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# THE CONCEPT OF PERSON IN ST. BONAVENTURE, P.A. FLORENSKI AND H.U. VON BALTHASAR: ITS ECUMENICAL VALUE

The question about the nature of the human person is not a new one. It has not surfaced with Christianity, although it was Christianity that treated it very seriously in the context of questions relating to the mystery of the Holy Trinity[1] Throughout the ages this question has been asked by many and answered in different ways. Even now there is no agreement among the scholars regarding its mystery. Although this paper will not offer the definitive answer to this difficult question, it is however an attempt to look at the concept of the person described by St. Bonaventure (1217-1274) and by two eminent contemporary Christian theologians: Pavel A. Florenski (1883-1937) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), two leading representatives of the Eastern and Western tradition.

Such an analysis permits us to point out similarities in the views of the human person represented by the three theologians mentioned above who were far apart from each other not only in historical time but also in theological culture. In addition, the question of whether their concept of the person has an ecumenical value in it, will be asked. Does accepting Bonaventure's, Florenski's and Balthasar's concept of the person promote ecumenical dialogue in its broadest meaning, not only between Christians but between all the people as well?

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[1] Cf. J.S. Grabowski. *Person: Substance and relation.* „Communio" 22:1995 nr 2 pp. 139-144.

## I. PERSON AS A DYNAMIC SUBJECT
## ACCORDING TO ST. BONAVENTURE

A Western thinker of the early Middle Ages, Boethius (480-524 A.D.) contributed to the popularization of the word *persona*. In his classical work *De duabus naturis et una persona* he defines the person: "Persona proprie dicitur naturae rationalis individua substantia"[2]

According to Boethius *persona* was not treated as a rational subject engaged in dialogue with subjects similar to it. Perceived rather as a world into itself, person was not approached as the consequence of a possible existential opening toward other subjects. On the contrary, Boethius's person was a subject existing independently of the other. Boethius intended to accentuate the individual character of the person, being convinced that only a rational hypostasis can enjoy full self-awareness, freedom of self-definition, and as a consequence, responsibility for its deeds. Therefore, Boethius placed in the foreground the ontological character of the person which emphasized a static manner of being. He understood the person as an independent, autonomous subject, containing in it the principle of subjectivity. As a consequence, the human person 'revealed itself' most clearly in its ontological determinations but not in relation with other subjects.

Boethius approached the concept of a person philosophically and not theologically, without taking into consideration the reference to God in the mystery of His trinitarian life. Together with the undoubtedly positive elements (for example, a certain degree of independence, intelligence), this concept of the person once applied to the Trinity opened the way to a hidden or open tritheism. Applied however to the mystery of Christ it could lead to monophysitism, that acknowledges in Christ just one divine nature, omitting His human nature. Because of these difficulties[3], it was necessarily to create a new more dynamic concept of the person that would stress in a clearer way its 'dialogical' character.

This problem was attempted a few centuries later by Richard of St. Victor (†1173) in an interesting approach[4] Richard, an Augustinian canon regular,

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[2] PL 64, 1343C.

[3] Card. J. Ratzinger described for example Boethius' definition as „eine 'leider entscheidende Verkürzung' des Personbegriffs." Cf. J. R a t z i n g e r. *Zum Personenverständnis in der Theologie. Dogma und Verkündigung*. München–Freiburg 1973 p. 225.

[4] G.A. Z i n n. *Introduction. Richard of St. Victor. The Twelve Patriarchs: The Mystical Ark: Book Three of the Trinity*. Transl. and introduc. by G.A. Zinn, preface by J. Châtillon. New York–Ramsey–Toronto: Paulist Press 1979 pp. 1-49.

proposed a new modified definition of the person. He defined it as an 'incommunicable' (singular) existence of an intellectual nature (*intellectualis naturae incomunicabilis existentia*)[5] He highlighted in this definition not so much the role of intellect as the importance of the 'existence' in the process of being a full human person. Consequently, 'nature' referred to a rational being that, common to all humans, tied them together into a certain natural community. 'Existentia,' however, underlined the relational character of a person turning the attention to a certain kind of positive opposition in relation to other subjects. This gave the person a real opportunity to define him/herself in his/her own subjectivity, and at the same time in his/her uniqueness in opposition to other human persons.

Richard's proposal was at the same time an indirect critique aimed first of all at the *individua substantia* of Boethius. He suggested the difficulty and even the impossibility of using *individua substantia* either in relation to God (one nature and three persons) or in relation to Christ (one person and two natures). Noting the very important role and meaning of '*existentia*' in the human person's life and in its constitution Richard derived a wider, spiritually richer concept of person. In addition, it was easier to apply such a meaning of person to God as well as angels and man. The prefix '*ex*' (*ex-istentia*) which took a very important place in the new definition of a person, stressed clearly the importance of taking into account the 'origin' and 'quality' of that which exists.

It is worth observing that turning one's attention to the meaning of origin, i.e. the relation to somebody or something (which underlines the prefix '*ex*'), widened very visibly the number of elements affecting constitutional character of the human person. 'The origin' in its genealogical as well as spiritual meaning has decisively moved the center of gravity from the individual to its surroundings. It was a very valuable operation as it brought much spiritual freshness into the life of the person, opening it in a natural and therefore, necessary way to others. Furthermore, Richard seemed to suggest that being authentically a person is directly proportional to one's relationship with other subjects. In this way the answer to the question 'who am I,' depended on the answer to the question, 'who am I for others?'

Unlike *substantia* that assumed that there was a strong autonomy of existence of the human person without pointing to the source of its origin at the same time, *existentia* stressed the dynamic character of its existence. More-

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[5] R i c h a r d   d e   S a i n t - V i c t o r. *La Trinité* IV 6. Texte latin, introd., traduc. et notes par G. Salet SJ (SCh 63). Paris: Ed. du Cerf 1959.

over, Richard's definition turned attention to the fact of a close relationship between being 'a person' and being in a 'relationship.'

St. Bonaventure's (1217-1274) reflections followed a similar direction. The Franciscan theologian undertook the intellectual task of uniting the wisdom of Boethius[6] with Richard's terminology[7] He accepts the definition of person as formulated by Boethius: *Persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*[8], but at the same time it does not satisfy him entirely and he supplements it with the new dimension of the *relationship*[9], seen as the constitutive element of true person. Bonaventure writes:

> Person is defined either by reason of substance or by reason of relation. If it were defined by reason of relation, then a plurality of persons would be identical with a plurality of relations[10]

In other words the *relationship* for Bonaventure was not simply accidental or predicative, but it had an ontological character. As J. Merino comments,

> Relationship in the works of St. Bonaventure defines the reference and internal polarization of one person, with respect to other persons or things. Person, as a relational being, implies being directed and open to other relationships, different from him/herself, which encompass and condition him/herself in continuous symbiosis[11]

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[6] When he writes that the person is "per se existens" (*1 Sent.* I pp. 436 and 441). St. Bonaventure wrote: "Definito Boethii, quae videbitur improprietatem sonare, correcta est a Richardo et a magistris" (*In Sent.* I, p. 441, 4*).

[7] According to Balthasar this is apparent in the writings of St. Bonaventure, who writes that "juxta quendam singularis existentiae modum naturae rationalis" (*In Sent.* I pp. 436 and 441), in Balthasar's *Homo Creatus est. Skizzen zur Theologie V* Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1986 p. 97 note 14. On the subject of connection between Richard and St. Bonaventure: R. J a v e l e t. *Saint Bonaventure et Richard de Saint Victor*. In: *Bonaventuriana. Miscellanea in onore di J. G. Bougerol*. Ed. F. de Asis Chavero Blanco, Roma: Ed. Antonianum 1988 pp. 63-96.

[8] "Ad illud quod ultimo quaeritur de assignatione definitionum, dicendum quod persona definitur a Boethio sic: persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia; a Richardo sic: persona est intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia. Definitur etiam alio modo sic: persona est existens per se solum juxta singularem quemdam rationalis existentiae modum. A magistris definitur sic: persona est hypostasis distincta proprietate ad nobilitatem pertinente" (*1 Sent.*, d. 25 a. 2 q. 2 ad. 4).

[9] "Persona in divinis dicitur tum secundum substantiam, tum secundum relationem" (*1 Sent.*, d. 25, a.1, q.1, concl.).

[10] *De Trinit.* q.2, a.2, n.9. S a i n t  B o n a v e n t u r e's *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*. Introd. and transl. Z. Hayes. St. Bonaventure University: The Franciscan Institute 1979 p. 148.

[11] J.A. M e r i n o. *Historia de la filosofía franciscana*. (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 525). Madrid 1993 p. 71.

All scholastics maintained the existence of real relations, but the nature of the real relation was judged differently. While one group of medieval scholars saw the relations simply as the predicaments or accidents of a person, the other group, on the contrary, was saying that with reference to human person their nature is transcendental or essential. This kind of difference existed between the two greatest medieval scholars: Bonaventure and Thomas. The Franciscan scholar accepted the transcendental or essential meaning of relations with regard to person, while St. Thomas held them to be predicamental or accidental in character[12] For Bonaventure therefore the *relationship* was not something casual, without great importance for life of the human person but rather constitutive for his/her true existence. Thanks to this relationship the human person, who enjoys his/her "singularity, incommunicability and supreme dignity"[13], from then on lives *with* the others, *with* whole of the creation and *with* the Creator.

The category of *relationship*, so deeply integrated with the life of the human person, indicates for St. Bonaventure the reference of one person to another. Therefore, everybody that exists, co-exists and pre-exists, subsists by means of an infinite web of all-inclusive relations. Nobody exists outside relationships. It follows that understood as 'the being in relationship' the human person is in radical opening towards the realities different from itself. As an outcome:

> St. Bonaventure's anthropology has a prominently dynamic character and person is not a state of being but rather a process of being[14]

According to the Seraphic Doctor the dynamic nature of person revealed itself completely in the mystery of the Trinitarian God in which each of the three divine persons lived in radical openness and mutual offering of each to the other[15] Since the person is created in the likeness of God, he/she can also enjoy the full authenticity of his/her 'I,' only at the moment of opening

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[12] Cf. *Hexaämeron*, col. 12, n. 14.

[13] *III Sent*. d. 5 a. 2 q. 2 ad. 1.

[14] Cf. M e r i n o. *Historia de la filosofia* p. 72; also I. M a n z a n o. *Concepto de persona humana segú San Buenaventura. Una valoración actual de su pensamiento*. In: *Bonaventuriana. Miscellanea* pp. 391-416; F.L. B e r e t z. *Grundlegung einer philosophischen Antropologie. S. Bonaventura Maestro di vita francescana e di sapienza cristiana*. In: *Atti del Congresso Internazionale per il VII Centenario di S. Bonaventura*. Vol. II. Roma 1976 pp. 471-482; I. T o n n a. *Lineamenti di filosofia francescana. Sintesi dottrinale del pensiero francescano nei sec. XIII-XIV* Roma 1992 pp. 71-73.

[15] Cf. J.P D o u r l e y. *Paul Tillich and Bonaventure: An evaluation of Tillich's Claim to stan in the Augustinian-Franciscan Tradition*. Leiden: E.J.Brill 1975 pp. 115-157

him/herself to others and directing oneself toward other beings in radical relation to them. Their intersubjectivity governs the whole trinitarian process, which explains itself through the metaphysic of love:

> Through the highest communicability of the good, there must be a Trinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. From supreme goodness, it is necessary that there be in the Persons supreme communicability; from supreme communicability, supreme consubstantiality; from supreme consubstantiality, supreme configurability; and from these supreme coequality and hence supreme coeternity[16]
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> For here is supreme communicability with individuality of persons, supreme consubstantiality with plurality of hypostases, supreme configurability with distinct personality, supreme coequality with degree, supreme coeternity with emanation, supreme mutual intimacy with mission[17]

Because the life of the triune God is the source and example for the human person, it results that the same 'communicability' or the same radical relationship should take place on earth, among the human persons. The *relatio* of the human person that is best termed as *openness* or *relationship* was therefore a radical openness towards God, and in Him and through Him, openness towards union with other beings.

According to its own nature the human spirit therefore directs itself in movement in three different dimensions: towards its exterior, interior and supreme realities. From here derive three different categories of function: the senses that direct the person to the exterior, the reason to the interior and the understanding that projects itself to the highest.

> Just as there are six stages in the ascent into God, there are six stages in the powers of the soul, through which we ascend from the lowest to the highest, from the exterior to the interior, from the temporal to the eternal. These are the senses, imagination, reason, understanding, intelligence, and the summit of the mind or the spark of conscience. We have these stages implanted in us by nature, deformed by sin and reformed by grace. They must be cleansed by justice, exercised by knowledge and perfected by wisdom[18]

It is necessary to emphasize that Bonaventure does not see here only the enumeration of human faculties. Rather, saw in them the acts, the functions and relations, naturally present in the life of human person, which one must activate to be truly a person.

This understanding of the mystery of the human person was not only a theory for St. Bonaventure since in St. Francis he found an ideal example

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[16] *The Soul's Journey into God. Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis.* Transl. and introduc. by E. Cousins, preface by I. Brady. New York–Ramsey–Toronto: Paulist Press 1978 ch. 6 n. 2.

[17] *The Soul's Journey* ch. 6 n. 3 p. 105.

[18] *The Soul's Journey* ch. 1 n. 6 p. 62.

of its realization. His personal and radical openness towards God and the whole creation characterized Saint Francis of Assisi as an authentic person allowing him to rejoice in the fullness and perfection of being which God reserved for the creation[19] The greatness of Bonaventure's mind was to combine in one the philosophical definition of the person given by Boethius, the mystery of trinitarian life of God formulated by Richard of St. Victor with the mystical experience of St. Francis of Assisi.

## II. PERSON AS *ОТНОШЕНИЕ* IN P.A. FLORENSKI (†1937)

The starting point for this Russian Orthodox theologian's reflection on the mystery of the person, similar to St. Bonaventure, is the biblical foundation concerning the creation of man in God's likeness (Genesis 1:26). This text appears regularly in the theologian's writings explained each time with a deeper analysis and wider application allowing for a better understanding of the authentic fullness of the human person. From numerous meanings embedded in God's gift of 'His likeness,' I will reflect upon only one – *relationship,* translated by Florenski as *отношение.*

*Отношение* assumes the openness and dynamic character of the person. The following is a reference to Florenski's fundamental work *Столп и утверждение истины* (The Foundation and Support of Truth):

> The personal character of the person (*личности*) is a live unity of activity (*деятельности*) thanks to which it becomes itself[20]

*Activity,* which can be also described as a creative outburst that leads a person out of seclusion, is a natural element in the spiritual life. The human person cannot retreat from it if one desires to live in the authenticity of the being. Such a kind of the *activity* presents each person with the necessary element of surrender from the tempting conviction of one's completeness already at the starting point, at the moment of one's birth. On the contrary, it demands from the human person the feeling of inner deficiency which leads him/her at the same time to the necessity to go out of one's 'ego,' and to enter into *relationship* with others. It is a kind of spiritual *kénōsis*, through which Christian asceticism understands the spiritual process of the *surrender* its own 'Ego' from every possible egoism. But above all, it demands from

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[19] Cf. *The Life of St. Francis. Bonaventure. The Soul's Journey into God* pp. 177-327.

[20] *Столп и утверждение истины. Опыт православной теодицеи в двенадцати письмах.* Москва 1914 p. 80.

the person love as the privileged way to self-fulfillment, to full actualization of one's person[21] Only then it allows the person full departure from an actual state of being, which is the state of his/her radical incompleteness, from the state of being closed to others, from staying isolated from others who in fact create necessary conditions to disclose the authentic treasure and the full self-identity of the human person. To understand better this thought of the Russian theologian we can use a metaphor, or rather an analogy of a rose. The beauty of a rose is not learned from observation of its roots or buds, but of the flower. Only then are we admiring the authentic beauty of the rose, delighting in its charm, smell, and color of its petals. Similarly, the person reveals oneself to the fullest in the moment of 'blooming,' i.e. in the voluntary and loving moment of giving of oneself to others, and giving them the opportunity to define his or her own 'Ego.' By doing this the human person becomes him/herself most fully and is the most fascinating. It is without a doubt therefore that for the Russian author only the person who persists faithfully in his/her ontological ecstasy, i.e. in relationship, in his or her position of openness towards others, faithful to the dynamic entrance into creative dialogue with them[22], only this type of person carries in him or herself the possibility of developing one's nature entirely. Florenski cannot accept the argument that the person is defined by nature or substance. Rather – he says – the person who lives closed to the other cannot be defined as person but rather as a *thing*. In this condition, the Russian philosopher employs the term *вещность*, i.e. *thingness*[23] The author addressed the meaning of *thingness* of the person in the following manner:

> It means dull, closed in oneself, equalization with oneself; it means a person closed in him or herself in the full completeness of attributes. In this manner, such a person is lifeless and static. In other words, this deals exclusively with the understanding of the person subordinate to the law of rational identity[24]

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[21] *Столп и утверждение истины* p. 92.

[22] This 'difference' perceived by third party was described by Florenski using term 'beauty.' In this case, 'beauty' was referring to objective being, full of creative energy. Cf. *Столп и утверждение истины* pp. 75, 91.

[23] Very difficult to translate into English, Florenski's term *вещность* has very negative connotation. This state of person, which author describes using term *вещность* (*вещ* – thing, subject) defines materialistic person in a negative sense, person equating him/herself with lifeless, inanimate things or subjects. Therefore, the translator of Florenski's works into French, C. Andronikof, described this term through neologism *réité* (from Latin *res* – thing). Compare *La colonne et le fondement de la Vérité. Essai d'une théodicée orthodoxe en douze lettres*. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme 1975 p. 58.

[24] *Столп и утверждение истины* pp. 79-80.

The person closed in him/herself without a willingness and courage to leave his/her own subjectivity and enter into dynamic relationship with God and others risks losing his/her own identity by living on the surface of reality. The only way to save the authenticity of the human person and bring him/her to own fullness is an *ecstasy*, understood as not something passing and accidental, but rather as the normal consistent measure of existence. Through *ecstasy* a person goes out of one's self looking for completeness in a dynamic relationship with others. The appeal to the necessity of the *ecstasy* does not lead to the undermining or loss of subjective individuality, one's proper identity. By entering into dialogue with the other 'You' my personal 'Ego' does not automatically and completely diffuse into the other 'You,' losing personal subjectivity. Even by creating a real and radical unity with the other person, my 'Ego' not only retains its authentic subjective individuality, but also gains its fullness.

The Florenski did not want to trivialize the richness of the subjective 'Ego,' given by God to all creatures. He intended only to emphasize that the most worthy for the human person is the resignation from negative and the tight grip over the borders of the own subjective 'ego.' He was encouraging the departure from one's personal individuality, understood on the basis of exclusivity, leading to existential openness towards others. He expressed this truth in the following way:

> Through surpassing the law of identity, logical, but lacking essence, through identification with my beloved brother, my 'Ego' becomes voluntarily 'not Ego' or using the language of holy Psalms, 'strips, destroys and lowers' himself (Phil. 2:7). This means that my 'Ego' resigns the necessity, received characteristics and natural laws of internal activity, which remain in harmony with the law of ontological egoism or identity. In the norm of the other being, my 'Ego' leaves its boundaries and resigns from his/her norm of being and submits oneself voluntarily to the new perspective. It enters in this way into the 'Ego' of the other being, which looking from his/her side, reveals him/herself as 'not Ego.' In this way, the impersonal 'not Ego' becomes a person, alter-ego (second 'Ego'), i.e. 'you.' Through this 'impoverishment or exhaustion' of my 'Ego,' through 'stripping' and 'kenosis,' the consequent return of my 'Ego' takes place in the proper norm of his/her being, i.e. in openness towards 'you'[25]

The quoted text, unlike any other, portrays the author's deepest thoughts. The deepest contents, which are difficult to express in simple and generally understood words, visibly suggest that between the person and his/her way of existence there exists a strong spiritual bond. Obviously, the person can break this bond by not accepting such a deep relationship to his/her

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[25] *Ibid.* pp. 91-92.

consciousness but in the circumstances where this bond is broken the person ceases to understand him/herself and his/her nature. Regardless of the way we will interpret these words for Florenski the authenticity of the person is connected to the 'manner' in which it exists. And therefore, it becomes possible and even authorized to treat the 'manner' and existence' as two closely tied anthropological realities which express the full truth of the person only when treated jointly. It could basically be said that Florenski's person reveals him/herself as a specific 'manner of existence.'

Experience teaches that the sharing of my 'Ego' with the other person costs a lot. 'Giving myself' to others as a 'manner' of forming my own person does not limit itself to temporary and passing 'being for.' This 'being for,' understood as a unique 'manner' of existence, which possesses within itself the opportunity to realize the fullness of the human person, has an especially long lasting (eternal) time of existence: it is the *constant* outline of the authentic person. Judging it from this point of view, we could probably add that the 'being for,' being in *relationship* is nothing more than the true *essence* of the human person. In practice, that means that *ecstasy* tends to touch upon the essence of a personal being; this ecstasy encompasses the person or in radical terms creates the human person. The person 'attains him/herself' through a dynamic rejection of his/her subjective 'Ego': in love and freedom the person opens him/herself to other subjects in the first place to those who exist next to him/her, entering with them into creative dialogue and subjectivity followed by all other subjects, from which uncompromisingly the most important is God.

One's personal 'Ego' in this way comes to coexistence with the other (*единосущным брату* – *homoousios*), writes Florenski, i.e. not only similar or close to, but 'coexisting' with, equal in nature, or co-natural with the other. The important point here is the strong and radical unity going far beyond the similarities. Joining the two subjects on the level of nature this unity accepts at the same time their whole richness of diversity. The only and probably best equivalent of unity in difference is the internal life of the Holy Trinity. Florenski emphasized many times that the identity of divine nature does not destroy the diversity of Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)[26] Maintaining full identity and diversity, the Persons of the Holy Trinity unite in the one communion of being. Participating actively in the creation of 'You,' each Divine Person allows at the same time for formation of the full

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[26] Cf. Z.J. K i j a s. *Homo creatus est: Ekumeniczne studium antropoligii P. A. Florenskiego (†1937) i H. U. von Balthasara († 1988)*. Kraków: Bratni Zew 1996 pp. 75-76.

and authentic proper and personal 'Ego' in the mystery of divine relations. A significant consequence of this is that relationship (*отношение*) takes on the connotation of substance[27], relationship influences the radical way of forming the person in its full richness, in all dimensions with full authenticity.

The Russian expressions *выход* or *выхождение* depict very well the coming out of oneself, leaving the hitherto existing seclusion in the "Ego." Florenski explained this process with the help of another equally dynamic verb *подниматься*. The term *подниматься*, which can be translated as 'raise up,' accents the occurrence in the soul of the dynamic process of the 'uplifting of oneself' (closely related to the mystical gift of ascension) surpassing the former way of existence, 'uplifting of oneself' over accepted rules of logical behavior and 'raising oneself' to overcome the logical level (*сверхлогический*)[28] This demands well defined internal effort, spiritual struggle, which necessitates following the way of the ascetics, whose power and greatness depend on a defined goal and on an ideal to which the person was called.

The above mentioned description of the person, in which existential activity in large measure was brought to the foreground, was on the one hand a return to the tradition of the Fathers, and on the other hand a kind of protest against the essentialist philosophy of Kant or Hegel.

### III. PERSON AS *(EX) ÜBER SICH SELBST* IN H.U. VON BALTHASAR (†1988)

Similar to his Russian colleague, von Balthasar contemplates the mystery of the human person in the context of the description from the Book of Genesis: "Let us make a man – someone like ourselves" (1:26). Balthasar acknowledges that it is not easy to capture the proper and full sense of the cited text by the inspired author, which is confirmed also by the history of exegesis. There are many interesting themes here, and to present all of them is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, I will treat only one of them that can be formulated with the following question: In what way does the person achieve consciousness of self as self, or simply stated, when does the person achieve fulfillment? Is the state that is achieved by the person the effect of an internal process or spiritual dynamism, or is this fullness given to

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[27] Cf. *Столп и утверждение истины* p. 49.
[28] *Ibid.* p. 91.

the person in a single act that would mean that the person is of a static and autonomic nature.

The human person for von Balthasar is not a being left alone in the cosmos, completely forgotten and left entirely to him/herself. On the contrary, the person is in the image of God called and supported in its existence by the love of the creator. Living in the unity of the three Persons the God of Christian revelation brings about the fact that God's likeness in humanity has corresponding degree of trinitarian character. The truthfulness of these words is deeply felt by many people. The Bishop of Hippo tried to understand the mystery of the trinitarian God's 'likeness' in man within the person as spiritual, looking for a reflection of the gift of 'likeness' in man's soul. The proposition of the Swiss theologian leads in the direction of defining the person more in existential terms, as approaching a specific kind of existence – an *ex-sistentia*, understood as a movement out of one's self. He believed that it was essential to supplement and to widen the earlier proposition of defining the person as centered mainly on the soul of man, and at the same time bring together two independent lines of thoughts and beings which can complete each other[29]

Stressing the dynamic character of image Balthasar, like Bonaventure and Florenski, pointed to the human person "as a spiritual subject which goes out from (*Hinausgehen [ex] über sich selbst*)"[30] Only this active notion deserves "to be labeled as person"[31] In practice this meant that the fullness of a person is revealed not in a static being, but in *relationship,* unselfish, full of love, going out of one's 'Ego' with a complete self giving to another. In this dynamic *relationship* with other I gave him or her the possibility to define completely and only authentically my personal 'Ego.' In exchange I was receiving a similar possibility of defining fully the other 'you,' so that he/she could enjoy the status of the authentic person. In such a manner, 'relationship to God and the other person' was understood by von Balthasar as consti-

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[29] H.U. von B a l t h a s a r. *Theodramatik*. T. II/2: *Die Personen in Christus*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1978 p. 480.

[30] Using German terminology which was adapted by Balthasar when describing Richard's theology (cf. *Homo creatus est. Skizzen zur Theologie*. T. V Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1986 p. 97).

[31] Cf. *Homo creatus est* p. 97 We read in Richard of St. Victor that for God: "Nihil aliud est persona quam incommunicabilis existential" (*La Trinité* IV 28). However, in reference to *ex* this philosopher writes: "Per adjunctam *ex* propositionem notari potest quod (persona) pertinet ad aliam" (*La Trinité* IV 12).

tuting being a person in its fullness and richness that was intended by the Creator.

The relationship with God, which was thoroughly portrayed by St. Bonaventure as a relationship creating a person and his/her specific nature, received from H. U. von Balthasar personal outline, to a higher theological rather than philosophical degree. He tended to say that full personalization of the human being is achievable only in the moment of full *openness* to the redeeming presence of Christ and through the positive response to God's message *(Sendung)*. In consequence, *Sendung*, which can be translated as 'vocation' or 'mission,' and *Personalisierung* ('personalization') are correlative and von Balthasar was willing to use them almost as synonyms[32] Obedience *(Gehorsamkeit)* to vocation and response to it in one's life 'transformed' the spiritual creation into a person in the full meaning of this word. He accepted the biblical category of 'selection' *(Erwählung)* as a force personalizing the human 'Ego' through its specific 'expropriation' *(Enteignung)* from egoistic tendencies and tight grip within the self and also through directing one's interest to someone else, experiencing therefore in this other 'you' the chance of one's development[33]

> Only there, where God is person, will man be treated seriously as a person. Only then will God speak personally to everyone, as to 'you' and, only then, will the person be convinced of his/her exceptional value[34]

Balthasar gave the great credit for *relationship*, noticing in it a kind of personal response to the concrete call from God who desires the fulfillment of a person's richness in obedience to his/her mission. In this sense the human person becomes authentic to the degree one actualizes his/her *Sendung*; its fulfillment lies in harmony with one sending *(Sendenden)*, which defines a specific kind of vocation[35] In other words, the nature of the person, wanted and to some degree planned by God, is nothing else but the fruit of a realized vocation, i.e. existence in mission *(Sendung)*. Appropriately we can say that the person *is not*, but *becomes* or acquires him/herself in *[ex] über sich selbst*, i.e. by going out of one's self, being in *relationship*. This

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[32] Cf. *Homo creatus est* p. 100.

[33] Cf. H.U. von B a l t h a s a r. *In Gottes Einsatz leben*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1972 (2nd edition) p. 90.

[34] *Klarstellungen. Zur Prüfung der Geister*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1978 (4th edition) pp. 38-39.

[35] From Balthasar: "Im Begriff Sendung liegt zweierlei: einmal die Beziehung zurück zu einem Sendenden, der in der Sendung mit präsent ist, aber nicht als identisch mit dem, Gesandeten" *(Theodramatik.* T II/2 p. 154).

means that personal fullness planned and foreseen by God is lacking at the beginning of one's coming into being and appears only at the moment of the completion of one's work, i.e. at the moment of the realization of one's vocation designated in the act of creation[36]

Understanding the value of a person from this perspective it is easy to recognize that the only perfect person is Jesus Christ, for only He fully and perfectly was able to realize His mission (*Sendung*) on earth designated to Him by His Father[37]

## IV. ECUMENICAL VALUE OF THE 'OPEN' PERSON

It is not difficult to see the basic similarities of the three theologians's thoughts presented in this paper. For St. Bonaventure, Florenski and von Balthasar, existence[38] means in reality the *movement* towards the truth of being which is of relational nature. St. Bonaventure uses the term *relatio*, which means *entering* into relationship, whereas Florenski used отношение (directing to [someone] behind), and Balthasar adapted the term *hinausgehen*, as 'departing behind,' or *(ex) über sich selbst*, which means to be 'above oneself.' Although these terms differ in character they reflect basically the same thought which suggests that being precedes the person to some degree. In other words the starting point of this 'departure from – to' reveals the fullest nature of the subject. Therefore *existence* reveals slowly, but systematically throughout history, the answer to the question, 'Who is the person?'

To defend against the temptation to be closed within self German philosopher M. Heidegger proposes to look at the relation between: *ex-istence* and

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[36] From Balthasar: "Dort, wo Gott einem Geistsubjekt zusagt, wer es für ihn, den ewig bleibenden und wahrhaftigen Gott ist, wo er ihm im gleichen Zuge sagt, wozu es existiert ihm also seine von Gott her beglaubigte Sendung verleigt – dort kann von einem Geistsubjekt gesagt werden, dass es Person sei" (*Theodramatik*. T II/2 p. 190). Cf. also *Theologick*. T. III: *Der Geist der Wahrheit*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1987 p. 134.

[37] *Theodramatik*. T. II/2 p. 190. Although Balthasar does not mention this clearly, it appears that it is permissible to conclude, that Mary also belonged to the category of people who perfectly realized their vocation, their earthly mission. Cf. J. Ratzinger, H.U. von Balthasar. *Maria – chiesa nascente*. Roma: Ed. Paoline 1981 pp. 39-73.

[38] In similar manner M. Heidegger stated that: „Das Wesen weder aus dem esse essentiae, noch aus dem esse existentiae, sondern aus dem Ek-statischen des Daseins bestimmt" (*Über den Humanismus*. Frankfurt a/M 1949 p. 16).

*existence*[39] Although foreign to our theologians the Heidegger's proposition can enlighten their thought. In Western tradition the term *existence* was used to differentiate existence from *essence*, which defined the real but not yet factual possibility of coming into being. For the Heidegger *ex-istence* was a concept definitely richer because it defines some kind of internal activity 'leading' the being out of the present state of hiding from pure possibility into fullness of authentic being. This type of philosophy of being, and in consequence also the person, relates to St. Bonaventure, Florenski and Balthasar's understanding. This philosophy is also close to the spiritual needs of our times, more visibly perceiving the need for unity between people and mutual openness to each other which is the condition for authenticity of being and the survival of creation.

From this perspective the person is a being especially directed into the future, open and full of hope. Based on this, the person for Bonaventure, Florenski and Balthasar is a being always *itinerant*. As G. Marcel's *Homo viator* suggests the person 'wanders' constantly towards fullness, towards fuller existence, towards fuller unity with the Creator and other human persons.

> I must puncture the illusion, infinitely persistent it is true, that I am possessed of unquestionable privileges that make me the center of my universe, while other people are either mere obstructions to be removed or circumvented, or else those echoing amplifiers, whose purpose is to foster my self-complacency. I propose to call this illusion moral egocentricity[40]
>
> I establish myself as a person in so far as I really believe in the existence of others and allow this belief to influence my conduct[41]

The formulation of person in categories of *openness* suggests 'incompleteness' – one is not yet what one should be. The complete 'overflowing' of the person will happen only at the moment of 'giving him/herself' into the hands of the other person. In one's life the following of Christ who was radically for the Father and for the people is therefore the most important goal of existence of the human person that pursues to be authentic identity. Not intellect, but rather elements of heart and love are brought to the foreground and accepted as the most important in St. Bonaventure's anthropology as well as Florenski and Balthasar.

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[39] The German philosopher wrote: "Ek-sistenz ist nicht identisch mit dem überlieferten Begriff der existentia, was Wirklichkeit bedeutet im Unterschied zu essentia als der Möglichkeit" (*Über den Humanismus* p. 15).

[40] G. Marcel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*. Transl. by E. Craufurd. Harper and Row Publishers 1962 p. 19.

[41] *Ibid.* p. 22.

The acceptance of 'openness' as a basic element of the authenticity of the person has its ecumenical consequences that are important for us. I would like to focus attention on three of them, which I consider very important:

1. The dynamism 'I' – 'you,' which has an ontological nature is deeply ecumenical, because it postulates the interpersonal participation in the truth of being. The discovery of the truth of being fulfills unity in mutual dialogue with the other, in the mutual search in discovery of truth. At the same time such a dynamism bears with itself the tensions and conflicts. Brought out into the open and worked through, they are beneficial and help to grow the other and myself. This has been demonstrated by psychologists and sociologists, and also by those who have studied the community life. We spontaneously see unity in terms of identity. Meanwhile, the 'open' nature of the person teaches us that my true existence allows and even demands the presence of 'you' with all his/her differences, which I resolve by a principle that transcends them. Obviously it cannot harm my personal identity, rather it has to enrich it. This spirit of interreligious dialogue has been described by John Paul II in his encyclical on missionary activity, *Redemptoris Misso:*

> Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or closed mindedness, but with truth, humility, and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance, and misunderstandings. Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion that, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful[42]

2. The person is ordered and open to the totality of truth, but it is limited in each person and even in each group of persons. Each spirit, each group has only a certain number of experiences and recognizes only a part or certain aspects of the truth. That is why we are structurally in need of giving and taking. The human person is structurally directed towards dialogue, towards welcoming the other, towards what is *different.* If ecumenism is a quest for the fullness of the truth about God it must be open to welcome the differences. On 22 June 1979, John Paul II declared to a Coptic delegation:

> It is vital for this dialogue that we should recognize that the richness of this unity in the faith and spiritual life should be expressed in a diversity of forms. Unity – whether universally or on a local level – does not signify uniformity or the absorption of one group by the

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[42] J o h n  P a u l  II. Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* no. 56; quoted from "Origins" 20:1991 (January 31) pp. 541-568, at 557.

other. It is rather at the service of all groups to help one another to give better expression to the gifts that have been received from the spirit of God[43]

3. By underlining the importance of the *existence* in becoming an authentic person our theologians point at the necessity of *action* in human life. The words are important but the existence has its primary value and the dialogue, which is not realized on the level of concrete existence has no chance to survive. The ecumenical movement, as teaches the Decree on Ecumenism, consists in a "change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians" (UR 8). Theological ecumenism, therefore, must go along with the renewal of spiritual life and with the performing presence of the Christians in the life of the world.

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On the base of what was said above, it seems also possible to draw a certain analogy between the formation of individual personality, as we have seen by Bonaventure, Florenski and Balthasar, and the idea of the ecumenical dialogue, as it has developed in modern theology, which implies a mutual exchange of views between diverse parties who do not fully agree but who respect and are prepared to learn from one another. The interaction between 'I' and the 'you' in the emergence of the full person, as analyzed by our theologians, could provide such an analogy.

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[43] Cf. "Irenikon" 52:1979 p. 377.

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## POJĘCIE OSOBY
## U ŚW. BONAWENTURY, P. A. FLORENSKIEGO, H. U. VON BALTHASARA
## I JEGO EKUMENICZNA WARTOŚĆ

### Streszczenie

Kwestia dotycząca natury osoby ludzkiej nie jest nowa. Nie pojawiła się wraz z chrześcijaństwem, chociaż to właśnie chrześcijaństwo potraktowało ją bardzo poważnie, rozważając w kontekście tajemnicy Trójcy Świętej. Na przestrzeni wieków wielu stawiało pytanie dotyczące osoby, udzielając na nie różnej odpowiedzi. Także i dzisiaj nie ma zgody wśród uczonych co do kwestii osoby. Niniejszy tekst nie zamierza rozwiązać kwestii osoby udzielając definitywnej odpowiedzi na pojawiające się problemy. Tym niemniej jest on próbą spojrzenia na pojęcie osoby, zaproponowane przez św. Bonawenturę (1217-1274) oraz dwóch dwudziestowiecznych teologów chrześcijańskich – Pawła A. Florenskiego (1883-1937) oraz Hansa Ursa

von Balthasara (1905-1988), dwóch czołowych przedstawicieli wschodniej i zachodniej tradycji teologicznej.

Tego rodzaju analiza pozwala podkreślić podobieństwa w spojrzeniu na osobę, z jakimi spotykamy się u trzech wspomnianych teologów, którzy nie tylko różnili się między sobą czasem i środowiskiem życia, ale także przynależnością do dwóch różnych tradycji teologicznych. Ponadto chcemy ich zapytać, na ile ekumeniczną wartość posiada wypracowane przez nich pojęcie osoby. Czy opowiadając się po stronie pojęcia osoby, wypracowanego przez Bonawenturę, Florenskiego czy Balthasara, promujemy dialog ekumeniczny w szerokim sensie tego słowa, tzn. nie tylko między chrześcijanami, ale także między wszystkimi ludźmi.

Osoba jest istnieniem otwartym na całą prawdę. To sprawia, że osoba z konieczności potrzebuje dawania się i otrzymywania. Osoba ludzka jest więc istnieniem strukturalnie skierowanym na drugich, wchodząc z nimi w dialog, akceptując ich *inność*, które nie niszczy tego dialogu, ale czyni go możliwym, wzbogacając go o nowe doświadczenia. Jeżeli więc ekumenizm jest poszukiwaniem pełni prawdy na temat Boga, stąd też musi on być rzeczywistością otwartą na przyjęcie odmienności innych ludzki.

Podkreślając wartość i znaczenie *egzystencji* w procesie stawania się autentyczną osobą, wszyscy trzej teologowie wskazywali zarazem konieczność *akcji*, pewnego dynamizmu w życiu ludzkim. Oczywiście słowa są ważne w dialogu ekumenicznym, ale o wiele ważniejsze jest samo życie. Kiedy bowiem słowa nie są przeżywane na płaszczyźnie życia, pozostając zamknięte jedynie do samych deklaracji, wówczas dialog nie ma szans na przeżycie pojawiających się trudności. Nie przetrzyma zagrożeń, ale podda się im i zostanie przez nie pokonany. Ruch ekumeniczny jest szansą i wezwaniem do zmiany postawy serca i podjęcia decyzji o świętości życia. Dlatego też dialog ekumeniczny jest formą zaproszenia do autentycznej przemiany człowieka, dokonującej się poprzez jego otwarcie na prawdę, którą w sensie najbardziej pełnym jest sam Jezus Chrystus.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** pojęcie osoby, św. Bonawentura (1217-1274), Paweł A. Florenski (1883-1937), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), ekumeniczna wartość, dialog.

**Key words:** the concept of human person, St. Bonaventure (1217-1274), Pavel A. Florenski (1883-1937), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), ecumenical value, dialogue.