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CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN RELATION TO POSTMODERNIST PROVOCATION

The notion of a human being is in the centre of all issues of our civilisation. All the humanities: philosophy, theology, pedagogics have to adopt a certain point of view in this matter. Thus, such basic questions as: „Who am I?”, „What does freedom mean?”, „What is pedagogics and what makes the sense of education?” still remain to be answered.

1. Postmodern discourse on freedom in contemporary education

In every epoch and in every culture people go through important cognitive experiences. It often happens that what is simple and obvious appears as incomprehensible and highly complicated. Contemporary philosophical and humanistic thought is engaged in a discussion on postmodernism. It is often observed that there are many terms that have made an amazing career during recent years. These include: „deconstruction”, „poststructuralism”, „postmodernity”, „modernism” and „postmodernism”.

Postmodernism is above all an ambiguous term used to specify a radical breakthrough in contemporary culture. Generally speaking, postmodernism is connected with the acceptance of appearances and a superficial style, and of deliberate quotation and parody. It is also connected with the act of sanctifying irony, as well as with emptiness, chaos and lack of sense. Postmodernism is usually considered to be a reactive trend and regarded as opposition to a naive and earnest belief in progress and to confidence in objective or scientific truth. In philosophy it results in suspiciousness to grand récits (great narration) of modernity: far-reaching justifications for values of western societies and belief in their progress, which are so prevalent in the works of Kant, Hegel or Marks.

Postmodernism identifies itself rather as an intellectual and practical attitude than as a philosophical school in the classical meaning of that word, that is a school which would be

distinguished by a set of common opinions justified by generally accepted rational methods. Postmodernism either completely rejects the term of the absolute or it speaks about multitude of absolutes, which stands for relativism and nihilism. This is particularly well-expressed in the opinions of the French poststructuralists and deconstructionists, such as J. Derrida, M. Foucault, R. Barth, G. Deleuze, J. Lacan. Reading of the works of the above mentioned philosophers makes it possible to capture a certain atmosphere characteristic of the postmodernist perception and interpretation of reality. This atmosphere is described by:

1. Anticartesianism
2. Antirepresentationism
3. Antiobjectivism
4. Historicity of the Man
5. Antifundamentalism
6. Antidemarcationism
7. Deconstructionism
8. Antiscientism
9. Antihumanism
10. The Death of Science

In the context of the above mentioned „*ten postmodern commandments*” it is easy to notice that the contemporary pedagogics and education generally have a certain fundamental dilemma. The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that education itself cannot renounce neither authority nor tradition. On the other hand, however, it has to take place in the world where authority and tradition are no longer valid. In the face of these words a comparison leaps to mind: in the modern epoch school is an enormous ship but, unfortunately, without a steersman. Many different kinds of pedagogics may evolve, even the pedagogics which is in contradiction with itself. Nowadays it is difficult to identify explicitly the understanding of humanistic or critical pedagogics. No one has so far presented a comprehensive definition of the so called „pedagogics of success” (pedagogics of the rich), or of the „pedagogics of survival” (pedagogics of the poor). On the other hand, how should we understand the „pedagogics”, where a man is only a small cog-wheel in the machine?

This is the ground for pedagogics of contest which developed at the end of the 20th century which for their negation, rebellion and a radical opposition to any authority gain a variety of names, such as „antipedagogics”, „the pedagogics of liberation”, „the liberal pedagogic and the pedagogic of emancipation”, „antiauthoritarian pedagogics”, or „humanistic pedagogics”. The rejection of the values and freedom leads directly to the model – „*Do what you want*” (*faire laissez*).

2. Personalistic perspectives of freedom in the process of education

In Europe basically two main concepts of personalistic notion of a human being have sprung up. One, represented by Emmanuel Mounier, called *open personalism*, is also known as the social engagement personalism.

The other one, represented by Jacques Maritain, is called integral humanism. It is important to ascertain that a human being is a fleshly-spiritual existence given freedom, moral responsibility, awareness and will. In this respect Mounier's statement that „everyone has to learn the job of a man” becomes significant. Maritain continues: „we are human beings but we turn into people”. In order to talk about education and a man in general it is important first to find the answer to the question: „Who am I?”. According to Christian personalism education does not reveal the man's relation to material goods since the world of objects is perceived as impersonal, but directly refers to interpersonal relations. Education is assisted by the following hierarchy of values: material, spiritual, absolute. In no way does absolute value refer to freedom as arbitrary activity or freedom without limits: individualism, egoism, relativism, excessive tolerance. Neither does the value mean the same as intellect and reason, acquiring knowledge about the world and a human being, or educational techniques. But what it really means is acquiring spiritual, „*internal freedom*” by knowledge, wisdom, love and reaching the peaks of „*external freedom*” in the process of subordination to all values which ensure the growth of a human being. According to personalist viewpoint there are always two people who take part in the process of education: a fosterer and a child. Education should always concern personal values. Intellect and absolute freedom are not the most important values. The most vital is the meeting of two people: a master and a pupil, which reveals the range of values due to which a man becomes a man, regardless of his/her beliefs and social system.

In the process of personalist education it is the master- a fosterer who leads a child to good, truth and beauty. Christian personalist view recommends continual building of the relation: *I – Thou, Thou – I*. The fosterer is not only the master leading the pupil but also an example to follow. Personalist education needs a dialogue, not a monologue. Furthermore, it does not need terror since the person who in the atmosphere of real conversation concentrates on his/her influence as the speaker of what should be said by him, is a destructor. At the outset the dialogue vanishes, the conversation stops and, finally, interpersonal relations die. When the aim is to build the relation: *I – Thou, Thou – I* then a particular, social fertility appears. The two people in this process are grasped in the depth by the dynamics of being together. Their words gradually become essential. There are two ways of acting upon a man. In the first, in the process of education a pupil accepts and assumes all beliefs and opinions as

his own. In the second, a pupil discovers his master's values independently and wants to internalise them as his own. The first way is achieved by instruction and mediation, the other one is achieved by interpersonal meeting. At this point we touch upon questions of propaganda and the process of educating in the atmosphere of truth, the problem of the superior and inferior treatment of the educating process, Herakles's method of training to achieve fast and visible result and also conscious, voluntary meeting of people. One of the well-known Heraklit's saying: „*panta rei – all flows*” (*παντα ρει*) is exposed in the personalistic education. Thus, unique pedagogical efforts are strongly emphasised. The famous statement says: „*You cannot go twice into the same water*”. Dynamic growth of a foster child in the personalisational perspective implies a variety and complexity of pedagogical efforts towards good, beauty and truth in the following hierarchy of values: material, spiritual, absolute.

3. Personalist education in postmodernity context

At the turn of XX and XXI centuries a human being is suspended between yesterday, today and tomorrow, between tradition (*Christian personalism*) and that what is new (*postmodernism*). We all live – here and now – in temporal – cultural – civilised space (*Hegel's Geisteszeit – the spirit of times*), and this directs and shapes people's thinking and also might be tempting, to say the least. While writing about postmodernism in its own language, it can be noticed that although this thesis deals with personalism in one of the chapters and with postmodernism in the other, the third chapter is not the compilation of the two. Let us see: if personalism and postmodernism are of different nature they cannot be matched, since naturally this match is impossible.

Dealing with the issue of a dialogue between contemporary postmodern discourse and traditional Christian personalist pedagogics might seem quite odd and even uneasy for those who disapprove of „*the new and unknown*”. That is because these issues are not popular nowadays and although we often use the same words and signs, we do not always understand one another.

By no means is speaking about dialogue between personalism and postmodernism just presenting the two existing philosophies or philosophical systems. These cannot be found. Undoubtedly it is easier to analyse cultural epochs governed by *periodic continuation and negation rules*, specific for civilisation turning points. Naturally, *postmodernism* does not fall into any of these categories. It is necessary to ask: *Is postmodernism a cultural epoch?* Then an important dilemma arises: how to reconcile the possibilities and difficulties of the Christian

personalism, which constitutes a coherent philosophical system, with postmodern philosophy of ambivalence, „not-naming” and avoiding the concept of reality. One might get an impression that it is not postmodernism which penetrates the traditional spirit of the times, but that the traditional systems are introduced into the context of postmodern changes. In the author’s opinion, postmodernism is like air which we breathe in but which cannot be entirely embraced. This is the reason why the analysed pedagogics of Christian personalism, regarded as ways of viewing reality, has to appear in the perspective of the spirit of times and it has to start a discourse with it. This is a challenge but also an occasion for legitimism. Thus, it is necessary to view the attempt of a dialogue not in terms of two existing philosophical systems: in terms of relevant or irrelevant, but rather as the introduction of Christian concept into *the postmodern space*.

This fact seems interesting, as it creates the possibility of situating *yesterday* in *today*, and what *lasts* in *now*. The reflections proposed above do not lay any claims to be exhaustive and the only right ones, as the reading of the first two chapters in itself stimulates the Reader to personal reflections and to assuming an attitude to this problem. It is difficult to talk about the phenomenon of postmodern pedagogics in itself, in the strict meaning of this word. Nevertheless, it is possible to mention conceptions which are connected with the idea of *the new education*, such as the individualistic or existential ones which strongly emphasise subjectivity and the unique value of the person in the process of education. This offers the meeting ground for the traditional and still modernised *Christian thought* (philosophy of life, values and aims) and *postmodern philosophy* (philosophy of death, despair and nihilism). Both the former and the latter are to a large extent preoccupied with the man – everything for his own good (?). The rights of a person are defended and the greatness (smallness) of a man is discussed in the name of the freedom. However, in order to be able to speak about the meeting and the possibility of dialogue between the above philosophies, we should bear in mind that today it is not quite possible to grasp all the trends of *postmodern climate* (ambiguity, decentralization, ambivalence, not-naming, not-answering, non-systematization, non-definiteness).

It is noteworthy that in the world at the end of the 20th century there is a great interest in man, both on the side of what has existed for thousands of years and of what is new. Hence the strong need to answer fundamental and recurring questions: *Who am I – me, a man? How should freedom be understood? What is education and what constitutes its sense?* These questions should also include the ones of our life’s aim (*where from? what for? why?*) which

are – or are not – based on the hierarchy of values and authorities. Equally important are questions from the sphere of pedagogics and ethics which will let the set aims be realised.

According to the author, while answering the question: *who am I?* we answer all the remaining questions. Both in the personalistic and postmodernist interpretation the man is placed in the centre of attention. This fact should not be omitted, as the possibility of *personalistic-postmodernist* discussion should be looked for at this moment of philosophical studies. Nevertheless, it should never be forgotten that a man finds his ultimate sense only in the transcendental dimension and only in directing himself at Someone who is beyond the world as the Fullness of Personal Entity.