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LABOREM EXERCENS AS A HISTORICAL TURNING-POINT IN THE PERSONALIZATION OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

ABSTRACT

Doubtless that which strongly links Karol Wojtyła's *Laborem exercens* encyclical with Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* is not so much philosophy of work as the personalistic anti-feudalism that is equally alive in both works. The personalistic trait, in Marxism merely an (unpursued) option mentioned in the *Manuscripts*, was taken further—philosophically, and not just ethically—in *Laborem exercens*, where the person becomes an ontological category (in light both of the transcendent existence of a tri-personal God and the transcendence of the communities created by human beings, who are only able to live in communities). Also, the person acquired an ontological-social dimension by determining the boundaries of humanity's co-creative (also in the world-creating sense) communion with God as the ideal of community-based material and social existence. And this is also the guiding perspective of my initial analysis of the personalization process underway in Polish society and the post-Vatican-II Church. Both are gradually—if not without some difficulty—learning to part with the non-personalistic models characteristic for the previous, still considerably feudalism-influenced era, which manifested themselves as much in the institutionalism of official Marxism as the socially (not religiously!) motivated doctrines of the Church.

Key words: the anti-feudal encyclical *Laborem exercens*; work is not Divine punishment but a calling; the personal category as a sphere of communion with God; “ontological” personalism; subjective and objective aspects of work; post-Vatican-II Church; the personalistic revaluation of the Christian approach to social roles; the “inorganic” human body in Hegel (spirit) and Marx's *Manuscripts*; alienation: separation into objective and subjective work conditions.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

The encyclical *Laborem exercens* is not only profoundly Polish in spirit but, viewed from today's perspective, also reflects the serious difficulties Poles have with reforming their post-feudal (and often Catholic-rooted) consciences. From

a Catholic perspective the encyclical's concept of human personality is a successful effort at applying the distinctly anthropological and new category of labor as a key instrument in resolving social issues in place of the heretofore obvious but sociologically indistinct category of love. Thanks to *Laborem exercens*, Catholicism's official human doctrine is now open to broad scholarly study: between basic family structures and humanity at large extends a broad sphere of human relations formed by work, which promise to be a good location for a scientifically-based Church social doctrine.

John Paul II viewed the need to amend this doctrine in a primarily philosophical and most general sense—as an attempt to bridge the metaphysical chasm between God and humanity created by the original sin dogma. In this new approach the personal category is the place designated by God for humans to encounter His presence. Like God, humans are persons, transcendental beings, subjects of the living world and not one of its objects. As persons in a community of persons humans are to “rule the Earth”—and not only its inorganic matter: being human also means ruling over all that lives, crawls, swims and flies. According to *Genesis* the first form of such creative human rule (and expressively symbolic human activity) was the naming of all objects.

The Divine command to rule the Earth is addressed to humans understood as men and women, and supplements another godly ordainment: to multiply. Moreover, it was uttered before man's banishment from Eden, which makes it distinctly and eternally positive. It means that humans as persons toiled as “gardeners of the Earth” already in Paradise, hence the aristocratic “right to laziness”—or, more mildly, inactivity—is since *Laborem exercens* no longer a Catholic ideal (as it was for Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue). The scale of this reinterpretation of Catholic lore is immense in that that it changes work understood by owners of slaves and peasants as punishment for humanity's original sin into no less than a “Divine calling”—something which brings mankind closer to, not away from God as in creating the world, God (the first person) worked, which is best evidenced by the information that he rested on the seventh day. God was generally pleased with His personal, creative existence, in which he reaffirmed Himself by stating that all He had created was “good”.

Laborem exercens transformed work from enslaving, toilsome and often belittled labor into a pious duty, an active and creative form of existence, and a path to personal self-fulfillment and self-improvement (“becoming more human”¹) for the masters of the living world. Humans are masters, but themselves have a master—they are not masters over other humans! This form of personalism, therefore, may be interpreted not only anthropologically (which is already more than just sociologically), but also ontologically. According to *Laborem exercens* the person of God and human persons really do exist, hence, if humans

¹ John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*. [“A Calling For Work” —text and commentary edited by the Rev. Jan Krucina], Wrocław 1983, p. 30.

can become persons only in human communities, its main concept is at once ontologically pluralistic and creative. From a social perspective the mystery of the Holy Trinity is axiologically personalistic: God is one, but He exists in communities of creatively collaborating persons. A model of creative, interpersonal, non-egotistical human existence.

Evidently *Laborem exercens* does not promote individualism, its highest value being a community co-created by persons (the pre-condition of being a person). In sociological terms this is a variation of the parts over wholes theory. Marxism, on the other hand, proclaims the superiority of the whole (not so much the state as society and human communities) over its parts. Both standpoints are relatively moderate and devoid of radical traits like individualism or state control (although Stalinism, the driving force of “real socialism”, was state hegemony *par excellence*).

Thus, the first statement in this personalistic alphabet is that persons are more than individuals and components of society, that their existence is independent of Nature. Marx, a materialist and doubtless beyond naturalism, voiced similar ideas: continuing Hegel’s ideology from the publication of *Manuscripts...*, he also spoke about the “inorganic human body”², a collective generic body also mentioned by Mounier,³ which for Hegel is essentially objective spirit and Marx calls a “generic reservoir of not only technological but also social and institutional achievements”—in other word, the total result of humanity’s physical and mental labor, from which each person should be able to take “according to need”.

Personalistically oriented, communist ideology professes the creative elimination of such barriers and the evolution of human beings into subjects which actually, creatively and personally benefit from their species’ attainments. In *Laborem exercens*, however, John Paul II calls this pure technology without any institutional or social aspect, with work viewed not as a post-Hegelian, generic dimension of human praxis but solely through the prism of its produce and material aspect—capital (“the fruit of the historical heritage of human labor”⁴)—“each human being who is a subject of work and wishes to make use of its modern tools and production means must first acquire knowledge about the fruits of the labor of those humans, who invented, designed, built, improved and continue to improve these tools”⁵.

² K. Marx, *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts 1844*, in: K. Marx, F. Engels, *Works*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1962, pp. 552, 554.

³ E. Mounier, *Introduction to Existentialisms and Selected Other Works*, selected and edited by J. Zablocki, Cracow 1964, p. 31. Interestingly this is also mentioned by Henri Bergson in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, translated by P. Kostyło SJ and K. Skorulski SJ, Cracow 1993, p. 252: “**our great inorganic body** [underlining J.L.K.] is the location of our conceivable and theoretically possible activity”. This especially concerns the “great mystics”. See also pp. 300–302.

⁴ *Laborem exercens*, op. cit., p. 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Here the unity of “labor” and “capital” does not attain structural or capitalistic levels but merely an anthropological dimension, which means not so much rejection as the inability to see the structuralistic aspect of the Marxian work alienation idea, or the factual division of work into subjective and objective work conditions,⁶ where the “immediate producer” (in capitalism the proletariat) is for the first time in his history separated from the sphere of objective work conditions, of which he was heretofore part as an enslaved “taking tool” (feudal peasantry owned the tools with which they worked their landlords’ acres).

From the historiosophical point of view the work concept contained in *Laborem exercens* clearly moves on the naturalistic level, which only Marx’s post-Hegelian praxis concept managed to cross. In other words, it fails to absorb the latest achievements of historical materialism understood as a non-naturalistic materialism in which capitalism is artificial, unnatural, class-structured and logically contradictory. This was only possible after the emergence of structuralistically-approachable production means ownership/non-ownership relations—hence its retroactive transmission to earlier ages. According to structuralism “human anatomy is the key to an ape’s anatomy”,⁷ meaning that a more developed (complete) structure is the key to less developed structures still approachable in naturalistic categories (e.g. an anthill or beehive as an ultra-naturalistic statehood model based on antiquated work divisions; castes). Fitting here is Engels’ analogy with condensation: solid (castes, ice) liquid (social strata, water) vaporous (social classes, steam).

⁶ Cf. J.L. Krakowiak, *The Continuity of the Marxian Materialistic Approach to History: the Alienation Theory*, 1978 [unpublished doctoral thesis], passim; The division of labor category underlay all subsequent Marxian historical materialism understood as a science involving **five** forms of material movement, of which social existence was the highest. Historical materialism, on the other hand, was seen to address only the **fifth** form of material movement. Dialectical materialism was traditionally considered to be a **naturalistic** theory relating to **four** forms, including the concept of life as biological existence involving material exchange between living organisms and their environment and death as the result of failed exchange (or the inability to practice this form of movement).

The division of labor category made sense only when viewed from the position of non-naturalistic materialism. It described capitalism as an unnatural, artificial and dialectical structure based on logical contradiction, however the social status category which adequately described feudal society was not yet dialectical. Its “dialectization” was only possible after capitalism attained a more mature and sophisticated form, and then it was defined in the language of structuralistic contradiction. In other words, this perspective is only possible with a **combination** of work alienation theories [*Manuscripts...*] aimed at segmenting the work process [*Grundrisse...*], and upon acceptance of the “primary capitalistic accumulation” concept [final part of *Capital*, vol. 1] and recognition of the scientific character of materialistic history’s approach to the “division of labor” issue, from which this materialistic theory derives all its other categories [*German ideology*]. This was not possible before 1939, when *Grundrisse ...* appeared in print in Moscow as the last of the mentioned works.

⁷ According to Marx human anatomy was by no means a science involving human beings, but only a species of ape; despite Marx’s later distancing from this positivistic and naturalistic materialism, it continue to reappear in the dominating ideology of naturalistic “Marxism”.

In the personalistic approach human individuals are part of Nature and subject to natural laws. As persons, however, they rule over Nature (although according to *Laborem exercens* also subjects of the sphere of that which lives), hence are increasingly independent beings approaching the sphere of the spiritual. The true human element in a person is subject to material and social conditions which all persons should strive to provide. Christian personalism will add that if persons are not only social or cultural but also transcendental beings, then they are able to attain not merely earthly honors, but also eternity and immortality; this, however, would probably require rejection of humanity's striving for generic domination over life (the essence of communism!) and suppression of absolutistic autotelism. Granting humans power over the "visible world", *Laborem exercens* fails to state whether this world is the entire world, hence the power it confers is rather relative and mainly restricted to **trusteeship**. Therefore, the statement that "the world of a person is the world of a human being" is true for personalistic Marxism but **not quite** for the personalistic Stoics, Kant and Christianity in general, whose "state of aims and goals" embrace all possible persons, autotelic beings and mere subjects of the living world—including a "person of all persons", a unique, supernatural personalistic oneness which transcends every human person. In the ethnic perspective Kant had already reached the autotelic level of thought, however this sphere is, of course, only intelligible and hence existentially independent.

Suspension of the Divine transcendence issue (no less!), which, as the above shows, preconditions an anthropologically true dialogue with Marx, doubtless allowed a closer approach to his philosophy, which also considered the subjects of non-alienated work to be conscious and free beings—in other words, self-deciding, creative persons, although no more than parts of a bigger collective subject. In *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts 1844* Marx noted, that the capitalist-era direct producer (the working class) had lost the subjectivity and creativity postulated by philosophy as the goal of history. In fact under capitalism the "direct producer" not so much remained as became free of enslavement by specific other humans beings. However—to quote the Polish poet Maria Konopnicka—he became nothing more than a "hireling" structurally forced to lease himself to owners of "objective work conditions".

From a pan-human, above-class (i.e. communist) perspective, Marx understood history as humanity's increasingly conscious transformation into a collective subject of history (*Manuscripts*: "man's getting up on his own two feet") understood as a science in which natural and human history can not be viewed separately: "the history of Nature and the history of humans, which condition each other"⁸.

⁸ K. Marks, F. Engels, *German Ideology*, in: K. Marks, F. Engels, *Works*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1961, p. 18.

This is important as there exists an interpretation of *Laborem exercens* which accuses Marx of favoring the objective, capitalistic aspect of work (in *Letter on Humanism* M. Heidegger pointed out that Marx considered matter to be only the material (object) of work, hence saw humans as its intentional subject with the proletariat, like Esau, bereft of its “birthright”—its subjectivity (Heidegger calls this *non-nativity*⁹). John Paul II, on the other hand, is right in accusing real socialism—or “communism”—of subjugating the human personality to the structures of a party state (or, if one so wishes, a statelike party). It is true, however, that *Laborem exercens* shows a tendency to speak about each and every person in the context of the intentional co-creation of a real community, which is decidedly and directly personalistic. Whereas Marx’s direct statements address only work in the general sense, i.e. its economic-structural or social collective aspects, therefore he speaks about humans as such, although he recognizes their conditioning by economy and society. Marx thought along structuralistic and holistic, not existential lines; in Poland Marxism acquired this approach thanks to a Sartre-following interpretation by Adam Schaff.

In the present effort to describe the convergence between these basically opposite—and now certainly totally anti-feudal—schools of thought, I have set *Laborem exercens* against *Manuscripts...* and *Grundrisse...*, which clearly showed the personalistic, freedom-oriented aspects of early Marxian anthropology (which, of course, helps idealize and personalize Marxism).

However:

1) as usual, the practical execution of ideas proves far removed from theory; Marx’s *Manuscripts...* were excellent as a tool with which to criticize real socialism—and universally applied to this end—while *Laborem exercens* is rarely used to criticize the non-personalistic, post-feudal character of the Polish Church and Polish society. Here, I would like to simultaneously activate both these anti-feudal models of evaluating the real existence of persons and social institutions; one can call it monitoring the social process of the creative personality’s emergence on the global historical arena.

2) the convergence of work theories was aimed (successfully) at breaking Marxism’s monopoly over working-class interests and replacing it by Catholic social doctrine—understood more as an ethical choice than a proposed “third political option” (one only needs to compare the pre-1980 Polish-language bibliography on work with what was on the market several years later to see how this changed).

In the present dialogue-based, comparative attempt I will use the person category to place the issue of human subjectiveness in the context of relations between individual human beings (e.g. family) and the attitudes of individuals towards social groups and institutions, and measure the degree of society’s sub-

⁹ M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* (transl. J. Tischner), in: *To Build, Live, Think*. Selected essays (selected, edited and with an introduction by K. Michalski), Warszawa 1977, pp. 102–103.

jectiveness towards the state. Persons viewed as subjects of work possess a dignity unpossessed by **objective work conditions** (to use Marx's terminology), or the components of non-personal capital understood as creative existence; John Paul II calls this the **objective** aspect of work; consequently, in his still naturalistic approach to human history, he obviously fails to see that capitalism also (or, perhaps, most of all) reproduces precisely this **structural separation** of objective and subjective work conditions—thereby reproducing divisions in the work process. From a quasi-naturalistic perspective the encyclical also propagates the idea of Nature and its resources as a supernaturally interpreted Divine gift: “in each development phase of human labor mankind experiences its factual and fundamental receipt of the gifts of ‘Nature’—therefore, ultimately, the *Creator*”¹⁰. Generic and not class-oriented anthropology (conceptual study of human essence), in other words *metaphysical* short-sightedness entailing the **elimination of the possibility to inquire about the cultural unity of mankind**, allows us (following its supplementation by a supernaturalness other than Marx's—the metaphysical concept of supra-Nature) to ignore the structural dimension of Marxian thought, the main novelty in Marx's now non-naturalistic historical materialism.

Marx not only criticized the very division into subjective (the proletariat) and objective (property of the capitalist class) work conditions and separation of the proletarian direct producer from the latter (which was not the case either with slaves or serfs). Marx wants to abolish this post-feudal division of labor, or “hired labor as such”, seeing in it an economically harmful road to depersonalization and capitalism's reproduction of an existing essential division of work into subjective and objective work conditions (after *Grundrisse...*, the residue of the 1st volume of *Capital*), erroneously branded a “alienation of work” (after *Manuscripts...*). Marx considered hired labor as contradictory not so much to being a person (in the personalistic sense) as the idea of subjectiveness, or the self-government of each human being; hence the Kantian-Schillerian formulations and their practical implementation—“the passage from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom”.

Notwithstanding the evident differences shown above, a common element here is the **rejection of the post-feudal idea of "condemnation to dependence on Nature" (i.e. necessities)** in favor of human subjectiveness towards Nature; in Christianity's supernatural perspective this did not, however, mean the full sovereignty of human existence, which had to accept that which stood above it. Is, therefore, humanity's overlord a master who speaks to change—a pre-ethical “verbal happening” escaping the submission-rebellion alternative, or a master who enslaves?; the former essentially answers the idea of contemporary “faith”

¹⁰ *Laborem exercens*, op. cit., p. 36.

while the latter—“religion”—means remaining within the realm of “archaic life structures” (after Paul Ricoeur¹¹).

PERSONALIZATION: A GENERAL VIEW

The personalization category has a historiosophical dimension at least since Emmanuel Mounier, and a cosmic one since Teilhard de Chardin. The former speaks about the phases and milestones on the path to personalization amidst a sea of non-personality, and understands the personalization process as a constant battle between the forces of personalization and depersonalization, which entails the creative absorption of natural forces, where matter can lead to personalization or, in the worst case, alienation and inertia. This process does incorporate Nature in human history but cannot completely submit it to human affairs; Marx not only defended the dignity of utilitarian values against the absolute monopoly of exchangeable values, but also stood up for the esthetic values of the natural world in including the beauty aspect in his approach to the human species (*Manuscripts...* as the aftermath of the third critique of Kant).

Nonetheless the cosmic (and historically-generically anti-feudal) idea of “deifying matter” primarily assumes the elevation of matter to personal existence (according to Teilharda humanity is the coupling piece of cosmic evolution), and, in combination with Parusia its existence in the personal world. This personalism is neither spiritualism nor radical realism. As Mounier said: the human being is a whole both in body and spirit. Nature is not a given thing but an existence affirmed as a creative, personal construction and factual enhancement of the personalization process – a granted extension of the human body. Thus the individual’s feudal ties to Nature are transformed into its domination over Nature; to use Hegel’s terms: Nature becomes a spirit or existence with its own gravity centre. The person concept rejects dualism as an abstract viewpoint and sees the personal world as a creatively constructed world. The person does not work against the individual and should show concern for the individual’s material and social existence.

Indeed *Laborem exercens* contents itself with propagating the primate of the subjective aspect of the work process, however in this it shares the personalistic aspect of the Marxian de-alienation idea (evidently neglected by Marxists). This is among others evident in the acceptance by Church social doctrine of the essentially socialistic concept of the “right to work”, in result of which Christian personalism almost automatically became a quasi-social-democratic critique of unemployment. Also, demands for a more Christian treatment of the handicapped are today no longer limited to appeals for material support (slightly re-

¹¹ P. Ricoeur, *Religion, Atheism, Faith* (transl. H. Bortnowska), in: *Existence and Hermeneutics. Treatises on Method* (selected, edited and with a postscript by S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1975, pp. 271, 276–283).

sembling “feed animals” campaigns), but also concern the state’s obligations regarding the adequate professional training of disabled persons and help in their later employment. Similarly, the right to work is not a sole privilege of the natives of a country, but also extends on foreign labor.

In the personalistic perspective the post-feudal nobility’s and intelligentsia’s treatment of peasants as a mongrel breed in a pedigreed society (see J. Chałasiński, *The Post-Feudal Genealogy of the Polish Intelligentsia*) can no longer be considered Christian as it is the peasant who naturally “rules the Earth” as a ode of not only servile but also creative humanity and its lawful “landlord”. Here property can only be attained by “one’s own work” and not noble birth! This is the essence of Martin Luther’s, Karl Marx’s and Karol Wojtyła’s anti-reactionist approach.¹² Likewise calling workers jobs was and remains an expression of feudal aristocratic contempt not only for manual labor as such, but also the “humanity” of the working class (working people as such), whom they considered “born to work”. Probably the present Polish ruling elite’s recent attacks against “eggheads” were also addressed to the Catholic-feudal sentiments born from this past reactionary contempt. Is it really a thing of the past?

According to *Laborem exercens* the term “unemployed mother” is an essential untruth. If raising humans is not regarded as work and not respected as such, it is because of the “traditional disregard for the work of women and women in general” and the treatment of women as something inferior and not quite human; up to and after World War Two the Sixth Commandment as printed in most prayer-books admonished not to “desire the wife of your fellow human, nor his ox, nor donkey, nor any other thing which is his”. Apparently, if they were aligned with objects rather than persons, women were not considered to be “fellow humans” but live robots and the private property of their husbands—a still enslaved, impersonal, naturally-provided (and hence cost-free) workforce. This was accompanied by the equally naturalistic and derogatory belief spread by the rural-descended part of the bourgeoisie that children “grew by themselves like corn” (Wyspiański’s *Wedding*). According to this lore the upbringing process was instinctive and beyond scientific knowledge, a traditional domain of the Church (and today also schools) rather than the family.

A calling for work also assumes activity on the inter-personal relations plane. In this perspective a person is not a single, isolated monad concerned solely about its own salvation. Personalism means openness to others, seeking communication paths, consistent and perseverent effort to overcome the deficit on brotherhood, and ties with natural human communities. Personalism stands in an anti-liberal union with community-based, not state-controlled Marxism.

Indeed *Laborem exercens* states that the universal applications of goods are a right superior to the right of their personal ownership as the riches of Nature are God-given and not created by man. Hence ownership of production means is

¹² *Laborem exercens*, op. cit., p. 36.

less important than work and production means may not be owned in ways that disrupt the work process. This leads to demands of participation in, co-ownership of and, in some cases, the nationalization of production means. Here the subjectiveness of work and the human being as a person refers to a collective social subject; owners of production means can not infringe on human rights. Thus, the Roman concept of private ownership as the right to use and abuse is no longer considered a universal right. This also means rejection of the reactionary family model where the husband is a private owner entitled to abuse his power (reluctance to disrupt this model was the reason why the family's absolute autonomy was unquestioned even in cases which blatantly defied the rules of personalistic community). Reactionary Catholicism still defends this feudal and tyranny-based family structure.

Therefore, *Laborem exercens* is a critique not so much of moves to nationalize production means—although it is important that they be well-weighted and accurately targeted—but society's possible loss of subjectiveness to a formal monopoly of decision-makers. Also in such cases it is important for the direct producer to feel he is working for himself as a subject of a work process to which he is entitled to contribute his personal initiative, inventiveness and enterprise. This results in a reformatory pro-capitalistic ethic, with the direct producer content that his work is "good". The idea is for humans to mature through work, passing successive tests in "active" virtues like industriousness and thoroughness, and aware of the purposefulness of their work and professional skills. The goal is not altruism but personal fulfillment, an idea Erich Fromm developed in his references to Marx's *Manuscripts*. Equally important, however, is collective administration, the incorporation of science into political decision-making and excellence in executing decisions.

PERSONALIZATION VS. DE-PERSONALIZATION FORCES IN THE POLISH CHURCH AND POLISH SOCIETY

The post-conciliar church undertook some steps to personalize relations during services, a trend the present Pope has to a degree restricted:

1. Now priest does not hold service turning his back to the faithful, he **rather strives to activate and inspire them.**

2. Services are held in the native languages of congregations, gaining on comprehensibility and intellectual impact at the cost of ritual; thus faith and *ratio* are reconciled, knowledge ceases to be an enemy of faith and wisdom the sole privilege of church hierarchs, and the faithful need not be deprived of light to remain true to their religion.

3. The faithful exchange peace signs, thus signaling that they constitute the Church as a real community of people. Although this does not transfer very well onto non-religious relations, the vertical, expressly pastoral, hierarchic and Orthodox-patterned "one shepherd, one flock" relation between the clergy and the

faithful is no longer the only possible form of social intercourse within the Church (as Foucault so inspiringly noted¹³) and horizontal interpersonal relations are gradually becoming a reality.

I shall take the liberty to state that this resembles another form of opposition against “democratic centralism”—the “horizontal movements” practiced by the Polish communist party in its final years, where party members formed spontaneous groups without asking their hierarchs’ permission. Contrary to Protestant communities, the Catholic parish is still far removed from civic society ideology as it can only exist—as all Catholic associations—when ruled by a clerical hierarch or official—never a lay person. This means that unlike Kant’s “state of aims and goals”, Catholic communities **must** have a superior, hence hierarchism is an inherent element of Catholicism.

Even such innocent forays into civic openness as the Lublin Diocese’s announcement of its balance sheets find no followers. And indeed—why should not such matters be kept secret from the lay part of society?! “Glasnost” ideology certainly interfered with the party’s domination over society, besides community somehow does not fit in with hierarchism, party or church; is this not a somewhat diluted form of state control, the domination of an institutionalized whole (which also possesses a monopoly for truth) over parts? The Reformation’s elimination of this monopoly for spreading the Divine Word also helped combat illiteracy, thus activating the sphere of religiously motivated theoretical hermeneutics. Catholicism, on the other hand (as Hegel put it), remained true to listening, hence also obedience. This is why Poland still makes one want to ask why, if its Church is so mighty and its theology so advanced, are its Catholics so weak and utterly dependent on literal interpretations of religious lore? Could it also be because they themselves never took the trouble to comprehend them? (this, of course, a rethorical question).

4. I believe many Polish parishes were truly shocked by the gifts sent by the West during the martial law years. It was then that the Polish clergy realized, that they had to date taken little actual interest in personal matters—even within its parishes. It appeared that lay persons often knew more about social needs, which in some parishes inspired a long-dormant community spirit and various forms of social aid. Still today the Polish Church is capable of open (and mainly envy-driven) criticism of persons who successfully inspire public activity in aid of the needy outside its official channels, at the same time spending more time and effort on protecting its institutional status than helping people in need. Are Marek Kotański, Father Arkadiusz Nowak, Jerzy Owsiak, Sister Chmielowska and Anna Dymna not today’s personified saints?! In the name of what institutional, human-hostile and anti-personal values must these arch-personalistic

¹³ M. Foucault, “*Omnes et singulatim*”: a Contribution to the Critique of Political Reason”, in: *Filozofia, historia, polityka. Wybór pism* [Philosophy, History, Politics. Selected Writings], translated and with an introduction by D. Leszczyński and L. Rasiński, Warszawa—Wrocław 2000.

persons be put down?! Is it not utterly shocking that such Samaritans often become the subject of public condemnation solely because they dare to do good outside Church control? Still strongly alive here is the negative adoration of evil in place of incrementing good—especially in the recent “clean hands” policy which Moutier so rightly called a form of “intimidating the spirit”.

5. More young Catholic groups have appeared, they are, however, ostensibly hierarchic and devoted less to teaching personalistic behavior than training executive personnel called “animators”. This does give rise to questions about the domination of institutional interests over “love thy neighbor” policy.

6. Doubtless the now well-established tradition of guild-organized pilgrimages to sacred religious sites is a form of community which enhances solidarity amongst and with working people.

7. The relatively open, though obviously controlled youth meetings organized by the charismatic Father Góra in Lednica seem to have a particularly communal character. Dominant here is a spirit of disinterestedness (if slightly tainted by snobbery), or service in return for the grace of salvation and not payment. This also appears to be the aim of the Stoicism-derived quest for good as a form of existence with no rewards for doing good. On this Kant wrote quite clearly: moral humans deserve and wish to attain happiness, but cannot achieve it by themselves, thus can neither demand nor expect it; seen from the perspective of personalistic morality this would be evidence of its absence. However, grace understood as the feudal right to confer privileges is also more whimsical than moral.

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on professor T. Tołłoczko’s question to the Rev. W. Hryniewicz during a workshop: faithful Catholics usually interpret religious scripture literally, i.e. almost materialistically, whilst religious formulas are idealistic and their deep, symbolic and often hidden content should always be approached hermeneutically and philosophically, and not literally.

I absolutely agree with professor Hryniewicz that in the case of personalism, a philosophy that deals with personal and not objective existence, the only acceptable hermeneutics is purposeful theology and not causality or determinism. Consequently, in seeking its deeper content, one must ask oneself for what purpose and to what end one is doing so, and not why (as science does). God’s Word should therefore be understood as a teaching and we should be asking about the intentions of the Divine Person and not its ontology: objects as products of human labor should also be viewed as purposeful personal expression addressed to other persons. In the second, causal case, thus-interpreted faith quickly acquires a quasi-scientific certainty about objects, hence in fact accepts the non-subjectiveness of the Divine Person—which is in the highest degree contradictory to the divinity concept itself. In this interpretation God must submit to the cause-and-effect rule together with the inanimate and natural world,

which means humanity is able to force His hand; Divine Grace understood as the inexplicable whim of a feudal landlord endowed with a quasi-legal right to confer privilege is no solution here.

Polish mentality, especially Polish post-feudal Catholicism, in which most priests were recruited from the peasantry (priesthood being for a long time its almost sole advancement possibility), is still contaminated by selfhood-derived thinking and ethic. I mean not so much the post-feudal reglamentation trend in socialism (still happily adhered to by the ruling elites), but the politically post-feudal attitude to power understood as “first night rights”, a privilege once enjoyed by feudal landed gentry and now abused by the plebeian gentry of the Self-Defense party (Samoobrona).

I must stress that in my belief law as such did not function in the medieval era nor its mentality. In force instead was a system based on privileges granted by sovereigns to their vassals; this was a semblance of law, where exceptions were the rule. The ruler’s right to capriciousness was founded in religion and messianism, not Roman lore, and was interpreted personalistically not formally as people were not equal: some, anointed by a Divine grace to represent God on Earth, were entitled privilege and punish according to their imperial whim, while the peasantry was considered a not-quite-human underclass (in fact all not of noble birth were “rabble”); The *Liber chororum* compiled in the early 17th century by Walerian Nekanda Trepka is a bulky volume listing plebeian-born aspirants to the nobility. By posing as gentry without being born into it they were in fact usurping class and not state rights. This religion- and Catholic-rooted confusion of feudal privilege with law shows we still do not possess a bona fide legal culture.

For this reason justice is immediately linked with punishment, with “eternal justice” calling for “eternal punishment”—Hell. Nietzsche tackled enslavement resentments with the following hermeneutics (“scorpion”): I am just, therefore I shall be avenged by God (the stick!); revenge is sweet, sayeth the Lord. The mentality of slaves is too tainted by the idea of victory as the other side’s defeat and annihilation. Can the other be any argument at all for this kind of morality? Moreover, I believe the morality concept to be essentially personalistic. What moral pleasure can I derive from watching others suffer? Why should feasting on life’s cruelties (?) be considered a way of doing good? Is this what personalistic humanity is about?!

Meanwhile the mentioned Stoical-Kantian, gratuity-based ethic does without the external attributes of reward (the carrot—also salvation). Is not being good itself the highest good? Is their master’s praise not the best way for slaves to experience good? Slaves must not be made to feel like an independent source of good. This, of course, may be read as conceit, but perhaps in *Laborem exercens* it refers more to being a “co-creator” of God and His act of creating life and the world, which He experienced as “doing good”. The choice is open.

The personalistic approach, including personalistic teachings on self-expression, accentuates the creative aspects of personality without negating the creative existence of others, with God as a model of creativity. In this perspective being good no longer requires the slave like rejection of others as outside confirmation of the do-gooder's perfection and superiority, as the perfection of others, including God, is not enslaving or demeaning even if it is superior.

ESSENTIAL AND STILL UNTACKLED PROBLEMS

The community process was certainly not enhanced by the already forgotten conflict around school reading lists, which involved the introduction—with strong support from the mass media—of an essentially new system of values and ideas, under which the older generation could no longer exert direct influence of the younger and was deprived of its position of authority. This in turn upset the basic structures of many families. All this took place at a time of deep political change, which itself brought new social awareness and new ideas.

Personalization is most certainly ill-served by the current ruling elite's extremely aggressive application of the "divide and rule" principle, which, regardless of purpose, up to a certain moment ensured social support for "good"—but is this personalism? In my opinion such deliberately-provoked divisions not only affect the groups and milieus they are aimed against, but also to a large degree families.

Especially as the new official "philosophy of virtue" (a Hegelian generalization referring to the Inquisition and the French Revolution¹⁴) is in reality mainly focused on cultivating mistrust and suspiciousness, glorified as a long-delayed "settling of accounts" with the "old" communist ideology. Also, what virtues one is found to lack appears less important than the very fact of their absence. Accusations founded on "vague suspicions" of failing virtue (like faith/atheism, anticommunism/communism, anti-fascism/fascism, etc.) are deliberately aimed against community (or, more precisely: towards the political strengthening of the rulers' own, narrow and isolated community by provoking hatred against real or imagined foes). The punishment is to be exclusion of the non-virtuous from the virtuous community. Philosophies based on divisions into "us" and "them" never served—and still do not serve—the personalistic community project. After all, the First and Third Divine Persons are linked by love. The Holy Spirit, a symbol of the community of Divine persons, is far-removed from the spirit of exclusion.

¹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Wykłady z filozofii dziejów* [Lectures on the Philosophy of History], translated by J. Grabowski and A. Landman, vol. II, Warsaw 1958, pp. 349–352, 314–316. I wrote about this over a decade ago in an essay entitled, *How Philosophy of Virtue Becomes Applied Terror* (Kamena 1993). Before it appeared in *Kamena*, my paper had been commended by *Gazeta Wyborcza* editor Adam Michnik himself, who, however, refused to print it explaining that it was... too serious for a daily newspaper.

To conclude this improvised but not completely rhetorical debate, we must ask one fundamental question: if, as the doubtless personalistic Erich Fromm claims, Marx professed self-fulfillment alongside socialization (and not only in *Manuscripts...*), then why was it never taken up by the praxis of real socialism? Was it because the “owners of truth” whom the system had elevated above other individuals were not this truth’s real producers? And that they therefore did not rule over others as creative individuals (persons) but only on strength of their official powers? Was it only communist party lore that glorified Lenin’s char-women and cooks?!

One can also ask why, if *Laborem exercens* sees shirking work or bad work as disobedience or misfulfillment of God’s commands and personalism as disrespect for the beneficiaries of the work process (the end-users of its produce), no priest has ever refused absolution for it?

The condonement of defective work is a relic of feudal Catholicism’s contempt for work, a unique variety of hypocrisy which also breeds spiritual laziness. Perhaps it is also a boycott of this anti-feudal encyclical, which according to many Polish church hierarchs goes too far in its strivings to reform the Catholic conscience?! In Poland you are not allowed to ask why the Protestant world has known to poverty for the past two centuries. Having wed “Mistress Poverty” (to use the language of St. Francis), Poland is now seeking peaceful divorce solutions.

RESUME FROM THE UNIVERSALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

In this context it is impossible not to refer to the basic rules of universalism. According to Bergson “all great mystics” are universalists because they no longer think in the categories of their own parish (“their own anthill /country/”) and, hindered by no essential empirical barriers, pursue a dynamic religion which makes all humanity one community. This way of thinking and speaking was initiated by St., Paul, who said that from now on there will be no more Greeks, Jews, women, men, masters or slaves¹⁵: “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit”¹⁶ by a God who “worked all things in all”¹⁷. Here one may ask in whose name those who divide and exclude divide and exclude—good alone?

Max Scheler was perhaps right in rejecting the theoretical justifications of the equality concept in the Christian world, seeing its source in the pragmatic interpretation of predestination¹⁸ which the clergy should refrain from out of

¹⁵ *Galatians* III, 28: “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus”.

¹⁶ *1 Corinthians*, XII, 13.

¹⁷ *1 Corinthians*, XII, 6.

¹⁸ M. Scheler, *Resentiment*, translated by Jan Garewicz, Warszawa 1977, pp. 150–157.

obvious caution: it is not theirs to know and implement Divine plans. Thus, people are perhaps not equal, but no one besides God has the right to empirically implement this theoretically assumed inequality—in other words possess foreknowledge of Providence’s verdicts. Did God not command man to subdue the Earth? Did he tell anyone to subdue humans? If that were the case, St. Paul could never have been able to proclaim that “there can be neither bond nor free”.

Is, therefore, true community in the social sphere possible—regardless under which “centralism” (hierarchy) theory? Or does the fact alone that there are differences here—e.g. the distinction between teachers and the taught (the third of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*), especially when the former assume the form of collective bodies which are not elected publicly like institutions, parties or the Church’s “teaching office”—mean a division into “equal” and “more equal”? This should be a major concern for all universalism-guided and universalistic thought.

John Paul II’s personalism appears to be essentially critical of a hierarchical Church, which it conceals by altogether bypassing the issue of statehood. And only when it is set against Marxian utopias (but personalism-imbued like *Manuscripts*), does *Laborem exercens* become so very appealing as a purely moral and ontological perspective devoid of political theory and “third road” doctrines. The description of work as “the key to the social issue” is above-political and above-institutional, and hence somewhat confusing. It should rather have been called a door to the meta-social (hence *par excellence* universalistic) sphere which is open to existing difference but does not consider it a meaningful factor in building “universal” civilization (in this case transcendental as the person as such belongs to this existence level). The idea rather resembles Kant’s “state of goals” or *Civitas Dei*.

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