist the powers, which aim at his manipulation and the annihilation of his consciousness. We also discuss some extensions of the above theories with reference to the construction of a democratic political system based on the value of freedom as an individual and collective achievement. Of course, we preserve the differences between the two theoretical fields, given that Christianity is by definition a theocentric system within the frame of which Church acts as the main area, where its principles are implemented and projected towards a social transformation.

Palabras clave: Persona, comunicación, alteridad, valor.

Key words: Person, communication, otherness, value.

Introduction

In this study we attempt to demonstrate that Christian philosophy – mainly the Eastern (Orthodox) one — and especially its perception of the human person, stands in full opposition to two phenomena of the modern era: a) mass production of material goods (consumerism) and b) economic competitiveness. Regarding these phenomena we shall mainly stick to estimates that have been so far verbalized by the representatives of the Frankfurt School and mostly the ones made by Marcuse. The issue appears to be quite broad and therefore our analysis will have to focus on a general basis. More precisely, we shall refer: *firstly* to the value-code according to which the lifestyle of the industrial and the so-called post industrial community has been developed and *secondly* to the way that this new manner of life has altered our culture and diminished the communication among people. The difficulties that arise from these aforementioned conditions are threatening to some great extent not only for the human person but also for the structure of human society. What we suggest is that the Christian perception of the human person and the individual human being is capable of providing a formula of opposition to the ever-burgeoning spiritual and social alteration.

1. The human person in Eastern Christian perception

Eastern Christianity has always targeted the content and meaning of the human person as its main concern and research. By the fourth century the elaboration of this issue was systematically developed and engaged those conceptual forms which consolidated it theoretically. The main founder of this theory was Gregory of Nyssa who developed it on the basis of the Triadological and Chris-

tological discussions of his time.¹ From a general Christian estimate, what is defined as a person is a specific human entity that exists in a particularly existential situation. To begin with, a human person constitutes a special expression of the human essence. This expression is endowed with qualities which do not appear in this same way in any other human entity. On the other hand, this expression does not refer to an abstract transcendental subject, which would express a generalization, or a universal of common anthropological characteristics and would be independent from particular presentations and from both time and space. The human person is not perceived without reference to a specific historical context within which it appears. Consequently, it does not constitute an idealist situation which is formed in an abstract manner. Every human person has its own manner of presentation, through which it appears to possess and also to manifest certain specific and unprecedented characteristics. This, however, has to do with a particularity which does not lead to an interruption of the relations it has or could develop with the other human persons. Indeed the opposite is the case. It actually uses its particularity as a basis in order to express on various levels its reference to whatever surrounds it, its environment. By projecting its particularity, the human person manifests its intention to renew and expand the regions and possibilities of its communication.² The human person is the entity which having gained its identity makes sense of its existence through the dialogues it develops with the rest of these entities in the context of an ethical manner of consultations and not of conventional strategies.

According to the above, the human person constitutes a value and possesses a twofold character. *Firstly*, it proceeds, by means of attempting to acquire self-knowledge, to improved adjustments of itself. At the same time it attempts to subsume its activities under an entity so as to avoid the uncoordinated and inconsistent manifestations. *Secondly*, it develops a peculiar dialectical communication with the environment in a way which is qualitatively explosive and produces constant renewals. It transcends –without abolishing its particularity and does not examine the social and the ethnic origin of the human beings to whom it directs its reference. Without altering its own identity, it activates its otherness vis-à-vis other human persons not in order to be cut off from them, but

1. See J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2006).

2. For the Christian perception of the human person see J. Bockenhoff, *Die Begegnungs Philosophie. Are Geschichte-ihre Aspekte* (Freibur–München, 1970). K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/1* (Zurich, 1950) 375-380. Auer, *Person. Ein Schlüssel zum Christlichen Mysterium*, Regensburg (1979) Splett, “Zur Thema Person Heute. Ein Literaturbericht,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 185 (1970) 125- 132.

in order to communicate with them on sincere and authentic terms. Whichever contradiction might be ensued in connection with the above is nothing else than phenomenological. Here we have a synthesis of particularity with communicability in the context of a reciprocity whereby the one feeds the other. In other words, through the persons the communal dimensions of the individual come to the fore.³ Here also we could easily refer to Aristotle's views about the human being as a being which is naturally or ontologically social and political. Moreover, we could refer to his opinion that within the communal context the individual discovers the meaning of its existence.⁴ [The city (*polis*) constitutes the field within which the individual becomes a citizen and completes himself. In other words, the city brings forward the political counterpart of the Christian Church.]

2. *The human person and modern productivity and economics 'values'*

In our times the perception of the human person in Eastern Christianity can be a counter-balancing potency to the mentality of increase in productivity and achieving the maximum result. This mentality has a specific social and political basis and rationale, and is widely specified by the element of competitiveness. This element shapes on the one hand a tendency and on the other hand a situation, which reflect the attempt to consolidate individualism as well as the ravenous and corporate interpretation of the economic activity. The economy does not function as an instrument, but is converted into a main goal. And it should be noted that all the above gradually evolves into institutional –although informal – expressions. It is the domineering atmosphere which gives to the life of the contemporary human being an intense quantitative direction which is sometimes consciously realized by the same person while on others it might not be so.

The characteristics of both the commencement and the evolution of this commercialized and utilitarian way of life are mainly two, and both of them support the perspective of the greatest capitalistic commodity. On the one hand, there is an aggressive attitude towards nature supporting the expansion of the goals of scurrilous materialism. On the other hand, there is an oppressive propa-

3. The issue regarding the content of the person and the attitude that the person needs to show in his/her relations with the environment was a particular concern of the Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev. On this see J. L. Segunda, *Berdiaeff, Une Reflexion Chretienne sur la personne* (Paris, Aubier, 1963).

4. See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a-1255a. Cf. R. Bodeus, *Politique et philosophie chez Aristotle* (Namur, 1991). W. Kullmann, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele* (Milano, 1992). R. Campa (ed.), *La societa civile et la societa politica nel pensiero di Aristotle* (Roma, 1998).

ganda which aims at a peculiar behavior without spiritual anxieties.⁵ The spirit is by nature critical and dialectic and stands with scepticism before everything that is suggested or imposed. It compiles qualitative terms and is not subdued to the customary habit.

The extensions of this particular manner of life acquire more and more expansive dimensions of extreme subjectivism on the level of ethics, values, and life-theories (*Weltanschauung*). A gross eudemonism, however, comes to light, while the ferocity between the interests of opposing potentates is employed almost as a rule. Within such a climate, exploitation and coercive control of the social body become the governing principles. Simultaneously, the economy is no longer regarded as a social method of organizing and utilizing the material forces for high quality constructions and products that bear the seal of collective achievement. It rather gains the opposite characteristics. Indeed, oftentimes it becomes a kind of domineering ideology vested with metaphysical status, since it promises conditions of an earthly paradise. As a result, it absorbs –and thus eradicates– the free operation of the workers and marginalizes the activities of human beings which cultivate the arts. As an imperialistic regime, it precludes the creative and high premium potentialities of society from developing and intervening in its political and economic evolution with new proposals. Thus, the economy ceases to function as an instrumental reasoning which contributes to expediting collective intentions, and even comes to subdue artistic creations to commercial accommodations. It becomes a pragmatic reasoning, which radically transforms the principles pertaining to the quality of every action in a manner that makes it acceptable to public opinion.⁶ The economy imposes rules, becomes a life model and a purpose which gives every particular choice its capital meaning.

This is exactly how the conditions which shape the priorities of the contemporary historical moment are constituted. On the one hand, there is the extreme tendency of constantly increasing the monetary power, and on the other hand, there is the flattening and mass-shaping of daily life. It must be noted that these material orientations are regarded as liberation of human existence, and as terms for reaching the highest goals. The result that arises is the enslavement of human beings, as much in their individual life as in their team activities, to the

5. For a systematic analysis of the directions which modern society follows, the causes that form them and the perspectives that reinforce them see H. Marcuse, *One dimensional Man* (Beacon Press, 1964).

6. On the suzerainty of the economic and the materialistic criteria to the mentality and the civilizing generation of the modern man, see M. Horkheimer, "Art and Mass Culture," *S.P.S.S.*, Vol. 8:3 (1938).

rule of money and the antagonistic mentality which is required for gaining it. It should not, of course, escape our attention, that the above are pursued with a barbaric interference into the eco-system. Quantitative bulk is imposed on the qualitative one. Such a mentality, however, leads to inner denudation and corruption, to social aphasia and cruelty of relations, and therefore to no relations. An extreme form of totalitarianism is developed both by the governments of states and by the companies of economic interests.

The notion of the citizen begins gradually to lose its real meaning, as a proposition of participation in common concerns, while ingenuousness, spontaneity of behaviour, inventiveness and personal creativity disappear. Despite the domination especially of subjectivism, as an expression of covering individual needs without sensitization for social issues, a general mass-attitude is shaped, in the context of which the reason endowed and particular human being is suppressed by the uniform majority. By extension, individual political abilities and intellectual particularities are devastated by the mediocrity of the average norm, which reacts to innovations or at least does not understand. Finally, the average norm is promoted to the ideal and interpretative criterion of life. As a result, philosophical thinking is considered to be an engagement in marginalized human forms.⁷ Or in many cases, the attempt is made to use philosophy in such a sophisticated way that reinforces the dominant economical system with syllogistic proofs. In other words, various circles of financial interests try, in every way they can, to provide moral support for the modern economical system which is characterized as free.

All the above provide the mentality of institutional self-sufficiency with an institutional character. Nevertheless, in reality this is an illusion of liberation, because the contemporary human being is by now unable to understand and express life as relation. The prospects of thinking and acting in order to communicate are absent from the conscience of the human being. At the same time, today's human being remains impotent before the extreme antagonisms either of the all-powerful monopolistic companies or of the centres of political coalitions for the promotion of ideologies. The final extension is the domination of bestiality, which is confirmed by the corporate character of social activities and by the ease with which indifference in peoples' relationships gradually turns into sadism.⁸ Basically, our fellow human being becomes our hell, exactly because we are unable to communicate with it and oftentimes we use it as a means for succeeding in our materialistic goals.

7. See H. Marcuse, "Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture," *Daedalus*, vol. 94:1 (1965).

8. See H. Marcuse, "Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatdanfassung," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 111:2 (Paris,1934).

3. *The ability of the human person to react to current problems*

All the above mentioned facts should not and could not abolish in a magic way the social characteristics of the human being. The human being is subject, of course, to the limitations of its environment under the form of necessity. As a reason-endowed being, however, humanity has the ability to resist and to create new life conditions. According to Christian teaching, the human being can express progressive propositions and renew its social, historical and natural environment. It can expand the horizons of its action beyond the limits which restrict its existence. This can be easily obtained by an attempt to discover the depth of its existence and the metaphysical archetypes which provide life perspectives for it.

All the above can certainly be achieved as long as the human being consciously undertakes to carry out its duties and responsibilities. Firstly, it has to free itself from the tension which deforms its thoughts and intentions and infuses them somewhat with materialism. This attempt, fortified with Christian principles, will oppose the current vulgarity with the asceticism of a genuine 'lust' for authentic life. This asceticism does not aim either at annihilating the human body or effacing social activities. Its only concern is to eliminate the very causes which shape the carnal spirit. This observation must be taken very seriously, because, according to Christian anthropology, the basis of evil cannot and will not be found in materialism but in the failure of the human being to become a bearer of the supernatural.⁹ Irrespective of this failure, however, the human being oftentimes seems to be constantly moving towards a total debasement of its existence. Such a movement would eliminate the prospect of re-establishing authentic life. Nevertheless, according to Christian teaching, sin cannot intervene except to a limited degree. It is a matter of choosing different forms or attitudes without any fatal ontological overthrow. God's imprint in people's conscience always remains unfading and unrepeatable, even if it is sometimes darkened by those attitudes which are directed by subjectivism.¹⁰ Clearly, the non-ontological character of

9. For the ontological and ethical foundation of evil in Eastern Christianity see, Pseudo-Dionysios, *On the Divine Names*, Book 4th, P.G. 3, 716a-728c. Cf. E. Corsini, *Il trattato 'De divinis nominibus' dello Pseudo Dionige e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Universita di Torino, 19962) 7-35.

10. For Christian anthropology and the principles which ought to direct human actions, see P. Evdokimov, *La Femme et le Salut du Monde*, (Paris: Casterman, 1958). The author attempts to connect the Christian teaching with the theoretical findings of Psychology and Sociology researches. For the notion of the human person in the various cultural traditions see, M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes, (eds), *The Category of the Person* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

evil and the possibility of restoration introduce a very optimistic perspective for the future of human beings.

Concluding Remarks

To sum up, we wish to provide some observations regarding the content and the goals that education has adopted these days. We note that education has been mobilized in order to serve the fulfilment of the goals of the industrial and post-industrial community by motivating the various levels of human action. These very goals have been included even in the general and special education which is provided by the various University Departments. In this way education has been combined with economic development and with the laws and regulations of the market. Thus, it is evident that the contemporary basis, goals and choices of the educational system are now in the main utilitarian. This is a dominant perspective which is being developed into a framework which could not be controlled either by teachers or by students. The educational perspectives are shaped in such a way that they enable individuals to understand the meaning of their existence in terms of their materialistic advancement and happiness, and this is the reason why they are competitive towards others.

Under the prism of meritocracy knowledge and professionalism are interpreted in terms of effectiveness and acceleration of action, and not in terms of qualitative transformation from a simple to an advanced level. Thus, education serves the competitive community. Values such as sociability, morality or involvement in dialogue do not come to the fore. Education gradually ceases to be a factor in the spiritual improvement of human society and innovative ruptures. The student is not taught the reasons for risking personal security for the sake of reinforcing true values in the open society, but is made obsessed with terminating those personal relationships which overrun the psychology of utilitarianism. Thus, the student becomes a stranger or an indifferent bystander to the inner tension arising from the “I” encountering the “Thou,” that is, from the dynamics which change an individual into a person.¹¹

It is of the outmost importance to highlight without ignoring their differences that the Christian teaching about the human person and the “critical theory” of the Frankfurt School actually meet. One of their common elements is faith in

11. See, J. Fr. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Les editions de Munit, 1979). In this particular study the negative consequences of the development of the modern spirit in western civilization with the crucial critical references to the modern advanced technology directions are underlined.

human dignity and its theoretical support. Indeed, the conditions are now mature for a systematic approach of this very encounter from a theological, philosophical and sociological research. The main characteristic of both is the denial of present day industrial and economic ‘values’ as a basis for the establishment of a positive approach to the human well-being. Both theories find in this denial a profound dialectic between the true face of the human being and an imposed fake of human appearance. They suggest to people to refuse to collaborate with this fake appearance and to part with whatever has prevailed in human society without the authentic mark of the supremacy of the people. At the same time, on the level of political administration they suggest to parliaments to take over responsibility for national education, to try to express the people’s conscience, to support decisions reached in consultations, in the encounter of *logos* and *antilogos*, in the dialectic which will lead to true morality and will be established by democracy itself.

We should also state, however, that the place where the Christian receives the full meaning of his existence is the Church as a peoples’ institution. There he learns that the values he has to abide with are fully completed within the empirical world but their core comes from the supernatural world. In other words, divine revelation defines on the one hand what is in progress, and on the other hand what pre-exists and will be fulfilled. In the perspective of space and time Church teaching is firmly specific. It proposes as fundamental aims for human beings, poverty and absolute respect of the natural environment. On the other side, we should note that in the context of the “critical theory” of the Frankfurt School, metaphysics almost has a strictly secular and social content. Its representatives, and especially M. Horkheimer, consider as metaphysics the realization of a desirable society with explicit differentiations from the one which is formed nowadays. These observations are necessary, if the relations between the Orthodox Church and the Frankfurt School are to be marked by scientific accuracy (or precision).¹² Without violating the differences between the Christian teaching on the human person and the “critical theory” of the Frankfurt school, we could assert that the

12. For the representative approaches of the Frankfurt school on religion see for instance W. Helmer, *Religion und Wirtschaft. Die neuere Kritik der Weberthese*, Diss., (Köln, 1970). K. Dahm, V. Drehsen, G. Kehrler, (Hrsg.), *Das Jenseits der Gesellschaft. Religion im Prozess sozialwissenschaftlicher Kritik* (München, 1975). B. Hilberath, *Theologie zwischen Tradition und Kritik* (Düsseldorf, 1978). W. Kunstmann, E. Sander (Hrsg.), *Kritische Theorie zwischen Theologie und Evolutionstheorie. Beiträge zur Auseinandersetzung mit der Frankfurter Schule* (München, 1981). E. Arens, *Habermas und die Theologie. Beiträge zur theologischen Rezeption, Diskussion und Kritik der Theorie kommunikativen Handelns* (Düsseldorf, 1989). A. Reimer, *Critical Theory and the Future of Religion* (Lewiston, 1989).

above two perspectives could meet together. It is true that one of their common elements is their belief in human dignity and its theoretical support. Therefore we believe that the conditions for the systematic approach of this encounter are mature in the context of theological, philosophical and sociological research.