

PREFACE

DIALOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Man is the supreme question for man. This is the principal and fundamental question for us as men is an obvious thing, because every other interrogative, every other question (about the earth, the sky, the moon, the stars, the air, the water, atoms, cells etc. even about God) acquires relevance only with reference to our being. For man, to know who he is, what his origin is, what his destiny, what consistency his life and internal dimension has etc., all this cannot be an indifferent matter. Indifference can arise towards all others (dogs, cats, horses, cows etc.) but not towards ourselves. We must necessarily occupy and concern ourselves with the sense of our life and the value of our existence. Thus, the question concerning the nature of man, his place in the world, and the sense of his existence, faces us with a new seriousness and urgency.

« Who is man? »: this is an interrogative for which only philosophy can search for and — perhaps — find an adequate and exhaustive answer on the rational level. On this point, the claim of science for taking the place of philosophy in resolving the human enigma is clearly fallacious. Certainly, with the advance of scientific knowledge during the modern era, many sciences are occupying themselves with man and have contributed to the comprehension and clarification of many aspects of the human reality; and yet, it is necessary to concede that no science has succeeded in even touching on the main interrogatives which regard human existence: man's origin, his destiny, his real and profound being. No science has been capable of dissipating the mysteries of pain, guilt, anguish, self-transcendence and death. « The increasing multiplicity of the special sciences that deal with man, valuable as they are, tend to hide his nature more than they reveal it.

Moreover, in particular the Darwinian theory of the origin of man is severely impaired, and we may say that at no time in his history has man been so much of a problem to himself as he is now »¹.

It is certainly man's duty to search for and find a response to his existential interrogatives but he cannot do so with the criteria and the methods of experimental sciences. Thus, today more than ever, the noble but onerous burden of the mystery of man falls again on the shoulders of the philosopher. Actually the interrogative: « Who is man? » has always been faced by philosophy, from the very beginning, both in the East and the West; nevertheless, it has been faced without philosophy succeeding in reaching a satisfying and conclusive response. Therefore this same interrogative has returned to present itself with an acute urgency and renewed interest.

Modern and contemporary philosophy has been mainly anthropocentric: it has privileged the study of man above every other study. And for the understanding of man philosophers have chosen many different perspectives: history, culture, sociology, psycho-analysis, self-transcendence, hope, despair etc. In this way, modern and contemporary philosophers have obtained a whole new series of images of man, images that have often sparked great interest. For example: anguished man (Kierkegaard), economic man (Marx), erotic man (Freud), existent man (Heidegger), symbolic man (Cassirer), utopic man (Bloch) cultural man (Gehlen), fallible man (Ricoeur).

Among the many philosophical currents that have centred on man their attention, personalism is probably the one which has contributed more in clarifying the peculiarity of his being and value. According to personalism man is essentially intersubjective, dialogical and not solipsistic, and yet every human being has an absolute value, worthy of the utmost respect and consideration. The leading figures of personalism are the Jew Martin Burber and the Catholic Gabriel Marcel.

In his doctoral dissertation Dominic Anton Joseph deals with the core of Marcel's philosophy: the concepts of intersub-

¹ M. SCHELER, *Man's place in nature*, Beacon Press, Boston 1961, p. 6.

jectivity and self-realization. It is an excellent study, which does not limit itself to the reconstruction and analysis of a thought which is very alien to systematization, but also gives a personal contribution to a further clarification of these fundamental aspects of anthropology.

L'homme problématique is the title of one of Marcel's most significant essays. In that essay the author shows that man is problematic under many respects (origin, end, freedom, hope etc.). But he is problematic in his very nature. Differently from the nature of inferior beings, which is complete from the start, human nature at the beginning, at the moment of birth, is not yet achieved: it is rather an open project, which needs definition and realization.

Marcel shows that man needs the help of his fellow men both for the definition and the realization of his project, for this reason he is essentially intersubjective and dialogical. My project of humanity certainly presupposes and requires my personal effort, yet its discovery is mainly due to the contribution of other men. It is literally a gift of another or of many others or in Marcel's beautiful metaphorical phrasing, « 'I' is a child of the 'we' ». This definition and rebirth of the self is achievable through the inter-subjective bond of love acting as an inward principle which develops us from within. Consequently, there is no self except in so far as there is communion. Looking in the opposite direction Marcel shows that man, by self-enclosure, by turning into himself, by bridging barriers from others entering into his life, not only does not achieve his own humanity but can even destroy it. In closing the door on himself, by restricting entry to others, he becomes cut off from others. He remains an unfulfilled self. Of this introvert or purely self-concerned, sadly there are many in this world, Marcel says, « less intensely his life he lives, the more poverty stricken his life is ».

Another meaningful contribution of Marcel's anthropology, which is carefully analyzed by Dominic Anton Joseph in his dissertation, is the quality of self-transcendence. Marcel shows that human transcendence is not merely a transcendence towards his fellow beings but it is first and above all a transcendence towards God: He alone provides man with the possibility of

achieving his project of humanity: he is the Ultimate Thou that calls into being my 'I', that through His inner calling sustains my efforts to grow towards a higher level of humanity during my life and that, finally, by letting me share his own life when I leave this world He brings to full realization that project of mankind which is inscribed in my effort of self-transcendence.

Being a Roman Catholic priest the author of the present dissertation is in the best position to put into practice the two human qualities that he has analyzed so nicely and deeply in his essay: inter-subjectivity and theocentric self-transcendence. My best wishes that it may be so.

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