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FOUNDATIONS OF A CIVILIZATION OF LIFE AND A CIVILIZATION OF DEATH

In the teachings of Paul VI and John Paul II, the Holy See proclaims to the world a “civilization of love” as the only deliverance from the menace of a “civilization of death.” The manifesto of the civilization of love is the well-known fourfold way of 1) the primacy of the person over the thing, 2) the primacy of ethics (morality) over technology, 3) the primacy of “to be” over “to have,” and 4) the primacy of mercy over justice.

The civilized world, including Poland, is in a deep crisis which, in a sweeping generalization, can be called a “civilization of death,” the exact opposite of the “civilization of love.” For man, in the personal dimension (of his cognition, morality, and creation), is in many ways being turned into a mere instrument by other men and by institutions of public life. Everyday matters of *enjoyment* and of materialistic *profit* are taking precedence over human dignity (the person is an end and never merely a means of human action). This finally leads to killing others, even unborn human beings. This leads to small scale theft – to pick-pocketing – and to large scale criminal mafia-like theft called, because of the banks, “financial scandals.” Financial interests and the political interests subordinate to them (Machiavellian politics) take precedence over the dignity of the person, whose rights are openly scorned in the name of tolerating evil. But everything that stems from man, his cultural artifacts, are *things* with respect to man, for they are *signs* we created in order to transmit to other persons the means to facilitate and to enhance human life. Man in his personal life – cognition, love, and creation, dominates all his creations and finds his final, personal, fulfillment beyond the world and its material objects.

Real scorn for man is expressed most fully in the practical contempt for morality, which replaces real good with non-real “values” such as psychologically-experienced motives and “objects” (constructed according to Kantian *sollen*) of human action. Among values so conceived, the principal value is *making it possible to achieve* everything a “free man” wants. And he is made to want by manipulated television, radio, advertising, and by mirages of technology. All that, when released from the restraints of real morality, which differentiates between good and evil, introduces a tyranny of amoral technology and the possibility of the total annihilation of man. It is sufficient

to point to the modern arsenals of nuclear and laser weapons, to genetic manipulations, and to the devastation of the environment...

In our actions we ignore the imperfect, weak, and contingent status of man, who – to maintain and augment his life – needs real love, which acknowledges the fragility of human existence. This real love for others is, by its very nature, love-mercy, for it requires us to love weak and unstable entities. It does not rule out justice which requires giving to one what one deserves – but in a humane manner, with the primacy of love-mercy, and not just as a dry, material measure. Material and “banking” justice led poor and indebted nations (by means of loans which made rich nations even richer) to poverty, causing riots, crime and war. So-called “value” justice for the living pushes the unborn, who could in fact become benefactors of humanity, into the pit of death. But the value of “use” and of a comfortable life shuts down one’s mind and love for one’s own child.

All this leads to the fundamental alienation of man: to a reversal of the hierarchy of ends and means, which expresses itself in the demand for more “*having*” than “*being*,” in the refusal to transcend the world of ever-changing, flowing matter.

Why is this happening to today’s civilization?

One can point to human contingency and weakness as explanations. We are not to blame for our weakness, but we are to blame for its deliberate perverse realization. The perversion and error of reason result from human *thought* being detached (“free!”) from the laws of reality — of being as truth, good, and beauty. At the foundations of the deformations of human actions there lies a deformation of human thinking “freed” and “liberated” from the rules of good and truth — or from taking into account reality, which somehow “evaporated” from human thought after Descartes, Kant, and Hegel. There come to mind the harsh warnings of St. Paul (2 Tm 4 : 3): “The time is sure to come when people will not accept sound teaching, but their ears will be itching for anything new and they will collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and then they will shut their ears to the truth and will turn to myths.” This has been taking place in our civilization. It began permanently in the autumn of the Middle Ages when, with the advent of nominalism, *universale metaphysicum*, i.e., the general and necessary knowledge of being through universal concepts, was denied (cut by Ockham’s “razor!”) to human cognition and when, following nominalistic thought (accommodated later in Protestant theology), cognitive sensations – ideas – became the point of interest of the subjective philosophies of Descartes, British Empiricism, Kant, Hegel, and of post-Kantian philosophers of phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutical orientations. *Cognitive signs* (ideas, concepts, imaginations, feelings, and sensations), instead of reality, became objects of analysis, and reality itself became either unreachable or unnecessary, for signs became “objects” – substi-

tutes for reality. Moreover, mere signs of signs (i.e. language signs as signs of ideas-sensations), that is merely the domain of language, became a major, if not the only, “object” of analysis. At the same time, language itself, as a set of conventional signs of natural, transparent signs (ideas), when considered from syntactic and pragmatic sides, turned out to be a more or less complicated *game*, whose deep and superficial structures were to be uncovered, even to the limits of absurdity in the structuralism of C. Lévi-Strauss. Thus, man as a real subject was denied; human subjectivity became merely an interiorization of the grammatical subjectivity of language. Rational structures were eventually to be explained by the rule of randomness. Nonsense was to turn out to be the father of sense.

But earlier, in subjective post-Cartesian and post-Kantian philosophy, cognition of reality (good, truth, beauty) was replaced by *thinking*, i.e. by an operation on formal signs (transparent ideas) and later, on conventional signs or language operations. Man became “free” from the rules of reality (being-truth-good-beauty) while the rules of reality themselves were exchanged for the sphere of *values* – the *sollen* conforming to the aims of actions, which do not have to take into account the reality of really existing beings. The various forms of human action were now understood to derive their *value* from intentionally planned and somehow realized *values* accessible only as a *sollen* – in the psyche of man, who could not know reality in itself. Ever since then, ethics, culture, and aesthetics became peculiar realizations of “values” and thus they introduced rational order into a world bereft of reason. The intelligibility of being “disappeared” and was to be replaced by “human rationality,” which judged the whole of reality before its tribunal.

So, different forms of human actions are values of “objects” created by the subject. Such “objects-values” can be either good or evil, for sin, too, is a “value” belonging to the *sacrum*. And the *sacrum* itself is a “value,” even without God. Man is merely a *Wüdrträger* – a bearer of “value”, and its creator. He is some “axiological I,” a non-subject devoid of any substantial identity of being. Therefore, man is a “something-somebody” without any sense as a being, since values are not being. Without an existence as an identical subject (substance), man cannot be held responsible for his actions, for they are dependent on a real efficient cause (i.e. on the being that decides to act). There are also no grounds for existence after death, for what is there to last? Man then is “freedom” for himself and is a freedom for realizing his subjective “values,” which can be a real menace to other people. This freedom, if it is taken to be a basis of values and a value in itself, can destroy the lives of other people (killing unborn babies in the name of one’s own freedom). It does not have to take into account the right of other people to live and to possess property, for they can prove to stand in conflict with the “value” of my actions.

A divorce from reality in the domain of cognition, and the locking of oneself up in the domain of merely “valuable” actions, can justify anything, for one has thus lost the measure of real truth, good, and beauty. And without these, man is only a “human-like” creature, even if he is called an “axiological I” – *ego valoris subiectivi*.

If the reality of the really existing world is life-giving, then a departure from such reality and locking oneself up in the world of *sollen-values*, which are not being-reality, amounts to locking civilization up in a death chamber. For the freedom of creating values for oneself, which are not being, is the freedom of non-being. A civilization based on value-freedom – measured only by subjective “needs” – is a civilization of death. That this threat is not always, and not for everybody realized, follows from the inconsistency of pure subjectivity (and also from its impossibility). For man is a real being in a real world which exists and develops through real truth, real good and real beauty. A total departure from reality is not possible. For one has to eat real food, sleep and breathe. We take all this from a really existing world for a really existing man. And this reality, stemming from God and ordained to God, provides – whether man wants it or not – truth, good, and beauty... But “the plague is here!” (A. Mickiewicz, *Konrad Wallenrod*).

Translated by *Marek Kowalczyk*