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*Against Apathy:
Reconstruction
of a Cultural Identity*

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ABSTRACT

Behind the current crisis there is, first and foremost, a crisis of values demonstrated by a deep disaffection for civic and individual responsibility. A feeling of loss and disorientation seems to be the main characteristic of this era. In the apathy caused by such a sense of helplessness, positive stimuli disintegrate and long-term projects atrophy. We must reconsider our cultural and spiritual identity in order to promote a personal and social renewal for the future.

*Perhaps it is out of my decrepitude
that joy and creation come.*

Irwin Peter Russell

Although the contemporary crisis has some specific technical origins, certain behavioural changes in social and interpersonal relations gave revealing warning signs of impending instability. The symptoms, which are still present today, can be found in a deep disaffection with personal responsibility and civic engagement, exemplified by a growing disconnection between individuals' values and their course of action¹. Moreover the digitalization of every public and private sphere², leading to an impressive flow of information, confuses the individual, who already feels lost in contemporary society, and does not favour any kind of fixed reference point³.

Throughout human history, there have been ages of instability and transition which have anticipated paradigm shifts or changes of perception in economic and geopolitical relations. These times are coupled with a physiological sense of helplessness or decadence: an aboulia of will or societal apathy⁴. Nowadays we witness the radical novelty of an epidemic structural crisis on a global scale condemning one's sense of belonging to an indefinite and uncertain fate.

The most distinctive and worrying aspect of this is undoubtedly the "necessity of speed" through which everything becomes confused not only in the private sphere but even in the international arena. This process has ancient origins, and its devastating consequences were anticipated more or less precisely by several authors over the past few decades. A few years ago, the French scholar Paul Virilio had an inspired idea, the advent of

* This paper can be seen as an introduction for a larger interdisciplinary project on the exegesis and the challenges of Western tradition and civilisation. On the path already traced by Tocqueville, Acton, Rosmini and many other thinkers, it would be useful to read and interpret historical passages from the perspective of civil and religious liberties.

The author is indebted to L. Martin, L. Martynyuk, K. Peacher and S. DeAngelo for their comments, suggestions and encouragement.

¹ Cfr. T. DeLuca, *The Two Faces of Political Apathy*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia PA 1995.

² Cfr. Z.A. Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in Digital Age*, Polity, Cambridge UK, 2010.

³ Cfr. Z. Bauman, *La solitudine del cittadino globale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2000.

⁴ "El temor de perder las ideas es un signo mortal; no que las ideas se van a perder, es que se va a escapar de nuestro dominio la inteligencia, que no podemos tener ideas cuando queramos porque la inteligencia no quiera fijarse en los objetos. [...] Es también sintoma de la abulia o debilitación de la voluntad, porque en este padecimiento la vida retrograda, no pudiendo vencer la pereza, que le impide continuar asimilándose elementos nuevos para renovar la vida al compás del tiempo." Ganivet Angel, *Epistolario. Obras Completas*, 3rd Ed., Vol. 10, Victoriano Suarez, Madrid 1944 pg. 26-27.

“dromocracy”⁵ which he defined as the importance of speed in interpersonal relations and political decisions. This feature is not to be underestimated. We have the impression that all processes happen so quickly that they fail to lay any structural foundation for the future.

Processes happen so rapidly that the individual is unable to grasp its deep influences and is transported, unconsciously and aimlessly, as if carried away downstream by a river. One’s personal identity becomes either submissive or that of a prisoner: Freedom itself seems fictitious function and runs the risk of being overwhelmed by the current. We run continuously without a destination, risking to annihilate our being and to lose our internal compass of orientation. Faced with this omnipotent sense of fluidity, of immanent appeals and in a context of an exaggerated positivism, in which every thought beyond the material assumes the value of an empty tautology or a meaningless representation, the person seems to have no choice but the satisfaction of his basic techno-needs in a violent and disorderly mixture.

This continuous adaptability is a natural cause of frustration and disaffection with a long-term result of the deconstruction of identity and a preference for non-binding forms of instantaneous gratification. This paradigm is self-perpetuating and self-referential. It seems that a pathological mass-ification has drastically reduced, with a mechanism as subtle as subliminal, the “freedom of thinking” filling this insurmountable gap with a kind of materialistic narcosis⁶. It is evident that this process began in the last century - father of profoundly anti-human philosophical theories - and it is not a coincidence that José Ortega y Gasset, prominent Spanish philosopher and precursor of many obscure aspects of post-modernity, did not hesitate to assert in 1930 that:

The direction of society has been taken over by a type of man who is not interested in the principles of civilisation. Not of this or that civilisation but – from what we can judge today – of any civilisation. Of course, he is interested in anaesthetics, motor-cars and a few other things. But this fact merely confirms his fundamental lack of interest in civilization. For those things are merely its products, and the fervour with which he greets them only brings into a stronger relief his indifference to the principles from which they spring.⁷

A permanent indifference destroys any realization of any serious endeavours in a context that disorients and prefers an unwise nomadism and all kinds of disengaged futile satisfaction⁸. In addition it seems to be a generally accepted interpretation of economic analysis that there is a complete rejection of the concept of person with the theoretical construction

⁵ Cfr. P. Virilio, *Vitesse et Politique*, Galilée, Paris 1976.

⁶ Cfr. G. Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago 1962.

⁷ J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, W.W. Norton & C., New York 1932, pg. 88.

⁸ Cfr. A. Porcheddu (ed.), *La crisi del soggetto nella modernità liquida. Una nuova sfida per l'educazione*, Unicopli, Milano 2007.

of a non-existing “personality”⁹: the so-called *homo economicus*. This abstraction, with no consideration of environmental circumstances¹⁰ or anthropological and spiritual substrates¹¹, is a shortcut resulting from a series of reductions as illegitimate as epistemologically limited. The attempt to impose, at any cost, mathematical and scientific legitimacy deprives the person of his natural characteristics bridling him to the jaws of a modern Moloch indifferent to any suffering and unaware of human history. In a critical contribution, the famous American philosopher and economist Murray Rothbard affirmed that:

In recent years, economists have invaded other intellectual disciplines and, in the dubious name of science, have employed staggeringly oversimplified assumptions in order to make sweeping and provocative conclusions about fields they know little about. This is a modern form of “economic imperialism” in the realm of intellect. Almost always, the bias of this economic imperialism has been quantitative and implicitly Benthamite, in which poetry and pushpin are reduced to a single-level, and which amply justifies the gibe of Oscar Wilde about cynics, that they (economists) know the price of everything and the value of nothing. The results of this economic imperialism have been particularly ludicrous in the fields of sex, the family and education.¹²

Not surprisingly, for example, many theorists speak about the “Malthusian trap”¹³: if in the past, coercive birth-control policies were vilified and condemned as products of the most ruthless dictatorships that restricted the most intimate and personal choices, today the neo-Malthusian doctrines have subtly and subliminally breached collective mentality¹⁴ and

⁹ Cfr. S. Zamagni, *Catholic Social Thought, Civil Economy and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pg. 16-17. www.ordosocialis.de 2007

¹⁰ Cfr. S. Gregg, *Economic Thinking for the Theologically Minded*, University Press of America, Lanham- Maryland, 2001 pg. 13-14.

¹¹ Cfr. M. S. Archer, *Person and Ultimate Concerns: Who we are is What We Care About*, in E. Malinvaud & M. A. Glendon, *Conceptualization of the Person in Social Science, Proceedings of the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, Vatican City, 2006 , pg. 261-284.

¹² M. Rothbard, “The Hermeneutical Invasion of Philosophy and Economics”, *Review of Austrian Economics* n. 3 (1989), pg. 45.

¹³ Cfr. P. Cafaro, “Fuori dalla trappola di Malthus”, *Scenari, Avvenire*, 11 Aprile 2012, www.avvenire.it

¹⁴ “The notion of rights and duties in development must also take account of the problems associated with *population growth*. This is a very important aspect of authentic development, since it concerns the inalienable values of life and the family. To consider population increase as the primary cause of underdevelopment is mistaken, even from an economic point of view. Suffice it to consider, on the one hand, the significant reduction in infant mortality and the rise in average life expectancy found in economically developed countries, and on the other hand, the signs of crisis observable in societies that are registering an alarming decline in their birth rate. [...] *Morally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource*. Populous nations have been able to emerge from poverty thanks not least to the size of their population and the talents of their people.” Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 44.

dramatically changed the way we think about work, family, society and nations¹⁵:

[F]ormerly prosperous nations are presently passing through a phase of uncertainty and in some cases decline, precisely because of their falling birth rates; this has become a crucial problem for highly affluent societies. The decline in births, falling at times beneath the so-called “replacement level”, also puts a strain on social welfare systems, increases their cost, eats into savings and hence the financial resources needed for investment, reduces the availability of qualified labourers, and narrows the “brain pool” upon which nations can draw for their needs.¹⁶

A merely bio-technical procedure replaces any critical “spirit of consciousness” leading to a sort of nonsensical contingency. This avoidance from any effort, supported by the strengthening of a revived political Darwinism, is common throughout the Western world. This “mainstream”, however, seems to be born of subterranean dark springs, as if it were an act of suicide, not only demographically but also culturally and intellectually, in an era characterized by epochal migration.

Western democracy, based primarily on certain inalienable values, has come to be questioned in increasingly radical and inappropriate ways.. The abandonment of the Greco-Roman way¹⁷ and the Judeo-Christian tradition¹⁸ in the name of a spurious and indifferent eclecticism and masked by full “openness” is modifying the common substrate on which the West had built its cultural identity¹⁹ over a span of centuries²⁰. Hedonism, linked to an increasing lack of responsibility, does not allow for any judgment, whether external or internal, or physical mortification in the name of a spiritual vocation²¹. The conscience has been reduced to psychological tinsel. The process of devolution from the *homo economicus* to the “homo absurdus”²²

¹⁵ Cfr. E.C. Beisner, “An Evangelical Look at the Centesimus Annus, the Nature of Man and Human Economy”, *Religion & Liberty*, vol. 2 n. 2, March-April 1992.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 44.

¹⁷ See R. Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine*, Criterion, Paris, 1992 and R. Brague, *Introduction au monde grec: études d'histoire de la philosophie*, Éditions de la Transparence, Chatou 2005.

¹⁸ See J. Sacks, *Recovering Judeo-Christian Ethics Precedes European Recovery*, ABC-Religion and Ethics, Address delivered at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, 12 December 2011, www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/12/14/3390711.htm

¹⁹ See C. Schönborn, “Cristianesimo Estraneo alla Riconquista dell’Europa”, *Il Foglio*, (21-01-2012) pg. 6-7.

²⁰ “Christianity sprang from the confluence of two mighty spiritual streams – the one Judaic, the other Hellenic – each of which had already influenced the other, and Rome finally gave it a practical stamp and social permanence.” M. De Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, Collins- The Fontana Library, London-Glasgow 1962, pg. 72.

²¹ Cfr. C. Colson, “Biblical Worldview crucial for the New Millenium”, *Religion & Liberty*, vol. 9/6-1999.

²² Cfr A. W. Dyer, “Prelude to a Theory of *Homo Absurdus*: Variations on Themes from Thorstein Veblen and Jean Baudrillard”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, n. 21-1 (1997) pg. 45-53.

of Camus²³ is becoming so alarming that any “apocalyptic” description of George Orwell would only be a mere introduction.

Recently, some contradictions inherent to this deconstructive movement have appeared through the reconsideration of the holistic approach of Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition, according to which social decisions should be judged for their real level of human development²⁴; purely technical measures and instruments, although important, cannot substitute for an integral approach to human capital²⁵, which creates the necessary conditions for knowledge participation, development and growth²⁶. The primary and unifying factor, therefore, appears to be the dignity of man in a “productive” interdependence²⁷ and in the freedom to express the call to personal reflection and transcendence²⁸.

If mass culture, on the one hand, tries to dismiss any spiritual vocation, there is, on the other, a natural, private quest for spirituality, as many statistical data on religious participation show. This would interrupt the dizzying circuit of indifference in a “*perspective of sense*” which goes beyond the meta-empirical horizon. Unfortunately more often than not, this quest takes the form of religion *à la carte*, a sort of postmodern Gnosticism²⁹ in which, in an explosive mixture of cabalistic influences combine with Sufism, Christian mysticism with yoga and so on. People seek

²³ Cfr. J.M.H. Reid- L. Poggi, *Dizionario della Letteratura Francese*, Gremese Editore, Roma 2002, pg. 69-70.

²⁴ Cfr. N. Acocella, *Politica Economica e Strategie Aziendali*, Carocci, Roma 2001, p. 119.

²⁵ “Human Capital, even taking into account only matters of economic significance, is a concept of broad moral range. In recent years, in fact, the most interesting developments in the field of economics have come with the new attention paid to moral factors in economic progress. For some generations, so long as traditional Jewish and Christian moral values held sway in the West, such moral factors could operate as silent partners in economic analysis, being everywhere taken for granted. Their current absence has brought to consciousness their earlier unappreciated presence, as economists have rediscovered with a vengeance the moral dimension of human capital in both cultural and personal contexts.” M. Novak, “Economics as Humanism”, *First Things*, October 1997 www.firstthings.com

²⁶ Cfr. M. C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: the Human Development Approach*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2011.

²⁷ “Business leaders are called to engage the contemporary economic and financial world in light of the principles of *human dignity* and the *common good*. [...] Among these principles, we recall the principles of meeting the needs of the world with goods which are truly good and which truly serve without forgetting, in a spirit of solidarity, the needs of the poor and the vulnerable; the principle of organising work within enterprises in a manner which is respectful of human dignity; the principle of subsidiarity, which fosters a spirit of initiative and increases the competence of the employees – considered “co-entrepreneurs”; and, finally, the principle of the sustainable creation of wealth and its just distribution among the various stakeholders.” P.A. Turkson - M. Toso, “Forward”, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader. A Reflection*, Vatican Press, Vatican City 2012, pg. 1.

²⁸ Cfr. A. Bagnasco, *La Questione Antropologica nella Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa*, Incontro Pasquale con i Politici (07-03-2012) Aula Magna- Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, pg. 2-3. www.chiesacattolica.it

²⁹ Cfr. J. Ratzinger, „Gnosis als Gegenteil zum Christlichen“, in *Der Glaube der Kirche. Ein theologisches Lehrbuch*, Institut Papst Benedikt XVI- Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2011, pg. 67-68.

an alternative path, shorn of all effort, discipline and serious self-criticism. In short, we are dealing with homemade spiritualism and thus depriving ourselves of a truly integral development.

Modern society does not permit, and often accuses its predecessors of, dogmatism, while rejecting the choice of a personal decision that goes *jenseits der Dinge* (beyond things). All this abruptly undermines any real metaphysical appeal. In a famous invective, the Chief Rabbi of England, Lord (Jonathan) Sacks, warned that Western society is atrophying because of a selfish and hedonistic mentality that has no desire to engage in the “massive sacrifice” of family, shared duties and responsibilities and dedication, while affirming that:

The place for religion is in civil society, where it achieves many things essential to liberal democratic freedom. It sanctifies marriage and the family and the obligations of parenthood, and it safeguards the non-relativist moral principles on which Western freedom is based.”³⁰

Bland indifference characterizes the turning point of the century in which civilisation, with its own weapons, disintegrates itself, singing joyously its end. If everything is meaningless, or has at most an instantaneous value, why should we involve ourselves in things that require difficult choices, sacrifice, discipline and courage? It is clear that we lack a common compass, a shared feeling of community, a mutual effort for the common good³¹. We are faced with a vague wandering, living hand-to-mouth and as the days and hours pass untidily.

If you avoid any responsibility and civic engagement for the sake of self-glorification, you become vulnerable to the modern Leviathan that, offering the “saccharin of the world” and putting the higher virtues to sleep, replaces not only individual reason but even freedom³². This lack of interest and concern or apathetic behaviour is the first and unavoidable step toward acute forms of selfishness like the “lack of rule of law, corruption, tendencies towards greed, poor stewardship of resources”³³.

³⁰ J. Sacks of Aldgate, *Religion in Twenty-First Century Britain*, Theos Annual Lecture 2009, London, 2009 Chap. 2 pg. 18.

³¹ See C. Dykes, “Is there a Moral basis for Capitalism?”, *The Freeman*, August 1983, Vol.33 Issue 8.

³² Cfr. M. Novak, “The Free Market and the Public Morality”, *Religion & Liberty*, vol. IV num. 3 - May-June 1994.

³³ “Obstacles to serving the common good come in many forms – lack of rule of law, corruption, tendencies towards greed, poor stewardship of resources – but the most significant for a business leaders on a personal level is leading a “divided” life. The split between faith and daily business practice can lead to imbalances and misplaced devotion to worldly success. The alternative path of faith-based “servant leadership” provides business leaders with a larger perspective and helps to balance the demands of the business world with those of ethical social principles, illuminated for Christians by the Gospel.” Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader. A Reflection*, Vatican Press, Vatican City 2012, pg. 2.

We prefer to be “narcotized” rather than be engaged actively even at the risk of selling our soul for a few cents in return for a fictitious, sudden and momentary satisfaction. The choice of disenchantment, however, testifies, to a mental laziness that shows the need for redemption and idealism which characterizes human action³⁴ and differentiates humans from all the other living-beings³⁵. The uninterrupted flow of stimuli and information in a context of technological opulence causes a sense of loss by affecting the formation of real ideas and concepts, obscuring the traditional channels of socialization and radically changing the collective identity. The new Prometheus, amazed and astonished, fails to control his products and thinks that he can reduce the world to an easy instrument of his absolute power:

[T]echnological minds see nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere given, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere space into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference³⁶.

This “semantic and ontological uncertainty”³⁷ becomes the main basis for the definition of any ideals: a mind proudly independent from any intrinsic norm³⁸. U. Beck, in the title of his famous work, speaks of the *Risikogesellschaft*³⁹ (risk society) to interpret the dehumanizing conditions of post-industrial and post-ideological society, in which the individual is constantly changing perspectives in an “elastic” milieu that favours not only geographical but also cultural and sentimental nomadism⁴⁰.

This meeting with disruptive fluidity leads to the rejection *tout court* of any historical connection or relation with “space”, meant not only materially.

³⁴ “The particular form that an individual human action takes is determined by factors that include those making up the specific environmental conditions as well as those that have shaped the character and values of the actor. The conception of sciences of human action recognizes that the form of action as it unfolds in its historical reality is the result of influences that range from the physiological to the religious, the social to the geographical.” I. M. Kirzner, *The Economic Point of View. An Essay in the History of Economic Thought*, Sheed & Ward, Kansas City 1960, pg. 149.

³⁵ Cfr. H. Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. V: Macht und menschliche Natur*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1981, pg. 135-234

³⁶ R. Guardini, *The Essential Guardini. An Anthology*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago IL, 1997, pg. 17.

³⁷ See S. Fox, *Ontological Uncertainty and Semantic Uncertainty in Global Networks Organizations*, Helsinki School of Economics- Technical Research Center of Finland, VTT Helsinki 2008.

³⁸ “The intellectual consciousness of modern Europe as commonly delineated and accepted even in our day proclaimed these three ideals: a nature consisting in itself, an autonomous personality of human subject and a culture self-created out of norms intrinsic to its own essence.” R. Guardini, *The Essential Guardini. An Anthology*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago IL, 1997, pg. 18.

³⁹ Cfr. U. Beck, *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1986.

⁴⁰ Cfr. Z. Bauman, *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality*, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, MA 1995.

On an individual level, the most significant effect is “the triumph of disengagement and the art of escape as conditions of existence and measure of success”⁴¹. Irresponsibility is the essential contributor to the dismantling of social relationships and in the obscuration of the basic rules of coexistence.

This is evident, on one hand, in a continuous process of infantilization of adults, the evident product of mass-media society, where caprice, extravagance and frivolity are considered the most important needs, worthy of being pursued at any cost. Without ideals and “happily” adrift, humanity lacks the highest stimuli and inspirations that, despite the fragility of their condition, are opposed to the pride of a blind man and, in the long term, unsuccessful *self-appropriation* (Selbstaneignung)⁴². On the other hand, disaffection for traditional educational processes is evident with catastrophic results in childhood, where computerized images of violence (with their undoubted influence in the subconscious), the television culture and the tragedy of family fragmentation have stifled the “positive fantasy” and the natural predisposition to integral growth⁴³.

Another peculiar aspect of postmodern and technocratic society is the mechanistic interpretation of reality. The “overcoming” of the classical division between *bios*⁴⁴ and *zoe*⁴⁵ towards completely biological and instinctual forms⁴⁶ resulted in the “demystification” of metaphysics and the reduction of *agape* to a “misunderstood” *eros*⁴⁷. This sort of absolutism discourages the natural psychological growth and relational maturity⁴⁸ in the name of a “*hic et nunc*” coloured with thrill and pleasure⁴⁹ which deprives

⁴¹ L. Demichelis, “La nostra vita è una giostra”, *TTL-La Stampa* (21.11.2003) pg. 4. (my translation).

⁴² Cfr E. Biser, *Keine Angst, glaube nur. Das Eugen-Biser-Lesenbuch (Eingeleitet und herausgegeben von M. Albus)*, Guetersoher Verlagshaus, Guetersloh, 2008, pg. 52.

⁴³ Cfr. N. Postman, *The Disappearance of the Childhood*, Vintage Books, New York 1994.

⁴⁴ Life as a physical and temporal experience: *vita quam vivimus*.

⁴⁵ Life as a cultural experience or spiritual search: *vita qua vivimus*.

⁴⁶ Cfr. P. Schallenberg, *Jenseits der Moderne? Herausforderung der theologischen Sozialethik*, Kirche und Gesellschaft, n. 372, KSZ-Bachem Verlag, Cologne 2010, pg. 3-8.

⁴⁷ “*Eros*, reduced to pure ‘sex’, has become a commodity, a mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man’s great yes’ to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness.” Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, n. 5.

⁴⁸ “Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or “poisoning” *eros*, they heal it and restore its true grandeur.” Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, n. 5.

⁴⁹ “A person’s rightful due is to be treated as an object of love, not as an object for use.” K. Wotyla, *Love and Responsibility*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1993, pg. 42.

Dr. Giovanni Patriarca

the act of all meaning⁵⁰ but “only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature”⁵¹.

According to contemporary reductionist and anti-personalistic philosophies, if from one side this man considers himself an absolute creator, from the other side he radically animalizes himself at the extremes of social life. The mortal Prometheus is a desecrated man *par excellence*, chained to his immanence and sentenced to a pseudo-fictitious liberty without any nostalgia for the truth:

True freedom is not advanced in the permissive society, which confuses freedom with license to do anything whatever and which in the name of freedom proclaims a kind of general amorality. It is a caricature of freedom to claim that people are free to organize their lives with no reference to moral values, and to say that society does not have to ensure the protection and advancement of ethical values. Such an attitude is destructive of freedom and peace⁵².

But in true freedom comes the question of meaning, which is the main characteristic of humanity. Especially in the search for meaning, which is without doubt difficult and demanding, the world, as masterfully expressed by Emerith Coreth, transcends itself and refers beyond itself⁵³. In his temporal and gradual passage, the man cannot avoid projecting, building or engaging himself because to do otherwise would be a deliberate condemnation the darkening of his reason⁵⁴.

In that moment there is not only compliance and correspondence with reality but a rejection of every alethophobic proposition⁵⁵ in a logical process that is open to common sense and rationality⁵⁶. If we lose the temporal conception of our journey through history in the name of utopia of a new technocratic, materialistic and self-sufficient world, we make the same mistake made by the all-embracing ideologies of the last century, which before any tradition, responded with a deep hiatus and arrogance as if “human emancipation” had finally been accomplished. This visceral and searing desire to break away from human nature for the deviant construction of a “new world”, as impersonal and as far from the ultimate meaning of life, is one of the main contributory causes of the current crisis.

⁵⁰ Cfr. M. Novak, “The Embodied Self”, *First Things*, February 2003 www.firstthings.com

⁵¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, n. 5.

⁵² John Paul II, *World Day of Peace 1981*, n. 8

⁵³ Cfr. E. Coreth, *Antropologia Filosofica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1978, pg. 176-178.

⁵⁴ „Die Vernunft kann die Wahrheit, die für sie konstitutiv ist, nur erkennen, indem sie Zukunft antizipiert“ G. Picht, *Wahrheit, Vernunft und Verantwortung. Philosophische Studien*. Klett, Stuttgart 1969, pg. 7

⁵⁵ Cfr. V. Possenti, “La domanda sulla verità e i suoi concetti” , in V. Possenti (ed.), *La questione della verità. Filosofia, Scienza, Teologia*, Armando Editore, Roma 2003, pg. 41.

⁵⁶ Cfr. Antonio Livi, *Filosofia del senso comune. Logica della scienza e della fede*, Edizioni Ares, Milano 1990, pg. 157-181.

This immanence, united to a still unclear scientific emancipation, leads the individual to face up to the dilemma of nonsense or inexorably yield to the lure of nihilism. While waiting for a meta-historical event with a messianic flavour, in the light of a purely terrestrial eschatology⁵⁷, we lose ourselves sailing with a sense, more or less perceived, of resignation and renunciation. We have lost the value of the radiant hope that gives lifeblood and vigour to every project mortifying and harnessing the creative power of freedom⁵⁸ and personal and intimate choices⁵⁹. The scientific and positivistic a-priori paradox deprives and stifles the human experience setting as a self-sufficient paradigm and superior to any other form of critical analysis of reality⁶⁰.

The constructive effort, albeit difficult and challenging, has been replaced by the idolatry of the world and the technique depriving the individual of any “relation of sense” that, as claimed by P. Barcellona:

[I]s the emotional investment, the creation of desires and passions that allow the construction of ideal goals and objectives; it is a relation between the ego and the world of people and things. The “question of meaning” pushes away from ourselves in search of love and friendship, encourages people to know themselves and others, to learn, to think, to look beyond the surface of events⁶¹.

In an empty emancipation only the superficial becomes the thesis and the antithesis of daily life in a self-delegitimization of reason, which becomes lazy and barbarous and dissolves itself with an alienating sense of

⁵⁷ “Once the truth of the hereafter had been rejected, it would then be a question of establishing the truth of the here and now. The critique of Heaven is transformed into the critique of earth, the critique of theology into the critique of politics. Progress towards the better, towards the definitively good world, no longer comes simply from science but from politics—from a scientifically conceived politics that recognizes the structure of history and society and thus points out the road towards revolution, towards all-encompassing change.” Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 20.

⁵⁸ Cfr. P. Ricoeur, “Une herméneutique philosophique de l’esperance”, *Lectures 3. Aux frontières de la philosophie*, Edition du Soleil, Paris 1994, pg. 19-40.

⁵⁹ Cfr. E. Levinas, *Difficile Liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, Livre de Poche, Paris 1976, pg. 204-206.

⁶⁰ “The positivist approach to nature and reason, the positivist world view in general, is a most important dimension of human knowledge and capacity that we may in no way dispense with. But in and of itself it is not a sufficient culture corresponding to the full breadth of the human condition. Where positivist reason considers itself the only sufficient culture and banishes all other cultural realities to the status of subcultures, it diminishes man, indeed it threatens his humanity. I say this with Europe specifically in mind, where there are concerted efforts to recognize only positivism as a common culture and a common basis for law-making, reducing all the other insights and values of our culture to the level of subculture, with the result that Europe vis-à-vis other world cultures is left in a state of culturelessness and at the same time extremist and radical movements emerge to fill the vacuum”. Benedict XVI, *Address to the German Parliament in the Reichstag Building*, 22 September 2011.

⁶¹ P. Barcellona, “Narrazione e senso della vita”, in P. Barcellona - T. Garufi, *Il furto dell’anima. La narrazione post-umana*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 2008 pg. 57-58. (my translation).

mortification. The only answer seems to be a silent immobility, the desertification of the will and creativity, the abandonment to sensual and lascivious laziness.

This sense of futility, of incessant activity without a purpose, has resulted in a striking predisposition to agglutinating inertia that prevents any movement. In the history of theological and philosophical thought, as many recent essays demonstrate, laziness, sleepiness, sluggishness, lack of effort are associated, albeit with differences and gradual variations, to *acedia*: the cardinal sin of sloth. *Acedia* etymologically derives from ancient Greek and the privative alpha (*a-kedeia*) emphasizes a “lack of care”. Saint John Cassian the Ascetic offers a detailed explanation of the symptoms, adding that:

Once [*acedia*] has seized possession of a wretched mind, it makes a person horrified at where he is. [...] Likewise it renders him slothful and immobile in the face of all the work to be done within the walls of his dwelling.⁶²

This psychological condition and existential angst, in a sort of uninterrupted race, degrades personal will and invalidates the sources of identity, any sense of meaning and fulfillment⁶³. Aquinas correlates sloth with the three theological virtues, concluding that it can be defined as a radical opposition to charity, considered the “root and mother”⁶⁴ of the perfect virtues. According to the Angelic Doctor, since charity has love for fundamental action and peace, harmony and respect as effects, the deplorable result of such an opposition is sad decadence, an aversion to common sense⁶⁵ and, paradoxically, as an extreme consequence, the slothful person, as Rebecca Konyndyk de Young shows in her significant work, “*either stays busy with desperate measures to escape (either in reality or fantasy) or slumps into despair and inactivity*”⁶⁶.

This mental status, highly standardized and fruit of a very complex historical process, can be read through the eyes of exegetical, comparative and etiological analysis in two masterpieces of world literature that, in a sense, anticipated the spiritual evils of future generations. It is not a

⁶² Saint John Cassian, *The Institutes*. Ancient Christian Writers 58, Trans. Boniface Ramsey, Paulist Press, New York 2000, n. X.xxi

⁶³ Cfr. R. Konyndyk de Young, “The Vice of Sloth: Some Historical Reflections on Laziness, Effort, and Resistance to the Demands of Love”, *The Other Journal* 10 (Fall 2007). www.theotherjournal.com

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae. 23.8

⁶⁵ Cfr. R. Konyndyk de Young, “Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of *Acedia*” *Thomist* 68:2 (April 2004) pg. 173-204.

⁶⁶ R. Konyndyk de Young, “The Vice of Sloth: Some Historical Reflections on Laziness, Effort, and Resistance to the Demands of Love”, *The Other Journal* 10 (Fall 2007). www.theotherjournal.com

coincidence that we speak about “contemporary oblomovism”⁶⁷, from the anti-hero⁶⁸ (Oblomov) described by the Russian writer Goncharov⁶⁹, to define the uneasiness⁷⁰ generated by the eternal dispute between “to do and not to do”: the Shakespearean dilemma between “to be and not to be” is now constantly postponed in an indefinite and incomprehensible time while life is consumed in a “comfortable” indifference⁷¹. This disillusioned feeling of time⁷² relates the Russian aristocrat to the “*Man without Qualities*” by Robert Musil, who, on the other hand, searching wildly for a meaning in his life⁷³ and being attracted by the technological revolution and its enormous chaotic possibilities⁷⁴, cannot find any solution to his enigma⁷⁵ and sinks

⁶⁷ “Die Bequeme Haltung gegenüber der Welt ist Passivität, Objektsein – psychoanalytisch gesprochen: Masochismus. Der Masochist verzichtet durch eine Art „Urwahl“ angesichts des Mitmenschen und der Realität überhaupt auf sein Freisein, weil dieses mit Angst, Verantwortung und Anstrengung verbunden ist. Die Möglichkeiten der Selbstgestaltung und der Selbstwertverwirklichung werden dadurch reduziert oder schrumpfen auf Null zusammen. Darum ist die Preisgabe des Selbstseins kaum je ohne Selbstverachtung denkbar: Masochismus ist Selbstverkleinerung bis zur Selbstausslöschung. Das ruft auf der Ebene der Zwischenmenschlichkeit zweierlei Beziehungsformen auf dem Plan; hat der Masochist Mittel zur Verfügung, dann scharen sich Schmarotzer, Ausbeuter und Parasiten um ihn, die seine Hilflosigkeit ausnützen.“, J. Rattner, *Oblomow oder die Ontologie der Bequemlichkeit*, in P. Thieren (ed.), *I. A. Goncharov. Beiträge zu Werk und Wirkung*, Böhlau, Cologne-Vienna 1989, pg. 113.

⁶⁸ “The general theme of Goncharov’s *Oblomov* [...] is deepened into a tragedy of passivity and of that peculiar type of indolence which soon became connected with the name of Oblomov not only in Russia but also in other parts of the world.” J. Lavrin, *Goncharov*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1954, pg. 27.

⁶⁹ See M. Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator. The Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1973 and S. A. Makashin, T. G. Dinesman (ed.), *Literaturnoje nasledstvo I. A. Goncharov. Novyje materialny i issledovanija*, IMII-RAN Nasledije, Moscow 2000.

⁶⁹ See M. Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator. The Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1973 and S. A. Makashin, T. G. Dinesman (ed.), *Literaturnoje nasledstvo I. A. Goncharov. Novyje materialny i issledovanija*, IMII-RAN Nasledije, Moscow 2000.

⁷⁰ Cfr. R. Gruebel, „Messiznizm v religiji iskusstva russkogo modernizma (Isobrazitenoje iskusstvo, filosofija, literatura, muzyka)“ in N. Grigoreva- S. Schahadat- I. Smirnov- I. Wutsdorff (ed.), *Das Konzept der Synthese im Russischen Denken*, Wiener Slawischer Almanach, Sonderband 76, Verlag Otto Sagner, Munich-Berlin 2010, pg.49-78.

⁷¹ „Er muß das Glück und die Bequemlichkeit seiner späten Tage, die Ruhe des behäbigen, dämmernden Schlafrock- und Schlafmützendaseins mit dem Verlust seines wahren geistigen Lebens erkaufen. Eine geheime Dämonie wohnt darum auf dem Grund seines mehr und mehr veröden Lebens. Es ist gewiß nicht einfach das Leben des ästhetischen-ironischen Menschen, der seine einzige Kontinuität in der Inhaltlosigkeit und Langweile findet.“, W. Rehm, *Gontscharow und Jacobsen oder Langweile und Schwermut*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1963, pg. 34.

⁷² Cfr. A. Haardt- N. Plotnikov & A. Rörig (ed.), *Diskurse der Personalität. Die Begriffsgeschichte der „Person“ aus deutscher und russischer Perspektive*, W. Fink, Munich 2008.

⁷³ Cfr. S. Huesch, *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit. Eine vergleichende Studie zu S. Kirkegaards Entweder-Oder und Robert Musils Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Ibidem Verlag, Stuttgart 2004, Chap. I and III.

⁷⁴ „Wenn nun der *Gott des Mathematikers* als ein sich derart beständig in Ekstase befindliches Allwesen imaginiert wird, als eine allumfassende Energie also, welche, durch die Kraft des Eros getrieben, eine unaufhörliche und unendliche Vermehrung von miteinander verwandten Einzelwesen und –seelen hervorbringt, die wiederum in der *Schauung* selbst eine gottähnliche oder gottentsprechende Ekstase zu erleben fähig sind, so

into an apparently magnificent life, comfortable in his cowardice⁷⁶, trying to establish a new moral code⁷⁷ and indulging in impromptu passions or in mediocre ineptitude.

It seems that we have described the prototype *par excellence* of the anti-charismatic man, indifferent to calls of conscience, hermetic and lonely⁷⁸, rootless in his own world⁷⁹, completely incapable of the gift of self⁸⁰. But even in this voluntary delegitimization of his own nature or in the moment

ist vielleicht an diese Stelle der Punkt erreicht, an dem sich die Pole auch der heutigen Zeit, genauer: die moderne Naturwissenschaft in Gestalt der Quanten- und Chaostheorie und die im eigentlichen zeitlose Mystik einander annähern oder gar sich überlagern.“ A. M. Kochs, *Chaos und Individuum. Robert Musils philosophischer Roman als Vision der Moderne*, Alber, Freiburg- Munich 1996, pg. 207.

⁷⁵ „Das grössere Problem ist Gott – denn man sieht ihn nicht. Wie soll man über ihn nachdenken, wie ihn erkennen, wenn es nirgends Eindeutiges über ihn zu erfahren gibt. Un wie soll ein Mensch existieren, wenn gesagt wird, er stamme von Gott? Wie verhält man sich zu einem solchen Ursprung, den man selbst nicht kennt. Sind nicht seine Bezeugungen, wie sie immer noch amtlich und konfessionell vollzogen werden, selbst überaus fraglich? Kein Entkommen aus der Frage, keine Fraglosigkeit in Literatur und Religion, und darum nur zwei Möglichkeiten, entweder gleichgültige Abwendung oder die Fragen stellen.“ P. Deibler, *Ist der Mann ohne Eigenschaften ein Gottsucher?*, P. Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2003, pg. 16.

⁷⁶ „Aufgrund seines Unvermögens, die verlorene Ganzheit aus eigener Kraft wiederherzustellen, erlebt sich Ulrich folglich als reduziertes, fragmentarisches Ich, das sich allein in der Negation aller charakterlichen Bestimmungen konstituiert und jede Bindung an die Wirklichkeit zugunsten der Fülle der Möglichkeiten ablehnt.“ R. Schnell, „die plötzlich enthüllte Zärtlichkeit der Welt. Liebe als ästhetische und religiöse Utopie in R. Musils *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*“, L. Ebert-C. Gruber- B. Meisnitzer- S. Rettinger (Ed.), *Emotionale Grenzgänge. Konzeptualisierung von Liebe, Trauer und Angst in Sprache und Literatur*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2011 pg. 96.

⁷⁷ „Nach der *Auflösung* des substanzontologischen Weltbildes sowie der Deduktionsgrundlagen der Moral – der Moralbewusstsein und dem Sittengesetz – wendet sich Musil dem Versuch zu, eine Theorie der Moral auf der Basis naturwissenschaftlich positivistischen Denkens zu entwickeln. Die Frage nach einer rationalen Moral, die nicht mehr in einem Vernunftprinzip gründet, erfordert zunächst eine Klärung der positivistischen Bestimmung des Begriffs der Rationalität.“ W. Ego, *Abschied von der Moral. Eine Rekonstruktion der Ethik Robert Musil*, Studien zur theologischen Ethik, Herder Verlag, Wien- Freiburg, 1992, pg. 59.

⁷⁸ „Un hombre hermetico, que no esta abierto de verdad a ninguna instancia superior“, J. Ortega y Gasset, *La Rebellion de las Masas*, Prefacion, Clasicos Castalia, Madrid 1998, pg. 119

⁷⁹ „The prevailing moral code of the West was informed for centuries by the wisdom of our forefathers, but in the new vision developed by secular humanism that old code is no longer relevant. The biting challenge of Nietzsche still nags at us: If God is really dead, by what authority do we say any particular practice is prohibited or permitted? In the resulting moral disarray in our society, the most immediate of moral questions has become unsettled: How shall we raise our children? What kind of moral example should we set? What moral instruction should we convey?“ M. Novak, „Remembering The Secular Age“, *First Things*, June-July 2007. www.firstthings.com

⁸⁰ „The true Christian is not obliged to renounce the things of this world or to lessen his natural abilities. On the contrary, inasmuch as he incorporates them into his normal life in a disciplined manner, he develops and perfects them; he thereby ennobles the natural life itself, supplying efficacious values to it not only of spiritual and eternal world but also of material and earthly world.“ E. Stein, *Essays on Woman*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C.- 1996, pg. 193.

of deepest depression, there is the possibility to reconstruct or retake the lost path because, as Martin Buber affirms:

[O]f course, in many cases, a man knows his strongest feeling only in the shape of a particular passion, of the “evil urge”, which seeks to lead him astray. Naturally, a man’s most powerful desire, in seeking satisfaction, rushes in the first instance at objects which lie across his path. It is necessary, therefore, that the power of even this feeling, of even this impulse, be diverted from the casual to the essential, and from the relative to the absolute. Thus a man finds his way⁸¹.

This way or path⁸² is a continuous effort for the overcoming of one’s own human limitations but also a matter of constant renewal of the person which becomes farsighted, ready to accept challenges and sacrifices, contemplative, open to rediscover the virtues and understand the *Other* in a dialogical vision⁸³. In the passage that leads from the deconstruction to reconstruction, the individual moulds and forms his own “trajectory” without putting himself in antithesis with his peculiar human condition by also accepting his limits. He is again the *homo viator*, according to Gabriel Marcel⁸⁴. This man embodies an inner need for *higher instances* in a process, as mysterious as real, which from corporeality leads to hope and the absolute⁸⁵.

Focusing a bit longer on this topic, it is quite clear that not only is alterity⁸⁶ perceived with an interpersonal perspective but a service is offered to reason itself, which becomes formative by maintaining contacts with the outside world and opening itself to other horizons⁸⁷. The person

⁸¹ M. Buber, *The Way of Man. According to the Teaching of Hasidism*, Routledge, London-New York 2002, pg. 11.

⁸² The way of perfection and purification is a classical metaphor in the history of Christian literature and mysticism from the Fathers of the Church to Thomas von Kempis and Catherine of Siena, from the Spanish mystics of the “Siglo de Oro” to Ignatius of Loyola, from Katerina Emmerich to Thérèse of Lisieux and Faustina Kowalska, from Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney to José Maria Escrivà de Balaguer.

⁸³ Cfr. E. Baccarini, “La persona come struttura dialogica”, *Dialeghetai. Rivista telematica di Filosofia*, 1-1999 (<http://mondodomani.org/dialeghetai/eb04.htm>)

⁸⁴ Cfr. G. Marcel, *Homo Viator. Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope*, Harper & Brothers, 1962.

⁸⁵ Cfr. G. Marcel, *The Mystery of Being. Faith and Reality*, The Harvill Press, London 1951.

⁸⁶ See E. Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, Columbia University Press, New York 1999.

⁸⁷ “Ogni operazione umana è sempre formativa, e anche un’opera di pensiero e un’opera pratica richiedono l’esercizio della formatività. Un’azione virtuosa deve essere inventata come quella che è richiesta dalla legge morale in quella determinata circostanza e deve essere eseguita e realizzata con un movimento che insieme inventa il modo migliore per attuarla; nel porre e risolvere un problema, nel dedurre da un principio le conseguenze, nel condurre una dimostrazione, nel connettere ragionamenti in un complesso sistematico, bisogna compiere ed eseguire movimenti di pensiero e con atto d’invenzione scoprire quelli che la ragione richiede nel determinato caso, e formulare espressamente i pensieri.” L. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della Formatività*, Bompiani, Milano 2002 pg. 23.

realizes himself in a forming and “revelatory”⁸⁸ process projecting its vision beyond one’s own space in a mutual process of receptivity and activity⁸⁹. This is the main characteristic of human action which is, by nature, creative, projectual, seminal: here pure *techne* finds its fulfilment in a more sophisticated *poiesis*⁹⁰.

From an economic point of view, motivation and creative behaviour are essential psychological paradigms⁹¹ for the real comprehension of circumstances. They help to analyze appropriately the needs, risks and opportunities from the perspective of enduring and effective commitment and giving a high grade of responsibility to any action⁹². As J. Schumpeter from an entrepreneurial perspective⁹³ and, more recently, H. A. Simon⁹⁴, M. Csikszentmihalyi⁹⁵ and others have emphasized, the creativity and the desire to improve oneself have extremely positive influences on the personality, thanks to their multidisciplinary nature, at both the social and cognitive levels⁹⁶, leading to a mature understanding of ourselves. This positive tendency can survive only in a freedom closely tied to respect and responsibility⁹⁷ where the moral forces are not delegitimized⁹⁸, fundamental

⁸⁸ L. Pareyson, *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom. Selected Writings* edited by P.D. Burgio, Davies Group Publishers, Aurora- CO 2009, pg. 145.

⁸⁹ Cfr. P. Caravetta, “Form, Person and Inexhaustible Interpretation: Luigi Pareyson, *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom*”, *Parrhesia*, n. 12-2010, pg. 101.

⁹⁰ Cfr. W. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: an Essay in Aesthetics*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1980, pg. 244.

⁹¹ Cfr. F. H. Knight, “Economic Psychology and the Value Problem”, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, (1925) 39 (3): pg. 372-409.

⁹² “The term *Human Capital* calls attention to acts of insight such as the entrepreneur noticing significant points that others fail to see: it thus stresses intellectual skills. But while many people have bright ideas, only some of them have the other qualities necessary for entrepreneurship – the moral qualities, such as boldness, leadership, know-how, tolerance for risk, sound practical judgement, executive skills, the ability to inspire trust in others, and realism.” M. Novak, “Economics as Humanism”, *First Things*, October 1997. www.firstthings.com

⁹³ See J. A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: an Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle*, OUP, New York 1961 and T. K. McCraw, *Prophet of Innovation: Joseph Schumpeter and Creative Destruction*. Belknap Press - Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2007.

⁹⁴ See H. A. Simon, *Models of Discovery*, Riedel, Dordrecht 1977 or H.A. Simon, “Rational choice and the structure of the environment” *Psychological Review*, 1963(2), 129–138 and H.A. Simon, “Organisation and Market”, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring, 1991), pp. 25-44.

⁹⁵ See M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. Harper Perennial, New York 1996.

⁹⁶ S. Dasgupta, “Multidisciplinary Creativity: the Case of H.A. Simon”, *Cognitive Science*, vol. 27, issue 5 (2003), pg. 683-707.

⁹⁷ « Freiheit darf nicht zu einem Götzendienst werden, ohne Verantwortung, ohne Bindung, ohne Wurzeln. Die Verbindung zwischen Freiheit und Verantwortung bedarf vielmehr der Ordnung“, L. Erhard, „Freiheit und Verantwortung. Ansprache vor dem Evangelischen Arbeitskreis der CDU. 2 Juni 1961“ in O. Schlecht, *Ordnungspolitik für eine zukunftsfähige Marktwirtschaft. Orientierungen und Handlungsempfehlungen*, FAZ Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2001, pg. 18.

⁹⁸ Cfr. D. R. Lee, “Liberty and Individual Responsibility”, *The Freeman*, vol. 37 Issue 4, April 1987.

Dr. Giovanni Patriarca

human rights are protected⁹⁹ and personal and mutual dedication is appreciated and admired¹⁰⁰. This acceptance of our own nature is not only open to higher elaborated mental processes¹⁰¹ but understands that our existence is characterized not only by rights but especially by obligations and duties¹⁰² in a structurally ethical perspective¹⁰³.

This point is a deadly wound for one's own self-interest and for the conceited attempt of self-referentiality¹⁰⁴ because, as the Jesuit F. Delps stated during his imprisonment prior to execution by the Nazi dictatorship:

We pretend to be grown up and responsible; we are so proud and self-assured--and look at the result. The world lies in bomb dust and ruins about us.¹⁰⁵

Although it refers to a specific and tragic period, his words still sound like a sublime metaphor today and a warning¹⁰⁶ to our contemporaries lost in their dispersive loneliness and surrounded by "cultural ruins"¹⁰⁷. Even in a context of democratic political systems, there is a risk of a totalitarian degeneration if we do not know how to discern with prudence¹⁰⁸ and

⁹⁹ Cfr. W. Eucken, *Grundlage der Nationalökonomie*, Springer, Berlin 1965, especially pg. 239.

¹⁰⁰ Cfr. W. Röpke, *Civitas Humana. Grundfrage der Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsreform*, Rentsch, Erlenbach 1949

¹⁰¹ Cfr. A. Müller Armack, "The Principles of the Social Market Economy", in T. Koslowski (ed.), *The Social Market Economy. Theory and Ethics of the Economic Order*, Springer, Berlin 1998, pg. 255-274.

¹⁰² "Unsere Fähigkeit zur Verantwortung ist somit nicht etwas, das durch Philosophen, Politiker oder Geistliche quasi von außen in unser Leben hineingebracht würde, sie gehört vielmehr zum Grundbestand des Humanum. Wir verlieren uns selbst, wenn wir diesem Prinzip nicht zu folgen vermögen." J. Gauck, *Freiheit. Ein Plädoyer*, Kösel Verlag, Munich 2012, pg. 36.

¹⁰³ Cfr. M. Wörsdörfer, "Individual and regulatory Ethics: An Economic-Ethical and Theoretical-Historical Analysis of Ordoliberalism", *Normative Orders Working Papers 7/2011*, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁰⁴ "La crisis debe ser una ocasión de discernimiento y de actuación esperanzada para cada uno de nosotros, para los responsables públicos y para las instituciones que pueden contribuir a una salida de ella. Pero, sobre todo, la crisis debería ayudarnos a poner en Dios la referencia verificadora de nuestras actitudes y comportamientos. Sólo teniendo en cuenta la dimensión trascendente de la persona, podemos lograr un desarrollo humano integral." Conferencia Episcopal Española, *Declaración ante la crisis moral y económica*, CEE, Madrid 2009, n. 8.

¹⁰⁵ A. Delps S.J., *Prison Writings*, Orbis Book, Maryknoll 2004, pg. 67.

¹⁰⁶ A. Lob-Hüdepohl, "Die Welt nicht freiwillig räumen! Alfred Delps Anstöße für eine Theologie des politischen Engagements", *Jesuiten*, 2012/1, Munich 2012, pg. 2-3.

¹⁰⁷ A. Bagnasco, *Omelia della SS. Messa in Suffragio del Card. Giuseppe Siri*, Cattedrale di San Lorenzo - Genova 3 May 2012, www.diocesi.genova.it

¹⁰⁸ "Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context and to act decisively. Exercising this virtue often requires the courage to act in defense of moral principles when making decisions about how to build a society of justice and peace." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship. A Call to Political Responsibility*, USCCB, Washington D.C., 2007 n. 19.

Dr. Giovanni Patriarca

recognize the value, dignity and greatness of the person¹⁰⁹. Unfortunately, in some cases, positive contributions to civic participation are extremely limited or, less rarely, opposed by high levels of bureaucracy and its “cargo” of Kafkaesque foolishness, corrupt practices¹¹⁰, illegitimate presence of unnatural monopolies, barriers to knowledge with a frustrating and imperfect allocation of human capital and unfounded contempt of merit and talent.

Some of these issues have already been a source of acute reflection by thinkers of the Russian diaspora¹¹¹ during the Soviet era that, with the especially vivid bifocal philosophical speculation of N. Berdyaev¹¹², criticized state atheism and the concentration of power in their country, as well as the growing impoverishment and annihilation of values in democratic countries which are apparently indifferent to the true concepts and meaning of good and evil¹¹³.

Never before have the teachings of various Christian denominations converged on this fundamental and non-negotiable point. From an ecumenical standpoint, we cannot deny that the East and the West¹¹⁴ are

¹⁰⁹ “The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity. At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual’s earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an ‘ultimate’ but a ‘penultimate’ reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters.” John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 2.

¹¹⁰ “If corruption causes serious harm from a material point of view and places a costly burden on economic growth, still more harmful are its effects on immaterial goods, closely connected to the qualitative and human dimension of life in society.” Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Fight against Corruption*, n. 4, Vatican Press, Vatican City 2006.

¹¹¹ Cfr. J. Meyendorff, *Witness to the World*, Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Yonkers N.Y., 1987.

¹¹² Cfr. M. Markovic, *La philosophie de l’inégalité et les idées politiques de N. Berdiaev*, Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris 1978 and A. Klimov, *Nicolas Berdiaeff ou la révolte contre l’objectivation*, Editions Seghers, Paris 1967.

¹¹³ Cfr. N. Berdiaev, *Un nouveau Moyen Âge. Réflexions sur les destinées de la Russie et l’Europe*, Plon, Paris 1927, pg. 243.

¹¹⁴ “By exercising their own charism, Cyril and Methodius made a decisive contribution to the building of Europe not only in Christian religious communion but also to its civil and cultural union. Not even today does there exist any other way of overcoming tensions and repairing the divisions and antagonisms both in Europe and in the world which threaten to cause a frightful destruction of lives and values. Being Christians in our day means being builders of communion in the Church and in society. This calls for openness to others, mutual understanding, and readiness to cooperate through the generous exchange of cultural and spiritual resources. One of the fundamental aspirations of humanity today is to rediscover unity and communion for a life truly worthy of man on the worldwide level. The

characterized, at present, by the same commitment against the relativization of the person and abandonment in the desert of a dehumanized society¹¹⁵. It is not at all paradoxical that in this common challenge, all Christian faiths are growing closer, day after day, toward a necessary and deeper spiritual renewal that can look beyond contingency in the name of a shared hope.

In his homily for the period of Lent 2012, the words of Bartholomew II, Patriarch of Constantinople, are a clear analysis of the current situation in which, with a meaningful analogy, highlights the contemporary crisis as a degeneration of common sense and of consolidated religious roots, thus creating anxiety and pessimism that corrode the secular faith of people and nations:

In recent times, we observe an elevated level of concern. Many challenges arise. The world is suffering and yearns for help. Indeed, we are going through a general test. Some people call it a financial decline; others refer to it as a political crisis. So far as we are concerned, it is a matter of spiritual perversion. And a solution exists. Many resolutions are proposed and numerous viewpoints are heard. Yet, the problems persist. People feel deserted and alone. Their deeper nature is ignored. They remain in the gloom of confusion and depression. Irrespective of the direction or solution proposed, the various answers that are offered cannot redeem humanity. For, from the outset, they render it captive to corruption and death.¹¹⁶

Kyrril I, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, using an even more poignant tone, admonishes with stunning clarity:

Church, conscious of being the universal sign and sacrament of salvation and of the unity of the human race, declares her readiness to accomplish this duty of hers, to which ‘the conditions of this age lend special urgency so that all people joined more closely today by various social, technical, and cultural bonds can achieve as well full unity in Christ.’” John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli*, VII-27.

¹¹⁵ “As I have affirmed many times, contemporary culture, particularly that of Europe, runs the risk of amnesia, of forgetting and therefore abandoning that extraordinary heritage that the Christian faith has generated and inspired. It constitutes the essential framework of European culture, and not of it alone. Beyond the religious life and the witness of many generations of believers, Europe's Christian roots in fact also encompass its invaluable cultural and artistic patrimony: the boast and precious resource of the peoples and countries in which the Christian faith in its diverse manifestations has engaged in dialogue with culture and the arts, animating and inspiring them, fostering and promoting creativity and human genius like never before. Those roots are still alive and fruitful today, in both East and West, and they can or rather they must inspire a new humanism, a new season of authentic human progress, in order to respond effectively to the numerous and sometimes crucial challenges which our Christian communities and our societies must face. Above all, the first is that of secularization, which not only tends to disregard God and his design but also ends up denying human dignity itself, with a view to a society regulated solely by selfish interests.” Benedict XVI, *Speech at the Concert in honour of Benedict XVI, promoted by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill I of Moscow and All Russia for the Days of Russian Culture and Spirituality*, May 20, 2010. www.vatican.va

¹¹⁶ Bartholomew of Constantinople, *Catechetical Homily for Holy and Great Lent*, February 24 2012, www.patriarchate.org/documents/2012-greatlent

Dr. Giovanni Patriarca

May our behaviour, in contradiction to the evil spirit of this age, become the visible affirmation of Eternal Truth. For, although we live today in conditions of social and religious freedom, the striving to live in accordance with Christian moral norms signifies, as before, a movement against the current. It reveals a refusal to accept those stereotypes of behaviour and the position of the justification of sin which insistently and systematically make their way into peoples' lives through modern means of influencing the consciousness.¹¹⁷

Each warning expresses the need for a commitment against fatalism¹¹⁸, for the reconstruction of confidence in the convergence of justice and social opportunities¹¹⁹. And, therefore, requiring the revival of "laboratories of humanity"¹²⁰ that can rebuild an apparently lost identity, with the power of understanding, patience, forgiveness and enthusiasm: the identity of love, hope and trust. Miguel de Unamuno, in his philosophical masterpiece, defines this essential intrinsic necessity stating that "*hope in action is charity, and beauty in action is goodness*"¹²¹ and adds that:

To love with the spirit is to pity, and he who pities most, loves most. Men aflame with a burning charity towards their neighbours are thus enkindled because they have touched the depth of their own misery, their own apparentiality, their own nothingness, and then, turning their newly opened eyes upon their fellows, they have seen that they also are miserable, apparential, condemned to nothingness, and they have pitied them and loved them.¹²²

I would like to conclude with an analogy from the history of art. At the end of the 19th Century the French painter Jean-Charles Cazin became famous for having painted various landscapes at dusk in common places such as countryside and rural villages with very delicate colours trying to capture the deep meaning of the absolute and the beauty of the infinite over the inescapable passage of time. That instant, full of references¹²³ and

¹¹⁷ Kyrill I of Moscow and all Russia, *Paschal Message*, 14 April 2012

www.mospat.ru/en/2012/04/14/news61457/

¹¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, n. 2-3.

¹¹⁹ Cfr. Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, *Chancengerechte Gesellschaft. Leitbild fuer eine freiheitliche Ordnung*, DBK-Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen, n. 34, Bonn 2011, Chap. 2.

¹²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the World Congress for the Pastoral Care of International Students*, 2 December 2011 www.vatican.va

¹²¹ M. De Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, Collins- The Fontana Library, London-Glasgow 1962, pg. 202.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pg. 143.

¹²³ "In the manner of Cazin's painting we never remark rough impasto, the violence of the palette knife, or the caprices of the undisciplined brush. The aspect of his pictures is always attractive, and their suave and distinguished tone is often absolutely fascinating; the details are subordinate to the general unity; the picture is one and harmonious. M. Cazin's dream of life is sweet, tender, full of compassion." T. Child, "Some Modern French Painters", *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 80- Issue 480, May 1890, Harper and Bros, New York 1890, pg. 128.

metaphysical projections¹²⁴, is still called “Cazin’s Hour”¹²⁵. Perhaps in a moment of silence and contemplation through the signs of beauty in the simplicity or the harshness of daily life¹²⁶, we can enjoy once again the *real values* and reconstruct a virtuous cycle of mutual understanding, selfless solidarity and reciprocal respect.

¹²⁴ “Cazin can be described as a painter who thinks. [He], on the other hand, may be called a realist. Completely cultured and familiar with the legends and poems of ages, Cazin’s faculty of pictorial conception seems to be aroused to activity only when it comes into contact with reality. He sees an actual scene in nature, and then his imagination interprets it and adorns it with some eternal symbol of compassion, of charity, of resignation, or of simple human sentiment. Constantly interrogating nature, incessantly recording notes of reality, making drawing after drawing and study after study, indefatigable in the court he pays to his mistress nature, Cazin the painter and limner is the prodigiously skilful auxiliary to Cazin the poet, the man of wide culture, the grand artist of strong, patient and delicate soul.” T. Child, “Some Modern French Painters”, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 80- Issue 480, May 1890, Harper and Bros, New York 1890, pg. 131.

¹²⁵ Cfr. S. Lemoine (ed.), *De Puvis de Chavanne à Matisse et Picasso : vers l’art moderne*, Flammarion, Paris 2002.

¹²⁶ “It may have happened on some occasion that you paused before a sculpture, a picture, a few verses of a poem or a piece of music that you found deeply moving, that gave you a sense of joy, a clear perception, that is, that what you beheld was not only matter, a piece of marble or bronze, a painted canvas, a collection of letters or an accumulation of sounds, but something greater, something that ‘speaks’, that can touch the heart, communicate a message, uplift the mind. A work of art is a product of the creative capacity of the human being who in questioning visible reality, seeks to discover its deep meaning and to communicate it through the language of forms, colour and sound. Art is able to manifest and make visible the human need to surpass the visible, it expresses the thirst and the quest for the infinite. Indeed it resembles a door open on to the infinite, on to a beauty and a truth that go beyond the daily routine. And a work of art can open the eyes of the mind and of the heart, impelling us upward.” Benedict XVI, *General Audience in Castel Gandolfo*, 31 August 2011.

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