

COMMENTS ON THE PAPER OF PROF. RAFAEL ALVIRA

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The first issue in the excellent paper of R. Alvira that deserves to be commented upon and further investigated is the idea of person and the connection between the individual and the social dimension of the person. The person is an *ens intelligens et liberum*. Man acts on the basis of her/his own insight into the true nature of things and of her/his own free will. This is also the first basis of the image of God in man. Just like God we are intelligent and we are free. This characterization of the person is however unilateral and does not give us a full grasp of the nature of the person. The human individual does not mark an absolute beginning. We are born in a family, we have a mother and a father. Our body is the result of the intermingling of the genetic codes of two other humans. Moreover we are thoroughly dependent on their support in the first years of our life. Our moral self develops in the close interrelationship with our parents. To a certain extent they are interiorized in us and live in us. Through a social process called 'tradition' each generation consigns (Lat. *tradere*, to consign) to the following the experience of values that in their lives have been experienced as true. In our lives we work together with others and can take care of our lives and of our dear ones only in and through this community of work. We fall in love and constitute new families. We search for truth in the dialogue with other human beings. Although we carry the full responsibility for our thoughts and our acts it is true that what we are is also the result of the relations we have to other human beings, relations that have of course to pass through the critical examination of our intellect and have to be confirmed by our free will. This is the second basis for our resemblance to God. God is a Trinity: each person lives in and through the relation to the other. This is the reason why God is Love.

Both traits of the similarity between God and Man are unified in the idea of person. The person is an *ens intelligens et liberum* but at the same

time the person is a relation (*hypostasis*, that is the Greek word for person and means relation). Among the great monotheistic religions of mankind the first trait is more widely recognized than the second.

All monotheistic religions know that God is intelligent and free. Only Christianity says that God is a Trinity and the relation is constitutive of His being. Of course the resemblance between God and man and the nature of man is profoundly changed when we add this second determination to our idea of the person.

The person is at the same time individual (*persona est sui juris et altero incommunicabilis*) and social (better: community, that is intrinsically dependent upon the relation to others. Each one of us could say to God, but to a lesser degree and in a different sense also to our families and to our loved ones: if you were not, I would not be). Here there is a fruitful point of interconnection between ecclesiology and philosophy of the person. Man is created for communion with other men and with God.

One point should not, however, be obliterated. I am created for communion, but I become communion through an act of my free will. This act cannot be coerced.

All these considerations confirm the central tenet of Alvira's paper: there is an intrinsic relation between person and common good. The good of the person cannot be defined out of connection with the common good of the community to which she/he belongs.

This seems to respond to the libertarian criticism of the idea of social justice. This idea needs to be grounded in the idea of common good and in the perception of the person both as an individual and a (member of a) community. But perhaps at least some of the libertarians (es. Von Hayek) visualized a different opponent in their criticisms of the idea of social justice and could come to terms with this idea of social justice.

A second issue that ought to be debated is the characterization and purpose of the enterprise. Perhaps we could agree in saying that the telos (purpose) of the enterprise is the creation of value. A certain input of raw materials, human labour, goods and services has to be transformed into an output of finished goods. If the output value is not larger than the input value the enterprise is a failure and does not perform its social function. The specific contribution of the enterprise as such to the common good is the creation of value.

Of course this specific contribution must be situated in the context of the totality of social life. Value has to be created for the shareholders of course. But value has to be created for other stakeholders too. Value has to be cre-

ated for the workers, who earn their wages and spend their lives in the firm. Value has to be created for the consumers who will make use of the goods and services delivered by the firm and value has to be created for society at large (for example through the taxes paid by the firm). On the other hand the firm needs a favorable environment to grow. The proper insertion of the firm in the social environment and the proper interrelation between the good of the firm and the good of the community of which the firm is a part is the result of a social dialogue in which different social institutions (city councils, trade unions, consumers associations etc.) must have a role. Each institution will represent the particular interests of their members and the task of politics is to regulate this dialogue preserving the sphere of specific decision and responsibility of each subject and at the same time avoiding that any particular subject shuts the doors to any possible communication pursuing a private interest opposed to the common good. The common good is always the result of dialogue and often of compromise.

The third issue I propose for further discussion is the social role of religion. Here the ideas of Alvira remind me of the great theological work of H.U. von Balthazar and especially of the introductory pages to *Die Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*.

The stand a person (or a human community or a civilization) takes in front of the *novissimi* (the ultimate mysteries of human life) determines the whole structure of the personality, the capacity to work and support a family, the attitude towards sexual love, the amount of energy and creativity she/he will develop in disentangling the intricacies of social life.

Christianity does not coincide with any specific civilization, it is not more western than eastern or northern or southern. Encountering different human environments Christianity has nevertheless generated different civilizations. There are some elements that unite these civilizations among themselves and differentiate them from all others. None of them exhausts the genius of Christendom and each of them expresses one of its possible developments. A civilization may keep living on the basis of social/religious archetypes long after the faith that has given birth to them has disappeared. But sooner or later these archetypes will be challenged and if the civilization has become intrinsically void it will expire. Or perhaps the original faith will be renewed.

I must stop here, although the paper of R. Alvira has given food for thought also on many other sensible points and I hope that these remarks of mine may help to start a fruitful discussion.