PERSON VERSUS INDIVIDUAL FROM THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE IN A GLOBALISED AND MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

The human person, created by God with love, represents the central element of the Creation. By relating to the personal God in Christianity, the person is defined as capable of dialogue and love on the horizontal axis toward the fellow men, and also on the vertical axis toward God. The globalization and its effects aim to transpose the human person in a system in which the dignity of the person with all its valences disappear, so the man remains a simple individual, characterised by a limitation that do not overcome the sensorial world. The unique religion lacking God, proposed by the secular society as unifying everything, is, in fact, the desacralisation of all that is sanctifying, the loss of the identity of the human person, and its implicit transformation in a simple element of the society.

Keywords: syncretism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, social networks

1. Introductive notions

The man, as dichotomist being, created by God in "His image and likeness" (Genesis 1.26), represents the crown of the entire Creation. Created on the model of the Creator, the man is defined as being a person exactly through the direct relation with the Creator of all things, because God is a Trinity of Persons, a fact proved by the biblical reference that, when describing the act of the human's creation, highlights the manner in which God, unique in His being, but Trinity as person, says: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1.26). Therefore, the human dignity of being a person in the divine order cannot be reduced to the notion of individual, a notion which, from a theological perspective, brings a major diminishing of the person's value.

"The respect for the human person is perhaps the most important ideal of our age. The effort of the modern humanism to undermine the Christianity in the field of the human dignity separated the concept of person from the theology and attached it to the idea of autonomous morality, even to that of a purely humanist existential philosophy". [1] Therefore, a loss of the human person's value is

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generated, a value that can be proved only in a theological perspective. Thus, the issue of the problem, as ideal by excellence, in order to be presented in parameters proper to the human dignity offered by the Creator, cannot be detached from the theological perspective, because it is indissoluble connected to it.

The three monotheist religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islamism, highlight the creation of the man starting from the uniqueness of God, while the differences refer to the forms in which the human person is understood.

2. The human person in the monotheist religions - the centre of the divine preoccupations

2.1. The human person from a Christian perspective

The historical-theological sources highlight the fact that the concept of person is born in the historical context by the involvement of the Church, from its desire to correctly express the faith in the Holy Trinity. This new concept, seen from the historical perspective of the early Christianity, represented a profound movement in the Greek philosophy, based on the identification of the hypostasis as person. This unfortunate identification was the main source of misunderstandings in the Triadologic dialogues during the 4th century.

The term used in the East was that of hypostasis, involving specific risks. The great philosopher Plotin presented the 'hypostases of the divinity', and due to its presentation, the use of the term in the Christian theology could have led to the accusation of Neoplatonism, with all its valences referring to the understanding of God and of the world [2].

The human person's value is in strong connection to the Persons of the Holy Trinity, after the model of the man who was made "living being" (Genesis 2.7). The existence of God in a Trinity of person highlights the most important attribute of the person: the love. The phrase 'God is love' has value only in the person. The person is a hypostasis defined by liberty, unicity and non-repeatability, a being loved by excellence, capable to respond to this love. Responding to the love received from the One Trinity, it brings the deification of the man through grace. "The aim of the salvation is for the personal life to be achieved in the human." [1, p. 46] Thus, we may ask: is it enough to be human in order to be considered a person or does the term requires much more than biologically being a man? The answer to this problem is split in two sections discussing two ways of living, which, apparently are united, but are in fact different. The first way of being refers to the biological existence, while the second speaks of the ecclesial existence.

Therefore, the first way of being, the biological one, defines the man as tragic identity. It considers that the being comes from an ecstatic act defined by eros, resulting inevitably a lack of ontological liberty. "The man is born as hypostatic act, as body, but this body is profoundly connected to individuality and death." [1, p. 48]

The second way of being defined the man is the ecclesial way. This ecclesial hypostasis is achieved only by being reborn in the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism, when the man overcomes the biological way of being and becomes a person in graceful communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

If the first way of being is subject to the simple laws of the instincts, inevitably leading to the denial of the liberty, with a man as simple individual passing through time to nowhere, the ecclesial way brings to the man the state of being "born again" (John 1.3, 7), the dignity of person capable of dialogue and love on the horizontal axis as well as on the vertical one. Through the Church, the man changed in person through the Holy Baptism, is placed in the world from another perspective that is not determined by biological inclinations.

The fundamental difference between these two types of existence results from the understanding and the manifestation of love for the other. Thus, the individual limits himself to strictly loving conditionally those close to him, excluding the others. Only the ecclesial person overcomes this form of exclusivism, being able to love outside the circle of the close persons, even the hostile ones. The supreme model of Person entering the history is the Son of God, Who, "when the set time had fully come" (Galatians 4.4), receives a human body, similar to us, but without the sin, and offers us the model of absolute personal love, because He embraces the cross from the love for the man, so the man can be alive through His sacrifice. In other words, the Church is the one maintaining the man in the dignity of person and does not allow his passing in the state of limited, biological existence of the individual.

The contemporary problem is that we identify the term of person with that of individual, considering them as synonyms. "Still, in a specific acceptation, the person and the individual have an opposite meaning; the individual expresses a certain mixture of the person with elements specific to the nature, while the person expresses what is different from the nature." [3]

The great theologian, Father Dumitru Stăniloae affirmed: "compared to the individual, the person lives in community with other persons, so their lives intertwine. The person does not know where his life starts and where the other's life ends, as in a continuum. I cannot be, I cannot exist without the other, and the other cannot exist without me. There is no joy in an isolated life, separate from the fellow men. There is no border between persons. The existence per se, as a fulfilment of the life or of the being, contains all that is present and can be life from the eternity." [4]

The human person, as 'image' of God, tends to the likeness of Him. "Without the connection to God, the man cannot be imagined. The relation with the absoluteness belongs to the being. The man is rooted in the absoluteness". [5] Therefore, the human person "tends to the absoluteness because God is the Absoluteness and because the Absoluteness is personal" [6].

The relation between the human person and God as Trinity of Persons is special, due to the fact that, when the man fell from the communion with God for his disobedience sin, the incarnation of the Son takes place, with love for the humans. The Son saves us from sin, while He, Who is completely innocent,

becomes obedient until dying for us. These are the premises of Trinitarian love as the crown of Creation, and the fact that Christianity can only be a religion that emphasizes the personal relationship between man and the One Trinity.

2.2. The human person in the Judaic perspective

According to the Judaic theology, God is the Creator of the man and of all things. The theology of Holy Scripture details God's creative act. If everything is created by word, on the sixth day, the Creator pays special attention to the most important part of Creation, that of man, and the latter, receiving the breath of life, becomes a living being capable of dialogue and love.

Paraphrasing the great scholar and philosopher of religion Abraham Joshua Heschel, who affirmed that the Bible is a book about the man and not about God [7], we may conclude that, once the act of creation is finished, the attention of God is centred on the human being. "After a series of failures, God decides to found His nation under the name of Israel, but his attention for the people is not abandoned." [7]

Therefore, the Oath between the Creator and the Patriarchs of the Old Testament will aim that "*all peoples on Earth will be blessed*" (Genesis 12.3). Starting from the text of the Genesis 2.7, "*the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being*", the man is the only element of creation that directly receives the gift of life from God, not only through the words.

Due to the fact that the biblical reference after the creation of the man does not contain the formula "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1.10, 12, 18, 21, 25), "the rabbi interpret this omission through the fact that, unlike other beings, the man is fulfilled only after developing his personality and becomes a moral 'I'. The expression 'in the image of God' gave birth to a multitude of interpretations. Some understood it as the 'free will' given to the man, others believe that is his faculty to invent, or to learn and use a notional language, or the creating intelligence, or as the human person's irreducibility, or the self-awareness and the awareness of the divine image resting in the man." [7, p. 490]

According to the Judaic teachings, the free will defines the man as rational and moral person, subject for the norms of the ethics. There is also possible to reduce the human person to the notion of individual, which can be defined as the person who does not respect the divine will and falls into the lack of respect for the ethical principles established by God. The limit between the person and the individual resides in Judaism in the obedience or the disobedience of the Creator's will. Disregarding the choice of the man, he will have to justify his deeds.

Starting from the text of the Psalm 8 - "*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory*

and honour. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet." (Psalms 8.3-6), the rabbi understands and explains the fact that person's dignity results from the aspect that God makes the man "in His image". Moreover, by the fact that all people have Adam and Eve as proto-parents, the people's equality is essential, but is put in relation with the idea of obedience, specific to the Judaism. Therefore, although a form of equality is discussed, still the Judaism highlight the fact that, in the relation man-woman, the man is superior because he was created the first, while the woman is considered only his help.

The proto-parents' sin of disobedience had numerous bad consequences, but did not lead to the loss of the man's dignity as a person. In other words, the human person, created in the "image of God", is not reduced to the notion of individual due to the disobedience. After falling into the sin of the disobedience, "the man's freedom, his capacity to respect or disrespect the divine orders, was not reduced. In spite of some biblical verses showing the man's inclination for the evil (Genesis 8.21), even the existence of a small number of good people proves the man's capacity to choose 'the good and the life', even before the light of the divine revelations." [7, p. 490]

According to the Judaic theology, each man has the capacity to do the good *ieţer ha-tov* and also the capacity to not listen to the divine will *ieţer ha-ra*. The inclination of the man toward one of these capacities defines him as person or individual. Thus, the person is seen by rabbi as possessing qualities as piety, fearing the Creator and a good heart. Each person can model from these directing elements his own personality, always in obedience to God. The man who is not characterised by these elements is defined as an individual belonging to the society, but not rising to the requirements of the moral law given by God through revelation.

2.3. The human person from an Islamic perspective

The man's nature, according to the Islamic perspective, has its origin in Allah's creating act, either of a sign of his wisdom, or as a desire to be known. The man has a central place in the Quran and is mentioned in 45 surah, two of them (7 and 20) being explicitly dedicated to the human person. The basic idea related to the man in the Islam is that the man must unconditionally obey to the Creator.

Starting from the idea that Allah knows from the eternity each man's destiny, He determines the deeds and leads some to the faith and others to the lack of faith. We must mention the important aspect that, in the Islam, the man does not know a form of liberty, as it happens in Christianity; the man cannot oppose to Allah's will.

This vision shows powerful accents of the man's predestination. Still, the Quran speaks of a certain liberty of the will, also understood as predestination. In other words, Allah gives to the man, through the creation, a form of liberty,

which is entirely subjected to the Creator's will, because He determines the deeds that the man thinks to be his own initiative.

The Islamic conception on the human person is a radical one; the man does not tend at all to be like his Creator and the distance between the Creator and the creation is highlighted.

The elements characterising a person from an Islamic perspective are the following: confessing the faith, fasting, charity, the prayer and the pilgrimage. If these five elements define a person totally obeying to Allah, the believer, it results that the people not respecting these elements in their life reduce themselves to the statute of individuals, equal to being non-believers.

3. The individual - definitions and modern theories in the society

According to the Romanian Language Dictionary, the term 'individual' defines any organised being that can be put in relation with a species. Another definition refers to the individual as a person who is isolated from the community [8].

These two definitions of the individual are very clear and, in the relation with the Christian theology, amplify their meaning. The individual is a person lacking willingly the interactions with the other members of the society, on one side, and the relation with the person of the Holy Trinity, on the other side. The individual is characterizing by the lack of the virtues and by the limitation to the biological, sensorial aspects. Anything that cannot be explained by reason, mostly based on senses, has no value, so it is not interesting for the individual.

The individualism is born from the ideologies of the nominalism, amplified by the Renaissance, Humanism and Enlightenment. The contemporary man is marked by individualism as basic guiding ethic and even philosophical conception. Manifesting the desire of not socialising with the members of the community defines the individual as a lonely man, without virtues and love. Only the person can be characterised by virtues and love, because the person does not close for the outside world, receives the love of the others and is capable to answer to this love.

Still, it seems that the individual cannot survive without relating to others. In other words, in order to maintain his form of individualistic existence, characterised by egoism, the individual is somehow forced to relate to another one due to the desire to be superior. The narcissism determined the individual to compare himself with the other, always seen as inferior, disregarding any quality.

Another aspect of the relation individual-person is that the person is capable anytime to sacrifice for the other, while the individual cannot overcome the barrier of the egoism. Paraphrasing Paul Evdochimov, the individual is not and cannot be anything else than a rudimentary stage of the person [9].

We must also mention that the society have tried to depersonalize the man and to transform him in an individual, just a number. If we refer to the communist prisons, the prisoners were called with a number and not with their

name. They were practically extracted from the personal world and included in a world without names, relatives, faces and identities. This practice is, unfortunately, nowadays in a continuous ascension in the entire society, where the person is reduced to a number. There are numerous statistics on various themes where people are just numbers.

All these issues, corroborated with the innovations of the secular society, taking the human being away from the dignity received by God, have also the role to take away the man from the community of persons, with its specific features, and, especially, from the communion with the Person of the Holy Trinity; therefore, the man becomes, as Petre Țuțea affirmed, an entity coming from nowhere and going nowhere [10].

Christianity is the only one to give a correct value to the human being. In Christianity, a person lives and grows based on the other persons, implicitly on the Person of the Son of God, incarnated "*when the set time had fully come*" (Galatians 4.4). The analysis of the man from a historical perspective highlights that, initially, in the ancient times, the man interacted with the Cosmos, later, during the mediaeval times, the man communicated with God, and now, in the modern times, the man reduced himself to the status of individual and communicated only with himself. The danger of this way of living is that the individual does not anymore represent the principle containing the capacity to unite the entire creation and to put it in relation with God; the individual becomes a simple component of the creation.

The researcher Francis Fukuyama underlined the tragic fact that the society of the future, built on individualism, will be post-human, characterised by a massive loss of the person's profoundness and values, and the individual will be captured by the insanity of the self-love [11].

4. Globalised society - syncretistic effects and social networks

Nowadays society is in a full process of globalisation and secularisation, presenting as main effect the appearance of some socio-economic and cultural processes. Their main features refer to the global diffusion of the democratic institutions and practices, and the formulation of economic, financial and technological models. In the same time, globalisation brings the uniformisation of the societies, easily reaching the relativisation of the national identity and to the destruction of the personal identity.

Starting from the brief definition of the globalisation, highlighting its main goal of uniting the population of the entire world to function as a singular system, we can clearly observe its harmful effects on the person. Thus, the person, characterised by features as the virtues, becomes a simple individual caught in a system. All the religious values disappear and the individual is concentrated on his own self.

The globalisation has visible effects on the world development of the social psychic state and the man is educated in this spirit, transforming into a simple element in a vast system.

The Christian religion tries hard to maintain the human psychic to the optimum level so the person would not turn in an individual. It highlights the fact that, for the life of a community, the features of the person are the ones guaranteeing the success. Thus, the person having the virtue of love does not try to solve only his problems, but also the problems of the other; a social structure based on the love for the other is formed. Without practicing the virtues of the person, which are absent to the individual, the society turns into an amorphous mass of people where each one cares only for himself and lives only for himself.

The globalisation of a society also brings the idea of religious syncretism. This idea proposes to the man numerous new concepts aiming to make the truth relative and teaching the man to renounce to his own value in order to obtain imagined or invented values, which are fashionable. Due to the idea of religious syncretism, the idea of universal religion appears, promoting a religion that is not based on the Christian principles of living in harmony and love for the other. This universal religion tries to encompass all, but leads to the desacralisation of the person and its transformation in an individual.

We must underline that the growing of the person's condition proposed by the religious syncretism, analysed from the theological perspective, can be done only in Christ. The only form of future unity is possible only in Christ. The unique religion without God, highlighted by the secular society as efficient and convenient for all people, does not refer to God and to the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the permanent reference points of the person. The religious form adopted by the secular society would be the one to be found in Hinduism, where the impersonal divine is called by each one with any name, depending on the individualist needs.

The proposed universal religion is in fact amalgam of oriental religions mixed with the principles of the new Christianity. Teillard de Chardin is the one providing a new Christianity, based on evolutionist ideas, together with elements from Vedanta and Tantra-Yoga, leading to some sort of Pantheist Hinduism [12]. This form of religion presents five defining components:

a) The universal religion without God must be based on the laws of the spirit, aiming to offer intellectual alternatives to the Christian dogma and to convince the person that the perfection can be achieved through initiatic knowledge, outside the personal relation with God.

b) Through the evolutionist ideas, the universal religion makes available for the man the support for the theory of becoming. Practically, the theory contains the ideas of Chardin's evolutionism intertwined with the evolutionism of the Hinduism, proposing to the man an evolution through the self, thus individualist.

c) The third component refers to the impersonal god. If God is impersonal, which is the point for the man to consider him a person; he remains at the stage of individual, seeing all through the glass of his own needs. Moreover, this component suggests the fact that "if a religion is true, all religions are true. Still, we know that all religions are various attempts of the human soul to reach the Absoluteness. This is the reason for which we become one with

the Muslims in mosques, worship the sacred fire with the Zoroastrians, and kneel in front of the cross with the Christians." [12, p. 50] The idea of absoluteness does not request, according to this component, the existence of a personal God and a personal relation between the man and God. The idea of impersonal god is the most important notion of the universal religion and of the globalised and secular society, because this is the first step to eliminate God from the man's life.

d) The religion intending to be defined as universal must always think to the satisfaction of the various needs of the man. Therefore we assist to the formation of practices as Christian yoga, white magic, etc., all these practices aim to cheat the man offering a false solution leading to nowhere.

e) The unique aim of the universal religion without God is of global nature: "The entire humanity descends to the foothills of this holy place, where the symbol is seated, which, in fact is not a symbol, and also the name, which is soundless" [12, p. 56].

From the perspective of the Orthodox theology, the world and, implicitly, the man, as crown of the creation, are meant to ascend to God. This ascension of the man is not toward a symbol, but toward a personal God, in communion and dialogue.

Related to the social networks we may affirm that they became the defining elements of the contemporary secular society. The relation between the individual and the social networks is very close and the dependence is clearly visible in the case of those absorbed by the networks. Various individuals participate through the social network to a form of sociability, no matter their age or personal qualities. The social network can be defined as a network of individuals with common aims. Each individual has a social status somehow defining him and placing him together with others from the same category. Starting from this status, the other members of the social network have reactions, praise or criticise. Therefore, there is the possibility that the individual behind the profile modify the status according to his own desires.

The real problems appear when the man lives in the virtual reality and willingly detach from the surrounding reality. This is also generated by the fact that, in the virtual reality, the individual can be anyone and do all the things impossible in the real life. Although there is a certain form of so-called social relations, they are not always based on truth or on moral principles, so the man behind a virtual profile does not reach the dignity of person and remains a simple individual, transposed in the virtual world.

One of the effects of the on-line life is that the liberty of the individual in this environment does not correspond to the real life liberty, a fact which causes major injuries to the human psychic. Thus, the individual isolates himself more in the virtual environment, where he fees satisfaction, and refuses the real world and its valences. This aspect determines the man to reduce himself from the dignity of person to being an individual, while the communication abilities considerably decrease in the real life. Socialising in the virtual space, in the

detriment of the real social life, has as consequence the isolation from the society, involving the serious illness of the brain.

5. Conclusion

Concluding the aspects above presented, we may say that only the Christianity offers to the man the dignity of person in its full meaning. The human person is characterised only in Christianity by the capacity to respond to the personal love of the Persons in the Holy Trinity. The Trinity persons God creates the man with love only in Christianity, and, after the man loses the grace through disobedience, the second Person from the Holy Trinity embodies similar to our human form, but without the sins, and saves the entire humanity through the unique sacrifice on the Golgotha. Therefore, the love as a person's basic feature is fully manifested in the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and the man participates to this manifestation, in a permanent state of loving God. Without this main feature defining the human person, the man is reduced to a simple existence as individual, living only for himself and being a simple element in a system.

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