

Archbishop Lazar Puhalo

**AN INVITED ESSAY ON “PERSONALISM”  
IN RELATION TO ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

We are not criticising the philosophy of Personalism per se but critiquing its relationship to Orthodox Christian theology. Personalism is a laudable secular religion with many good manifestations, but asserting that there can no Orthodox Christian branch of it.

INTRODUCTION

When Dr Andrew Sopko made a comment about Personalism in his examination of my theology,<sup>1</sup> I became curious about the philosophy of Personalism as it relates to Orthodox Christian theology, and began, in 2000, to study it. I was recently invited to write this essay on the subject.

Dr Sopko observed that, unlike some contemporary Orthodox theologians, I had not fallen into "Personalism." From my examination of Personalism, I conclude that there can be no Orthodox Personalism. Whatever our view of it, it is evident that there is no patristic support for Personalism, or for any kind of synthesis of Christianity with Phenomenology<sup>2</sup> or neo-Kantian liberalism.

Many historians had presumed that Apostolic and sub-Apostolic Christianity was shaped by osmosis from Plato and Aristotle. This surmise has been based upon the use of vocabulary which developed in the process of Greek (Hellenic and Hellenistic) philosophy. Scant attention was paid to the fact that the Church fathers generally turned Plato "upside down," while utilising much of his vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> Western historians and theologians, however, tend to read the Church fathers in the same context that they would read Plato. It is extremely difficult for the Western mind to divorce itself from Scholasticism (which is poor theology, but beneficial for the development of science) and this adds to the problem because Western scholars tend to read the holy fathers through the lens and with the concepts of Scholasticism. They are also generally unaware of the great foundational shift that is affected by the Liturgies of the Orthodox Church as well as by the actions of divine grace. Nor was there any harmonising of Christianity with Plotinus and the Stoics by the Church fathers. It is true that some early Christian writers and philosophers who were not fathers of the Church, such as Clement of Alexandria, Augustine and Origen did not observe this separation, but the fathers of the Church did.

They did utilise that cultural vocabulary and appeal to Hellenic thought as an instrument of

discernment, communication and elaboration of the Faith, but they did so with caution. In other words, unlike post-patristic theology,<sup>4</sup> philosophy and ethics, there was no amalgamation of first principles between the Church fathers and the Greeks. There is no continuity from antiquity to modernity on the question of the relationship between Orthodoxy and the Greeks, the dogmatism of Western scholarship notwithstanding. Such a continuity would be more true of Western theological development. As Cosmologist Menas Kafatos observes, The dualistic conception of reality as consisting of abstract, disembodied ideas existing in a domain separate from and superior to that of sensible objects and movements became the most characteristic feature of Western philosophical and religious thought.<sup>5</sup> Orthodox Christian mystical thought does not place reality in some *noetos kosmos*, some abstract realm of ideal forms. It is rather concerned with the dynamic working out of the human nature,<sup>6</sup> and the synergism between man and God.

The holy fathers also strove to demonstrate that man can have a relationship with God Who is both personal and yet unknowable.<sup>7</sup>

Personalism arose well over a century ago within the Western heritage but I want to direct the reader's attention to Personalism and its modernity, "the paradigm for the second modernity," as James

Lawson refers to it.<sup>8</sup> Although Personalism has had many both Christian and non-Christian proponents, such as Charles Peggy, Pope John Paul II,<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., Paul Marin, Edith Stein, Dorothy Day, Martin Buber, Max Scheler, and others, there are three Personalists who will occupy most of our discussion: the French Roman Catholic Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), whose journal, *L'Esprit*, launched the principles of Personalism; the American Methodist Professor Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910) of Boston University and, finally, the Russian Boehmist emigre Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), "the prince of the Catholic Workers Movement." Like many others, Berdyaev viewed the "communitarian revolution" of the 1930s as a social demonstration of Personalism.

This Movement (and several similar ones) was ignited by the Great Depression. It was fuelled by several papal encyclicals: Pope Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891) with its praiseworthy concern for the urban poor; and later, Pope Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno* (15 May 1931) which laudably called for the reconstruction of the social order through the recognition of the sanctity of human life and the dignity of each individual. They were aware of the significant number of members that the Catholic Church had been losing since the Industrial Revolution. At the same time,

these papal declarations prepared the way for a religious answer to Marxism. This religious response to materialism and collectivism did not imply a return to the Christian Tradition but rather encouraged Personalists to hail their experiment as a grand synthesis or, as some had described it, the "clarification of thought" and a "new humanism."

## 2

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN PERSONALISM**

The use of the term "Personalism" first appeared in Friedrich Schleiermacher's "*Personalismus*" in his Discourses (1799) and in the 1860s Walt Whitman and Bronson Alcott used it. Personalism did not, however, assume the nature of a school until the appearance of the work of Boston University's Borden Bowne. He had been taught in Germany by the philosopher Herman Lotze (1817-1881). Against Georg Fredrich Hegel, whose Absolute or Universal Spirit threatened to swallow the cosmos, Lotze defended the unity and indissolubility of the individual self. He had also been the teacher of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), whose Phenomenology inspired his pupils Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the prodigal Max Scheler (1874-1928), and Edith Stein (1891- 1943). Scheler attempted to find an objective basis for ethics that

avoided "the empty and barren formalism" of Kant's •practical judgment."<sup>10</sup> One of Scheler's pupils was Roman Ingarden who was the teacher of Karol Wojtyla.<sup>11</sup> There was, among these philosophers, a failure of modesty about the human person. They did not anchor the concept of "person" in finitude. Orthodoxy does anchor personhood in a finitude that is illumined by the light of the hope of coming into union with the eternal.

Personalism also inspired post-World War I American radicalism, none more important than the work of the wonderful Dorothy Day (1897-1980), a founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. She was taught Personalism by the French Catholic emigre, Pierre Marin (1887-1949), co-founder and collaborator in the social action of the Catholic Worker Movement. Curiously, Day referred to the Russian Sophianist Vladimir Soloviov<sup>12</sup> as her favourite philosopher, without meaning any slight to the inestimable contribution of Berdyaev to the Personalist doctrine. However important all these figures were to Personalism, it was Emmanuel Mounier (a "new Catholic of the Left") who was its guiding spirit. The organ of the Movement was the *D'ESPRIT* which he established in 1932. It has been described as anti-American, anti-Socialist, and pro-fascist.

Mounier's Personalism is eloquently expressed in his numerous books, most of which have been translated into English and other languages: *Personalist Revolution and the Communitarian* (1935), *A Personalist Manifesto* (first published in *D'ESPRIT*, October, 1936), *What is Personalism?* (1947), *Personalism* (1940), *Be Not Afraid: Studies in Personalist Sociology* (1951), etc. They are dedicated to the affirmation of the absolute value of the human person. When Mounier declares the person to be something "absolute," we must not think of the word in Hegelian terms. Not even the Igms or Man elevate him to that status.

Inasmuch as Mounier's Personalism is both religious and Roman Catholic, he believed that man is neither "clump of clay" nor "pure spirit." The human person is, contrary to Descartes, a single unified substance, a dynamic whole that is the synthesis of body and soul.<sup>13</sup> He is a self-conscious embodied soul. To be sure, Mounier agrees that each man is in the image of God, but his philosophical interpretation of the concept left him far short of Christian anthropology. Although he agreed with Thomas Aquinas that "person signifies the most perfect of all," a position Mounier shared with Jacques Maritain, the former insisted that, thanks to Christ, the person is neither Greek nor Christian, but self-born. He is self-created (*autogenesis*).

Personalism generally agrees with those Existentialist philosophers who hold that man has no essence and must form it by his decisions and actions. While it is difficult to see how a creature with no essence can create anything, especially his own essence, Mounier posits that man's autonomy makes him "the being who defines himself." He is *sine matre creatum*. This will not equal the patristic concept of hypostasis, but rather asserts an existence without an essence. Man would, in this system, give birth to his own essence and he would constitute his own essence.<sup>14</sup>

A particularly disturbing aspect of this is the disunity of mankind that such a position indicates. Orthodox Christianity understands that all mankind shares in the same essence, the human nature. The human nature is what is common to all and subject to the laws of nature. It is this common human nature that should cause us to have a respect for all human beings, and which should, for example, tell us that racism is a form of apostasy. Nevertheless, we are not without an individual personhood, an individuation that might be called a "particular" essence, which we can shape and expand (or contract). The holy fathers resolved this apparent paradox by expressing our individual personhood, our "particular essence," with the ontological category of "*hypostasis*." "The category of *hypostasis*

includes one's personal differentiation and particularity. It relates to what we consciously and intentionally do with our essence and energy.<sup>15</sup> *Hypostasis* signifies, therefore, not only our personal differentiation but our freedom within, and ability to rise above, our common human nature or essence.

This concept is necessary in order to understand how we have individuality but are at the same time all comprised in the one, single human nature, regardless of race, nationality, religion, gender or any of the other categories that our finite humanity can think of in order to create divisions and hatred within humanity. We all partake in this common essence of man, nevertheless, we do have our unique *hypostasis*, and this provides our personal creativity and our freedom to shape our own lives and fulfil our own personal potential, to develop our own character. We understand this *hypostasis* as a gift of grace, something which is added to our being by grace. Orthodox Christian anthropology holds that all share in common the human nature, even though that nature can be known only in individuals, not in abstractions. He is part, and yet he is whole. The individual personhood of each lies in his *hypostasis*, not in a "being without an essence," an essential *tabula rasa*.

This concept of nature and *hypostasis* is discussed more fully in my book *Freedom To*

Believe: Personhood and Freedom in Orthodox Christian Ontology. <sup>16</sup> I would like to suggest another possible problem with the Personalist notion about essence. If we must create our own essence, how would we have any idea of what is natural to man and what is unnatural, even "natural human rights?" If there is not a common, natural essence of all mankind, then how could there possibly be common "natural human rights?" How do we determine what aspects or characteristics one is born with and which are self-created, which occur within the common nature of man and which are matters of free choice and "self-created?" Science has resolved some of the questions and may very well resolve others. When we find them resolved as things that occur with regularity within the human nature, they demonstrate a common human essence that is not self-created.

In the absence of these proper ontological categories, recognised in the Orthodox Christian Church, Personalism developed in the quest for the resolution of irreconcilable paradoxes in the understanding of the individual as part and whole of humanity. That is, in our Orthodox perspective, the human person shares the common human nature, but that nature can be known only in individuals. He shares in the common human nature, but he possesses a "particular essence (*hypostasis*)," which

is evident from his ability to develop himself and seek and develop his relationship with God. So we (from an Orthodox point of view) assert that he is both part and whole of humanity.

Turkish philosopher Nazim Hikmet gives us a lovely metaphor that will, I believe, express this concept with regard to the relationship between the individual and the community. Hikmet says that he desires to "live free and individually like a tree, but in brotherhood like a forest."<sup>17</sup>

Mounier would not have us confuse Personalism with Individualism. The latter is a conception of the self as an object, and this is not the purpose of Personalism. For Mounier the individual is an object without interiority; he is a mass of emotions agitated by the senses. Individualism, therefore, blocks the road to social participation; in fact, it is an enemy of the community, for if the individual is the supreme value, his interests are subordinated to the interests of the many. In its extreme form, individualism leads to solipsism or the belief that only the individual is real. <sup>18</sup> It is a kind of self-deification. Ironically, it also makes personhood and the "individual" abstractions rather than entities. Mounier wants no obstacle to his autonomy and demands the right to act freely, but not in the form of radical individualism. For him, the individual defines himself as independent of any

social bonds. He opposes rights to duties. But Mounier is not being self-contradictory. The irony of individualism is that, as Plato said, it will morph into a collectivism, where the individual will also be on his own, perhaps only an object in the communal landscape.

For Mounier, the only answer to individualism and collectivism is Personalism. Mounier offers its creed in the Personalist Manifesto. Although he admits that Personalism presupposes certain principles or may be viewed as the necessary effects of ultimate causes, Mounier denies that it is a philosophy expressed in ideas. Furthermore, there is a Personalist understanding of the universe that is seen from the perspective of a "free and creative person."

In terms of these principles and effects, he describes a person as "a spiritual being constituted as such by subsistence and independence." The Personality adheres to a hierarchy of values "freely adapted, assimilated, practised by a responsible faithful and self-committed self." Each human being unifies all its activities freely for the purpose of developing his own personhood. His decisions and creative acts, each with his own vocation show that he is a moral being. The reconnecting or reconciling of being with moral life is an issue for Orthodox Christian theology also. While the dogmas of the

faith underpin our moral struggle, it is preeminently in the Liturgy that we find the reconnection of being with moral life. So far, in Personalism, we have seen no space for the common human nature as the essence of man, divine grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, God's will or a synergy between God and man that is more than a joint project of some mechanical sort.

Mounier did not place his trust in political parties. He also rejected the notion that Personalism requires violence in order to transfigure contemporary institutions. It may be "revolutionary," but only because it seeks a new social order, that is, for the order first enunciated by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount. Such a point of view seems inconsistent with his advocacy of liberal democracy and the universality of human rights. A liberal democracy might possibly ultimately and ironically guarantee anarchy,<sup>19</sup> and the demand for a universality of human rights without any contingent expression of a universality of human responsibilities ultimately undermines democracy. The demand for a universality of human rights without a clearly defined universality of human responsibilities is based on unsustainable presuppositions of man as "a human being with natural rights." Human rights are defined by human societies, they are not "naturally occurring." The

"certain inalienable rights" prescribed by the founders of the American state are defined by them, not mentioned by the Creator. Civil liberties are defined and boundaried by a defined civil society. Man was created with the freedom to form his societies and to define the rights and obligations of those societies. The boundaries of those rights are not agreed upon by all members of any society, even the most democratic, and in some cases, they are sharply debated by substantial numbers of those members. Personalism may advocate a system of rights that it considers to be "natural human rights," but it must also define them, and if some group that the Personalists themselves disapprove of demanded equal "natural human rights," then one would find many of them advocating that those "certain inalienable rights" exclude that particular group (Thomas Jefferson did not free his slaves, after all, and it was more than a hundred years after the American Civil War before black people could even begin to more fully participate in those "natural rights" of mankind which the founders of the American Republic ostensibly guaranteed to all).

It would be interesting to discover to whom the Personalist philosophers would deny those "natural rights." Moreover, who determines what are and what are not "natural rights?" The very concept of "natural rights" has existed for no more than two

or three centuries, an infinitesimal period in the course of human history. It is an ideological idea that is still struggling to be manifested in even the most progressive democracies.

In advocating the Personalist cause as something that calls upon humanity to fulfil the improbable task of living "in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus," Mounier is either incognizant of or indifferent to the power of ego and evil. His optimism is laudable but naive, for these are forces that must be encountered and dealt with in any process of striving to fulfil such a lofty calling.

Utopian movements typically collapse because the fallen nature of mankind is not taken as a reality. Here we must note that when we speak of "fallen nature," we are not speaking in an Augustinian concept. The nature of man is not "totally depraved," "completely corrupt," or "evil." Mankind is essentially oriented toward the good and possessed of a moral conscience. Nevertheless, the "fall of mankind" indicates the penetration of the human nature with a spirit of egoism, self-love and self-centredness. This creates an internal contradiction, a dissonance within us, and this is a reality which must be taken into consideration. One will find this contradiction at the root of the failure of utopian movements, and the struggle against it at the root of the success of some communal

movements. Those communal movements, such as the Amish, the Hutterites and Russian Orthodox "Old Believers," have been both cultural and religious. They have had a profound understanding of the struggle against egoism and self-centredness. Personalism could easily become a philosophy of "self" that amplifies rather than moderates these destructive passions.

It must be noted also that Augustine's doctrine of *Original Sin* is considered to be heretical by the Orthodox Church. The use of the term "fallen human nature" is not a moral judgement, but a description of the finitude and woundedness of man's essence—the common human nature.

Let us make clear what we mean by "sin and evil." Orthodox Christianity does not understand sin as "breaking a law." Rather sin is the habitual misuse of our energies, a misdirection of our freedom. This misuse and misdirection is not corrected by a mere act of will, even with the best of intentions. Evil does not have any ontological "being." There is no amorphous evil. Christ did not say to pray "deliver us from evil," but "deliver us from the evil-one," that is, the one who wilfully and intentionally misuses his energies in a destructive and malicious manner, the one who has intentionally separated himself from God, is utterly bereft of any trace of empathy, and has become an enemy of all

who seek to worship God. Evil is not a "thing" in itself, but a corruption and deeply ingrained addiction to the misuse of one's energies.<sup>20</sup> Above all, it is a lack of empathy. It takes moral struggle aided by grace to strive for regeneration. Living fully in accord with the justice and charity of Jesus is no simple task. Personalists are speaking of social justice, and the Hebrew prophets spoke about it also. The concept of the justice of Christ is a type of social justice, but it includes much more, a kind of mercy that exceeds social justice and which, were we to truly attempt to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus, we must also fulfil. The justice of God is, in the understanding of the holy fathers, diametrically the opposite of all human forensic or juridical notions of justice. It is not about punishment, but about rebalancing the kind of moral "rightness" that embraces the needs and failures of others in a healing and supportive manner, without destroying the essential freedom of any. This is perhaps best expressed by the Greek theologian Dr. Alexandre Kalomiros who reminds us that:

*This is a theme which needs to be preached with great insistence for] not only the West but we Orthodox have departed [from it] in great numbers, causing men to fall to atheism because*

*they are revolted against a falsified angry God full of vengeance toward His creatures... We must urgently understand that God is responsible only for everlasting life and bliss and that hell (Gehenna) is nothing else but the rejection of this everlasting life and bliss, the everlasting revolt against the everlasting love of God. We must urgently remember and preach that it is not a creation of God but a creation [i.e., product] of our revolted liberty, that God did not create any punishing instrument that is called hell, that God never takes vengeance on His revolted creatures, that His justice has nothing to do with the legalistic 'justice' of human society which punishes the wicked in order to defend itself... That our everlasting spiritual death is not inflicted on us by God, but is a spiritual suicide, everlasting because our decision to be friends or enemies of God is a completely free and everlasting decision of the free spiritual beings created by God, a decision which is respected by God eternally and absolutely.*

As Abba Isaak the Ninevite says:

*As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so God's use of just judgment cannot counterbalance the likeness of His mercifulness. As a handful of sand thrown into a great sea, so are the sins of all flesh with respect to the likeness of the providence and mercy of God. And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures.*<sup>21</sup>

And again he tells us:

*Now by this as in an image the Spirit depicts the design that God has had everlastingly. But the man who chooses to consider God an avenger, presuming that he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it that in that Fountain of Love and Ocean brimming with goodness, vengeance could ever be found!... For He wills that we should rejoice not as it were in what is*

*His, but as it were in the recompense of our own deeds. For although all things are His, yet He is not pleased that we should consider them His, but that we should delight in what is as it were ours.*<sup>22</sup>

St Dionysios the Areopagite also says:

*The divine justice in this respect is really true justice because it distributes to all, the things proper to themselves, according to the fitness of each existing thing, and preserves the nature of each in its own order and fitness... the nature of each in its own order and capacity.*<sup>23</sup>

Mounier believes that Personalism may adopt Saint Francis of Assisi as the Personalist icon, while, at the same time, ignoring the Faith that motivated Francis. This gallant defender of the papacy would never have allowed himself to be set in opposition to "the clerical order" of his Church. I doubt that Francis would have endorsed Lev Tolstoy's subjective and anti-Church understanding of the biblical words, "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21-ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν

ἐστιν). Tolstoy understood the words, "the Kingdom of God is within you" in a secular, utopian sense that Saint Francis would never have conceived. Mounier was more attuned to Tolstoy's concept than to that of the peaceful monk of Assisi.

Necessarily, then, leftist oriented Personalism demands a secular "revolution." Laudably advocating, as it does, "the daily works of mercy" (hence the building of homes for the homeless, farming communes, discourses of love, etc.) as noble and praiseworthy as it is, it does not permit us to completely identify these acts of mercy with those prescribed in Christian revelation, for they are based in concepts of secularism. Christian revelation advocates the same thing but does not divorce them from the process of the regeneration of man, with the dynamic of holiness and the recovery of the fulness of personhood. Holiness is not an abstraction or a concept of "perfect behaviour," but a manifestation of completely unselfish love. The twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that entry into the joy of Christ, the Heavenly Kingdom, depends on the fulfilment of such care for others, motivated by unselfish love. The fulfilment of the moral imperative expressed in this chapter of Matthew's Gospel must be seen, not simply as acts of charity but as an entering into communion with the Kingdom of God - and with those whom we are

privileged to serve.. It is beyond charity and reaches into the eternal.<sup>24</sup>

Christian revelation nowhere suggests that we can create a secular "people's paradise" on earth and lose sight of the Heavenly Kingdom and the age to come. When they collapse into ideology, neither utopian philosophies nor Christianity can sustain these high ideals in practice. But let us not denigrate these praiseworthy works of mercy just because they are fulfilled in the context of secularism and not mindful of the process of regeneration. They are still inspired by Christ and represent a moral assent. Perhaps one could rather use the injunction of Christ, "These you ought to have done, while not leaving the other undone" (Mt.23:23). One can certainly not claim that being Christian guarantees the fulfilment of either one. Nor can simple faith guarantee entry into the Kingdom. Those who live their lives in Communion are the ones who will find themselves "on the right hand" of the Glory when the Kingdom is fully manifested.

According to Mounier, Personalism is quintessentially "a philosophy of hope." Yet, it is genuine futility to believe that the majority of people will dedicate themselves to the Personalist responsibility of changing human institutions without there being first a regeneration of human nature. We have heard before the motto "from each

according to his ability, to each according to his need." Meunier has merely assumed that man has an unimpeded free will and that, with an appeal to his better side, he is able and willing to realise the Personalist agenda. Plato had a similar idea, but it does not work. It is a "hope" no better than the vision of Socialism. Christopher Lasch asserted that Personalism is nothing but a "culture of narcissism." Although Lasch might not develop his idea this way, we might say that this narcissism is fed by the tendency of utopianists to neglect the need for the struggle of regeneration, for a life centred on repentance and forgiveness. We are not a "system" or a machine with a reset button. We cannot change fundamental aspects of our nature with a mere act of will, even of goodwill. Ideas, ideals and philosophies alone cannot accomplish this.

There is nothing unique about Mounier's Personalism. It claims to disdain Socialism and Marxism because they deprive man of his dignity and value. Yet in its own definition, Personalism reduces man to a "being with rights." Claiming to be Christian, it equates, for all practical purposes, the biblical idea of *imago Dei* with this conception, as if the image of God in man was the sum total of "natural rights." Mounier's "Person" is a philosophical notion that is found nowhere in the Orthodox Christian Tradition. It was futile of him to

associate his secular philosophy with the "psychology" of Francis of Assisi and Augustine of Hippo. He may proclaim joyfully that Personalism has nothing in common with Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* which he has replaced with I love therefore I am; but in both cases, the self is the source of truth. Besides, "love" is easier to say than to do and some very wretched deeds have been carried out in the name of love, especially when "love" was part of the "white man's burden."

Moreover, undismayed by the criticism of their philosophy, Mounier and those with him were convinced that Personalism is the solution to the world crisis. They perceived the task on a grand scale: "Contrary to what takes place with many petty reformers our programme must be cut in a pattern of large dimension. Historically, the crisis that presses upon us is more than a simple political and/or economic crisis." We are witnessing, he lamented, the collapse of a whole area of civilisation. The old world was initiated towards the end of the Middle Ages, and climaxed in the industrial age "capitalistic in structure, liberal in ideology and bourgeois in its ethics." <sup>25</sup> It is a criticism of the post-Christian West that we have heard before, not least of all from Karl Marx.

Admittedly, the Personalist answer differs from materialism by virtue of its spiritual dimension

and its call for human cooperation in the solution to that perceived crisis. This is better than depriving the individual man of his moral value in the mill of economic violence and struggle. It is clearly superior to materialism which has no cognizance of man as a spiritual reality. Materialism views the "crisis" as social and economic deprivation. Personalism calls for a spiritual and cultural renovation by common social action whose first principle is the moral value of every human being. Both philosophies believe that "salvation" comes by human effort, without any thought of revelation and grace. Personalism is *auto-soteric* (meaning that one saves himself, being his own saviour). One might be interested to have a detailed map of what is considered to be the "moral value" of every human being. One answer that Orthodox Christianity would give is that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and, moreover, since we all share in a common human nature, we must all have the same intrinsic value as human beings. When we speak of Personalism as being auto-soteric, we cannot express the meaning of this in purely Scriptural terms of salvation (which for Orthodox Christians means deliverance from the bondage of death and power of the Evil-One, and restoration to the household of the Father). Personalism (though not every one of its professors) would see salvation

rather as a positive evolution of social order, and enshrining of one or another concept of human rights, even though one concept of human rights might exclude a portion of society whose rights are not deemed "natural." Thomas Jefferson, for example, although he pronounce man to be "endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights" never freed his slaves. In 1700s America, equal rights for black people would have appeared "unnatural," and everywhere in the English-speaking world, voting rights for women was "unnatural." Women did not even become "legal persons" until the 1930s and "natural rights" was, for them, considered "unnatural." This is one of my main objections to the concept of "natural human rights." "Human rights" is a concept created and developed in human societies, and not without conflict and violence. But the concept of human rights is almost never universal; there are generally some who are omitted from this "universality." There is no basis for assuming that "natural human rights" are given by the Creator or have any Scriptural foundation. Slavery is sanctified in the Holy Scripture, by the very word of the Creator. Many democratic societies are only just begrudgingly, and with considerable resistance, beginning to acknowledge the rights and freedoms of sexual minorities.

In vain does Personalism seek to reverse the deleterious effects of Scholasticism, the dehumanizing consequences of the Industrial Revolution and of consumer capitalism, rampant religiosity, and the conventional ethics of the bourgeoisie.

Nor does it adequately resolve the contradiction between morality and moralism.<sup>26</sup>

### 3

## **BORDEN PARKER BOWNE, THEORETICIAN OF AMERICAN PERSONALISM**

Personalism emerged philosophically linked to the German Idealism which invaded the United States in the nineteenth century. German Idealism held that material things do not exist independently of the mind, but are constructs of the mind. More significantly, it teaches, that it is by the categories (ideas) of reason that phenomena are formed. We become aware of the relationship between thought and being by the interaction between thought and the external world. It would appear that Mounier was not much interested in Idealism although its tenets were fundamental to Personalism. As with the teachers of Idealism, however, he was opposed to materialism which reduces the individual to something impersonal.

For a theoretician of this philosophy, we look to Borden Parker Bowne, Professor of Philosophy at Boston University. He was the founder and populariser of American Personalism. He was also keenly devoted to elaborating its metaphysics.

“Reality,” he wrote, “is known by persons and society as a community of self-conscious persons, a society of "interacting persons." Put another way,

human reality is the person that acts on or which is acted upon by another. All persons, whether individually or collectively, share in "the living experience of intelligence itself." But is not such "reality" only an adjective masquerading as a noun?

Bowne described himself as a theist. He referred to God as "world-ground" and, therefore, "implicit in everything" and "the postulate of our total life" (perhaps something like Paulo Coelho's "world spirit"). For Bowne, God is "the Supreme Person" to which human persons are analogous. Bowne rejected the idea that God is the impersonal Absolute of Hegel, if only because the Absolute is completely devoid of moral attributes. It is fatal to religion which is essential to the personal development of human beings. Moreover, he asserts, if in God there are any limitations, they are self-imposed. Bowne was careful not to let divine omnipotence tread upon human freedom.<sup>27</sup> To those who argued that the existence of evil placed restrictions on the divine Will, he replied that the problem of evil has no "speculative solution."<sup>28</sup>

Bowne offers arguments for theism. The universe is

intelligible with its order, design, teleology, and the fact of man's finite intelligence. In fact, any evidence of intelligibility in the universe is a clue that the external world is intelligible to the mind;

and, on account of the rationality of the universe, we have a convincing argument for theism. Furthermore, he argues, unless we assume that the world is essentially a realm of thought, there can be no knowledge at all. The fact that the mind has categories is no evidence that categories explain the mind. Accordingly, the "active intelligence" shows the validity of the metaphysical deduction of the unity, identity and causality from the idea of being.<sup>29</sup>

If, Bowne asserts, we concede to someone like Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) that the Deity is "unknowable," we must surrender any hope of morality. Indeed, an unknowable God is no better than no God<sup>30</sup> and, as Dostoevsky says: "If there is no God, then all things are permissible, even murder."<sup>31</sup> Bowne seeks to protect himself with the appeal to the idea of mystery.

Bowne held that we must recognize the existence of God as "the Supreme Person" (a personal Being), because as Being He interacts with His creation, with time, which gives time relevance, and His Power alone can explain world-order in relation to world change (evolution).

Orthodoxy Christianity would argue that God is "beyond being," but would not suggest that He is not a "personal God," nor that He does not commune with and sustain His creation. However, in theistic Personalism we can detect a flavour of pantheism,

first of all, because it does not distinguish between energy and essence.<sup>32</sup>

For Bowne, we have no proof of human freedom without God. At this point, Bowne attempts to answer another philosophical objection to his theism: how can man be free if God knows everything he does? He replied that God does not know a person's specific choices. Might it not have been better for Bowne to have postulated that God has chosen to be ignorant of human actions? In this case, however, the Omniscience of God would suffer. Only the theory of a "limited Deity" is left to him. As we shall see, it was the position taken by Berdyaev.

With this theology in hand, Bowne developed an ethics to which most Personalists would not object. Asceticism is not central to it and the reality of sin is no impediment to the service of the general good. He does seem to have considered that the impartial and unselfish will is not only an uncommon phenomenon but its application is often impeded by mood or passion, public indifference, or political opposition. He is certainly right that abstractions such as "virtue" or "happiness" or "pleasure" are worthless unless human will and intellect have contacted reality, whatever, philosophically, that may be. One is not certain if this "reality" is a metaphor for the unknown, or just

an adjective aspiring to be a noun. Bowne was equally correct to believe that the greatest need for ethical practice is the serious and thoughtful application of the mind to the problem of life and conduct. In all this, the basic flaw was a failure to ascertain the nature of the God to whom he had related his ethical theory. Perhaps he leaves us with a form of Kantian autonomous morality and a deity who does little more than nod his head in approval.

Bowne claimed to have been a theist, but His God was not identified, as it was in the Personalism of Jacques Maritain or Jean Danielou, with the Holy Trinity. In any case, no Personalist worshipped the God of the Church fathers, and this fact is reflected in their understanding of man and his good. Bowne would have agreed with Pope John-Paul II that self-mastery, not self-assertion, is the index of a truly human freedom, but Bowne gives us no programme for the attainment of the first and the purgation of the second.

Neither he nor the Pope seem to have had any notion that self-mastery is much more than repressing what is natural to our nature. "Thoughtfully and freely channelling the natural instincts of mind and body into actions that deepen my humanity"<sup>33</sup> is impossible if undertaken without recognizing man's "darkened mind" and distorted will which he cannot by himself alter. Indeed,

repression may only make the darkness more stifling. It can create in man a building pressure and frustration that can explode in the most unpleasant ways. Repression is not synonymous with self-mastery. One may call upon men to act together in order to participate in common thought and action, but the experience of the human race has demonstrated that without Divine intervention, which Bowne does not clearly kneed into his philosophy-human cooperation is generally very brief and often leads to greater evil.

#### 4

### **Nikolai Berdyaev**

I have always admired Nikolai Berdyaev as a philosopher and thinker. His concerns for freedom and his idea of a *meonic* or primordial freedom are dear to me. Perhaps, however, one of the traps into which he caught himself was his attempt to incorporate his ideas of personal freedom and concepts of democracy into a theological/religious worldview. Religion in general is antithetical to liberal democracy because religion always seeks to dictate human behaviour and how humans should live.

It is in the context of theology, rather than philosophy, that we are critical of Berdyaev. His

flights of fancy, Gnostic tendencies, German romanticism and theosophy preclude any notion that he was in any way an Orthodox Christian theologian, [or an Orthodox Christian philosopher, for that matter]. The following critique is not about Berdyaev the German romantic, existentialist philosopher, but about the pretence that his writings in any way reflect Orthodox Christian theology

Russia, on the eve of the Revolution and Civil War was a mass of contradictions. There had been sporadic opportunities during the 19th century to develop a constitutional state which could have prevented the horrors of the Communist era. As in so many epics of history, rather than learning from tragic circumstances, governments respond with cruel reactionism. Despite the efforts of a few Orthodox clergy, the Russian Orthodox Church was complicit in the tragedy. At the dawn of the 20th century in the Russian Empire, so many forces with so many internal contradictions had locked horns that each served to cancel out the best aspects of the other. Miliukov's Cadet Party advocated democratic reforms but made its platform impossible by calling for the immediate abolition of the monarchy, rather than the development of a British-style constitutional monarchy.

The intellectual/philosophical school to which Nikolai Berdyaev belonged recognised important

social reforms that urgently needed to be undertaken, but found itself mired in German theosophy and the recycled Gnosticism of the divine Sophia, that it must have been quite difficult for liberals to have taken them seriously. What further crippled the urgent message that men like Berdyaev, Struve, Bulgakov and others had to offer, was their outrageous attempt at representing the neo-Gnostic, theosophical school of Vladimir Solovyov as if it was somehow Christian.

Within the Orthodox Church, there were brilliant reformers pitted against renovationists and ultra-conservatives. Among the authentic reformers, such as Bishop Antony Khrapovitsky of Volyn and his friend Saint John of Kronstadt, there were sharp internal contradictions as well. While Vladika Antony would defend himself against accusations of "Judaophobia," both he and Saint John of Kronstadt were equally guilty of an unhealthy and destructive anti-Semitism that permeated much of Russian society. Vladika was certainly not a political liberal, although his social thought was quite progressive. The inner contradiction between genuine progressivism and political conservatism crippled many of the reformers in the Russian Orthodox Church. Among the intellectuals such as Berdyaev, an addiction to the strange brew of Buddhism, Egyptian Gnosticism, German romanticism and theosophical mysticism, what characterised the

so-called "Soloviovan Brotherhood," made their perceptions so muddled and without destination that, for all their brilliance, they served no purpose except, ultimately, to cause theological confusion and Church schisms in the Russian Orthodox diaspora in the West.

Nikolai Berdyaev was an associate of the neo-Gnostic Soloviovan brotherhood<sup>34</sup> which was ejected from Russia after the Communist Revolution. He brought with him to Europe a philosophy of Personalism which led William Miller to describe him as "the prophet of the Catholic Worker Movement." Others went further, and Paul Maurin lauded him as "the Prophet of the twentieth century."<sup>35</sup> Berdyaev did not bring a social agenda or a political schema to the cause, but provided its metaphysical, romantic (if not Gnostic), presuppositions. Berdyaev should not be thought of as representing any aspect of Orthodox Christian theology.

Berdyaev's Personalism begins with a critique of the Western world. We are, he correctly observes, passing through "the crisis of the Christian world," that is, "a crisis within Christianity itself." As it is presently practised, Christianity is no longer relevant; and in fact it has contributed to the present dilemma. It has encouraged, if not spawned banality and bourgeoisie, legalism and rationalism,

coorpoatism/collectivism, and individualism. Berdyaev sees Christianity as not concerned with an earthly future but rather as stalled by its worldview. We are, as it were, in an *entr'acte* and for that reason are experiencing a time of suffering. We are living in an era in which man is deprived of his dignity and freedom and, therefore of his happiness and perfection. One is left to wonder why he has singled out the era of the early 20th century, inasmuch as considerable progress in those areas had been made since the dawn of recorded history some 7-8000 years earlier. Perhaps there was some utopian nostalgia at work in his mind.

There is something more: if man is to regain the lost virtues of dignity and freedom, he must be redefined; and indeed so must God and reality. Our clue to all these truths is Christ Himself: the God-man. The great error of Western Christianity was to place the task of regenerating the world either in the hands of God or man. The truth ought to be found in the cooperation between God and man, a proposition that sounds deceptively similar to the Orthodox Christian doctrine of *synergism*. Berdyaev has a valid point, but not a valid conclusion. Even worse, Berdyaev thinks, there has been a failure to recognise the reason for the tragedy or to raise any questions about it. Christians, he surmises, should have turned to the Gnostics who were long ago aware

that revelation and absolute truth are adapted to the men who receive it, but, for some reason, Christianity has chosen to ignore this fact. In other words, we are now compelled to reevaluate, if not transform the Christian Faith, because in its present form it is irrelevant. Traditional Christianity was given to another people at another time. Perhaps it was just such thoughts that collapsed his colleague Serge Bulgakov into his delusions that he was the new prophet for the new age.

Berdyayev's synergism (cooperation) appears more as a project shared by God and man for the restructuring of human institutions. Philosopher David Cain<sup>36</sup> reminds us that synergism between God and man is always radically asymmetrical." Orthodox Christianity fully acknowledges man's freedom. God offers His love and grace for the regeneration and restoration of man, and man may freely choose to cooperate with that love and grace in working out his salvation. The idea that God and man cooperate in creating a utopian system on earth is in no way an aspect of this synergism. It can, and has, led to such enterprises as the Inquisitions, the Cromwellian terror in England, the Taliban, Al Qaida and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, Berdyayev, like the Kabbalist Jewish mystic and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel,<sup>37</sup> thinks that God needs mankind and has a certain dependency on him. Heschel argued that

human compliance with God's commands "augments God's power." If Berdyaev does not actually assert this, then he does come very close to it.

Berdyaev describes the man who, with Christ, hopes to transform the world as a genius, the creator of new things by his freedom. He is beyond the good and evil which are the proper condition of the fallen man. He may not be perfect, but his imperfection is a spur to excellence, towards greater creativity (which, incidentally, was Berdyaev's concept of freedom). "True creativeness" is linked to the Holy Spirit. It is always in the Spirit, he observed, for only in the Spirit can there be that union of grace and freedom which is inherent to creativity. Of necessity, therefore, acts of freedom are also acts of the works of the Spirit. Hence, it is no great leap in logic to describe those acts as "ethical."

To begin with, ethics must inquire into the moral significance of all creative work, even if it has no direct relation to moral life. Art and knowledge have a moral significance, like all activities which create higher values. There are, of course, personal values: a belief, a mission, and principles; and, also, cultural values which are norms of acceptable thought and behaviour according to the norms of any given culture or society. For Berdyaev, such values are created and, considering the moral and spiritual condition of most men, creativity must be the

privilege of the genius. He refers to such creativity as "theurgical" (the creation of being). The "new man" must work together with God to produce the "new age." At this point, any relationship to the Orthodox Christian concept of *synergism* collapses.

Berdyaev writes beautifully and his philosophy is attractive and enticing. He tells us that to reach that time, that "new age," we must struggle to open the way for the development of the Person whose heart will not rest until it abides in that transcendent realm of beauty and freedom. This is the reason, incidentally, that Berdyaev rejected both Capitalism and Communism. Capitalism, he said, destroys man's eternal spirit but forces labour to depend on power to achieve man's ends. Communism has "killed God" and, therefore, takes the religious element out of his life. Of course, both deny that Personality is the central category of value, the value of the Divine and human existence. They deny that the Person of man is the analogy of God. It is inevitable, then, that in these systems the Person is relegated to an "individual," that is, a naturalistic and biological category, while in fact, Personhood (hypostasis) is a religious and spiritual one. "The individual is part of the species, it springs from the species and may isolate itself without conflict. It is a biological process: it is born and dies. But Personality is not

generated, it is created by God. It is God's idea, God's conception which springs up in eternity."<sup>38</sup>

To repeat the essence of Berdyaev's thought in this area, Personality (Personhood) creates itself and exists by its own destiny. The individual is the objectified moment in nature's evolutionary process. The enemy of Personality (Personhood) is the community because the socialization of man abrogates the freedom of spirit and conscience. "The corporatisation of morality implies the tyranny of society and of public opinion over the spiritual life of man, and his moral valuation," Berdyaev correctly asserted.

Berdyaev distinguished between collectivism and *sobornost*,<sup>39</sup> the Russian word given prominence by the nineteenth-century lay theologian Alexis Khomiakov. Berdyaev does not use the term, however, in a strictly Orthodox Christian sense as Khomiakov did.

Soborny, in its Orthodox context, is community in the sense of "commonweal," the common good. It recognises both the personhood and individuality of each, and the positive aspect of the community. I want to suggest also, the idea that we know ourselves only in relation to other people. The fulness of our personhood includes our relation to others. The broader concept of *soborny/sobornost* includes such concepts, although literally translated

it would indicate the Greek concept of catholicity: a fulness of community which does not impinge on the personhood of the participants in the community. Collectivism drowns Personhood in the crowd of individuals who are in fact, spectators. In terms of the Orthodox Church, *soborny/sobornost* refers to a visible unity of Persons, who share the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the realm of freedom wherein the human will acts effectively in the realisation of the ends that the Person was intended to achieve and enjoy. It is an association of free persons who are unified by the Holy Spirit in the common cause of the Eucharist. Nowhere is there a loss of free will (as there certainly can be in corporatisation).

Berdyayev's philosophy is attractive if unrealistic. His religious vision is open to valid criticism from an Orthodox point of view. We have yet to examine his idea of God and man, the so-called "mystery of human life" which he identified with "the mystery of Godmanhood."<sup>40</sup> We must not be led astray by his fascinating allusions to the Trinity and the Incarnation. He offered exciting ideas about man as a spiritual being whose free will (creativity) is essential to our understanding of man and his destiny. As we shall see, however, Berdyayev's triadology and christology call his Christianity into question. What we have seen thus far is only the surface of a

theophilosophy. His ideas about human dignity and freedom are not conventional, nor is his teaching about man, good and evil. To comprehend Berdyaev's philosophy we must look to "the dialectic of the Divine and the human" in German thought, to which he was devoted. The father of this "dialectic" and, therefore, all German Idealism is the Gnostic, Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), without whom there would have been a very different Fichte, Goethe, Schelling, Hegel, and Berdyaev.

The basic assumption of Berdyaev's philosophy is "the coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*) which applies not only to man and nature but to God or Trinity (Bog, Gott, Theos, Deus). He emerges from the Abyss, the Absolute, the infinite, incomprehensible and bottomless nothing (Bogchestvo, Gottheit, Theotes, and Deitas). Thus the "birth of God" (*theogony*) is the beginning of the world-pro-cess. There is no creation from nothing, for "nothing" has no meaning outside the Absolute. The world is, therefore, erected from the mutable substance of God. He is the "unfolding God" out of which all things come, and all things are born, directly or indirectly, from Him (*cosmogony*). God lives so long as the world exists because the explication of God in time is merely the evolution of man and the cosmos. The one cannot exist without the other.

Freedom and evil also leap from the Absolute independently of each other. God, freedom and evil have no control one of the other. They possess the unchanging Absolute; and, therefore, they are, because of their relationship to the Absolute, both changing and unchanging. The Absolute alone is immutable. Moreover, man contains all three dimensions which means that God is not responsible for evil in the world (with which we agree); nor can he prevent man from choosing, thinking, or acting. At the same time, man may resist God and evil by his freedom. "Personality is not generated; it is created by God. It is God's idea, God's conception, which springs up in eternity. From the point of view of the individual, Personality is a task to be achieved" (we should note here that "*hypostasis*" is added to our nature by grace).<sup>41</sup>

"In other words, the existence of Personality presupposes the existence of God; its value presupposes the supreme value: God. If there is no God, Personality [*personhood*] has no moral value and man has no inherent dignity. There is merely the individual entity subordinate to the natural life of the genus," Berdyaev continued. "Personality is the moral principle, and our relation to all other values is determined by reference to it. Hence, the idea of Personality lies at the basis of ethics. An impersonal system of ethics is a *contradictio in adjecto*."

Personality is a higher value than the state, the nation, mankind or nature; and indeed is not part of that series."<sup>42</sup> In other words, because the Personality comprehends all things within Itself, it is a microcosm.

Furthermore, Personality develops by virtue of its communion with other Persons (*sobornyy/sobornost*). It is nurtured by fellowship "within its genus." The complexity of man lies in the fact that a man is both an individual and the Person as a spiritual being, especially in his freedom. On account of his unique place in the universe, his Personality, man has a supreme place in the hierarchy of values, He is the mediator between God and himself. It is clear from Berdyaev's metaphysics that man - specifically the Personality - is divine. He sought to protect himself by arguing that the human species was created by God, but God with His limited powers could not create anything out of nothing. There is no "nothing." The only "nothingness" (*meon*) is the "nothingness" of the Absolute or Abyss from which God, evil and freedom spring. It is for that reason that Berdyaev contends that all is ultimately *meonic*.<sup>43</sup> He described freedom as "*meonic* freedom."

We need go no further in our treatment of Berdyaev's theory of "freedom." He complained in his "philosophical autobiography" (*Dream and*

*Reality*) that a certain Orthodox cleric referred to him ironically as "the captive of freedom." He was "captive" of much more. He failed to think outside the parameters established by Western philosophy. In this regard, Berdyaev was a rationalist. It may be argued, also, that although he invoked the names of Christ and the Trinity, His "God" is not the God of the Orthodox Church into which he was baptised. It would be better to call him a pantheist. His Personalism is a testament to his loss of faith.

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that Personalism arose within the Western heritage. The principles upon which its doctrines stand were born of the categories and values of a mindset whose ancestry is the Latin Middle Ages. Not a few Roman Catholics credit Augustine with having developed the first Christian Personalism. In any case, there is an historical truth in the emergence of Personalism: the inseparability of God and man: alter your conception of God and you will inevitably alter your conception of man. I am convinced that the reverse is also true. This is the trail followed by modernity, of which Personalism is an offspring.<sup>44</sup> To be modern, wrote one philosopher, is to "think modern," to believe that modernity is in possession of "blossoming

humanity."<sup>45</sup> Necessarily, then, modernity has abandoned all "tradition," that is, the Greek and Christian ideas of God and man. The old idea of God as providential and revelatory or man as a "political" or "rational being" are supposedly bankrupt. Even more repugnant to moderns is the fact that man is a "substance," a fixed nature. And, of course, there is nothing more abhorrent to modern thought than the ascetic and his devotion to the supernatural state."

Although he may live in a country, obey its laws and pay its taxes, the ultimate loyalty of "the new man" is this world: to live in it and to perfect it. There is nothing more precious than "freedom" or "liberty." He was eventually defined as "a being that has rights." Under these conditions, he is at liberty to work for the establishment of a just social and moral order, which, as Hobbes observed, neither the Greek nor Christian Commonwealths ever provided. He must, therefore, have "an entitlement of rights" which involves the fundamental right to exist and, consequently, the ability to develop his own personality.<sup>46</sup> This requires a new political order, an order that is impossible if we fail to replace the Christian idea of the city with another. This can be achieved only if the West's Scholastic legacy is utterly eviscerated - *Carthago delenda est*. From the eighteenth century to the present, the God of Christian theology was studied under the assumption

that it was the Biblical God who was being examined. He was in fact "the God of the philosophers and the savants." There was something ironical in the proclamation of the Enlightenment that the Divinity created the world and left it to man to perfect. The dualism between thought and being (not nature and grace) as the insuperable reality, a philosophical conundrum that has been the surd of modern philosophy since that time, especially with the "transcendental metaphysics" of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804),<sup>47</sup> one of the actual authors of the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. He was confident that his philosophy was the sure path to "freedom."

Nothing was more suggestive to future thinkers than Kant's substitution of "the conditions for the possibility of experience" for the traditional idea of man as a "substance." In addition, Kant did not want to rely upon God for freedom and moral goodness. For him and many of his colleagues the Bible is not the inspired Word of God, but the repertoire of stories filled with subjective and edifying images. For those who find these writings helpful, they might contribute to "the feeling whose special office is to impel the improvement of life."<sup>48</sup> Finally, he left to modernity both skepticism and a dogmatism which reinforce each other in their repudiation of anything which dares to violate or restrict human rights<sup>49</sup> (as

understood by one or another definition). Ironically, this is a concept that is repudiated by the Evangelico/Republican Party in American politics.

One thing had been very clearly asserted by modernity: its philosophers had demonstrated that human nature (an inviolable substance) could not be proved to exist. If man has no human nature, he has no fallen nature and no real *hypostasis*, the concept of which had for so long deprived man of his rights, especially the right to determine what he was to become. No wonder monarchy and aristocracy were abolished, so interlocked were these with the old theology and anthropology. Mikhail Bakunin was not the only thinker to believe that the existence of the state (monarchy) is linked with the existence of God; hence, the disappearance of one will follow the disappearance of the other. If I remember correctly, Albert Camus lamented that the death of the king silenced the voice of God on earth.

Nietzsche declared the death of God (but in the atmosphere of the idea of the *deus absconditus*, why not?). Naively, he asserted that man was now free to become whatever he wishes. He can, as one particular school of Existentialism said, create his own essence. Twentieth-century Personalists came to the conclusion that "the cultural death of God" is an invitation to anarchy. It was implicit in their thinking that man is a being who has rights, but also that this

dogma could not have been possible if his being was substantial. The Personalists saw that rights and self-determination had their dangers, not the least of which was a society that forgot its poor, infirm and homeless. The response to this threat came primarily, albeit not exclusively, from the Catholic left. Mounier and the Catholic Worker Movement envisioned a world of freedom with the Sermon on the Mount as its moral guide. Envisioned but had no hope of accomplishing. Egoism is not so easily abolished.

Whatever its form, Personalism is another non-Christian philosophy. Jacques Maritain, Pope John-Paul II, Nikolai Berdyaev, John MacMurray, J.H. Oldham, and others hoped to create a Christian Personalism as a possible answer to the contemporary secular environment. It is likely that this is also both the philosophy and the motor that drives the reductionist notions within Ecumenism, and even secularism itself. We are not speaking about ecumenical interfaith dialogue, for dialogue is a necessity of all civilised intercourse, just as tolerance is a necessity for any hope of peace. Nevertheless, the idea that Personalism (and Ecumenism) could preserve Christianity by another synthesis inevitably fails, if only because the religion they have espoused is itself only an amplification of defective elements in contemporary Christianity. They had forgotten the

fathers of the Church. Unlike them, Personalists no longer believed that Christian truth comes from the Christian tradition preserved and protected by both the Greek and Latin Church fathers. Personalists do not seem interested in life eternal, but in a "better world" through organisation and ethical conduct. Freedom is the way to that end: freedom as inherent rights, by which each person is free to be whatever he desires in accord with secular ideas freedom, surely a recipe for chaos, cruelty and anarchy. Such things ultimately lead to reactive dictatorships and a complete loss of freedom (as is so clearly unfolding in America today).

But how does the Personalist know that he is free or that the ideals in which he has invested his freedom are true? He cannot create the reality in which he lives. Human experience shows that sometimes our good intentions have evil consequences. The "law of unintended consequences keeps proving itself). Personalists, in general, have not sought to expel the passions of the inner man by grace, nor any sort in "inner transformation" as patristic Christianity commends; nor have they even hearkened to the call of the Greeks to bring the passions under the control of reason. They have rejected both in favour of "the third man," the timeless labourer and consumer who may despair of the good, but never of himself. He cannot define the

good and he cannot know his end, placing his faith in the force of history. Personalism gives us no idea of what this actually means.

## **ENDNOTES:**

1. *For a Culture of Cosuffering Love*, Archive Press, San Luis Obispo, 2003.
2. Note that we are talking about a synthesis, not the use of methodology. It is true that some Onhodox philosophers and writers have used the methodology of Phenomenology in their works.
3. As an example of the use of vocabulary, the word *theoria* is used. In its Onhodox Christian use, *theoria* cannot be separated from the action of grace. It does not mean simply "contemplation." It means "vision," in the spiritual sense of revelation given by grace. In the process of prayerful contemplation in a life deeply surrendered to Christ, divine grace gives a revelation as a vision in the mind. Such a revelation cannot be adequately expressed in human language and so a form of metaphor is used to express the mystery. For example, St Gregory of Nyssa, *Ihat There are Not Three Gods*.
4. A "post-patristic" theology could never be Orthodox.
5. *The Conscious Universe: Part and Whole in Modern Physical Theory*, Springer-Verlag, NY, 1990 p.102.
6. One must note also that many of our educated clergy and the Hellenizers among modern Greek theologians are not so clear on these matters. Like the Liberal Protestants who accept at face value the critiques of modern scholars about Jesus Christ (and begin to deny the Divinity, miraculous birth and resurrection of Christ) there are those in the Orthodox Church who are enamoured of the Western philosophers who see Platonism in places where it does not exist.
7. Unknowable in His essence. We have a personal relationship with God through His uncreated energies, in which He reveals Himself to us. Of course, our relationship with Christ is with the God Who has revealed Himself to us in the flesh.
8. *From Mystique to Politique: An Introduction to Personalism*, p. 1.
9. John Paul II wrote his doctoral thesis on Personalism and Phenomenology. His treatise was fairly well ignored in Vatican circles because it was not "Thomist." Nevertheless, it is a brilliant paper.

10. For an Orthodox Christian assessment of Kant's ideas about ethics and morality, see *The Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith*, Khrapovitsky, Antony (Synaxis Press) 1998.
11. *From Mystique to Politique: An Introduction to Personalism*, p. 6-7.
12. This is the correct spelling. In English, the name is often spelled Soloviev or Solovyev, however, the "e" in the Russian in his name is similar to an umlaut, and pronounced "yo."
13. At first reading, this sounds very close to the Orthodox Christian position against dualism. In the words of Saint Irenae of Lyons (+ 203): "Now the soul and the body are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and union of the soul receiving the spirit...and the admixture of that fleshly nature...For that flesh which has been moulded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and a part of a man. Neither is the soul itself...the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, Ch.6: 1). And St Photios the Great, refuting Gnosticism, concurs: "The name 'man', according to the most truthful and natural expression, applies to neither the soul without [its] body, nor to the body without [its] soul, but to that composition of soul and body made into a unique form of beauty. But Origen says that the soul alone is the man, as did Plato." (*On The Resurrection*, (against Origen), 1:5.
14. For a further discussion of essence, existence and hypostasis, see my *Freedom to Believe*, (Synaxis Press) 1998.
15. I suspect that the attempt to translate *hypostasis* only as "person" is one of the sources of some difficulty with the concept of the Trinity. To say that there is one God in three Hypostases is not the same as to say that there are three "persons" in the Trinity. "Persons" indicates a distinction that is difficult to reconcile with a one essence. As an example, a *hypostasis* is seen when wine is set to "settle." The hypostasis is what becomes visible and distinct, but not separate from the wine. It is visible and distinct, but remains "of the essence" of the wine. But this is only an opinion of the author and subject to critique.
16. Synaxis Press, 1998; 2006.
17. In *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Sa'id Nursi's Risale-i Nur*. (Ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi) (State University of New York Press, 2008) p.193.
18. David Cain comments that "the distinction between Personalism and 'Individualism' in the thought of Mounier is important. How different from "the individual" (den enkelte) of Søren Kierkegaard; though Kierkegaard is often interpreted [wrongly] as advocating, if not "solipsism," then

individual isolation..." (From a letter to the author of this paper by Dr David Cain, Professor at University of Martha Washington).

**19.** See my essay "*Democracy and the Law of Diminishing Returns*," in *Collected Essays* (not yet published). As with the law of diminishing returns in economics, liberal democracy can invest so much in individual rights and freedoms that no one in the society is really free. Often enough the breakdown of the liberties would begin with a real of perceived necessity to watch people and monitor their activities. When individualistic liberties become so frightening that people will yield to being constantly scrutinised in order to feel safer and more secure, then we have certainly reached the point of diminishing returns in democracy.

**20.** We cannot here explore the broader question of evil and how a person becomes evil. Psychopathy, with its inability for empathy, is really an inoperative ventro-medial pre-frontal cortex accompanied by other distortions in the physical brain. Orthodoxy contends that evil has no ontological being. A person may thus become evil, thoroughly evil, but evil itself is not manifested as a person even though a person can manifest evil. Even the designation of Satan as "the Evil-One" has to be seen in more clinical terms than in strictly ontological ones. The problem of actual moralality resolves on the use of one's energies.

**21.** *Homily 58*; see also *Homily 60*, and St Ephraim the Syrian, *Homily on the End*, lines 30-31.

**22.** Saint Isaak of Nineveh, *Homily 123:2*.

**23.** *The Divine Names*, 7:7. I am aware of the critiques of the Pseudo-Dionysus. It seems to me that one cannot critique Dionysus without at the same time critiquing Saint Gregory Palamas – see his letter to Akyndinos for example.

**24.** The first parable in Matthew Chapter 25 is the one about the wise and foolish virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise and took oil for their lamps, five were foolish and did not. St. John Chrysostom, in his homily on this chapter, asks, "What was the oil that was missing from the lamps of the foolish virgins?" It was the oil of humanity, he answers. The foolish virgins had no humanity, no care for humanity. Indeed, all had equal virtues: they were all virgins. All had some kind of belief: they went out to meet the bridegroom and all carried lamps. Without the oil of humanity, however, they could not enter the bridal chamber.

**25.** *Personalist Manifesto*, p.8.

**26.** Morality is based in unselfish love, and the ideas of some versions of Personalism profess the same. However, true morality requires a spiritual struggle for an inner transformation of the heart. It involves work on aspects

of the moral conscience than than philanthropy alone. Moralism is an outward fulfilment of a set of moral precepts, or rather we should say ethical precepts. It attempts to resolve social issues by moralising them rather than approaching them as human problems that need to be dealt with on a more firm and civil basis than moralism provides.

27. Whereas for Kierkegaard, human freedom is a manifestation of, a triumph of, divine omnipotence.

28. *Studies in Christianity*. (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1910) p. 51.

29. *Metaphysics*. (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1898) p. 296.

30. This is at the heart of the so-called Palamite Controversy.

31. We must cite a beautiful paragraph from Dr. David Cain here, because it is a gem not to be concealed: "I remember this, perhaps wrongly, as 'if there is no God, all things are lawful, even crime.' But this is not 'Dostoyevsky' but Ivan Karamazov. Ivan's words, which Smerdyakov drinks in and acts on, are commonly interpreted according to the view of God as heavenly police person: You better do good or God will get you! But I wonder if another interpretation is not operative here: the dignity of human beings is bestowed in the divine love for them. This divine "valuation" makes us ends and not means. Apart from a God and this God's love for us, we are nothing; and violation of nothing is ...nothing." (from a personal conversation between the author and Dr. David Cain)

32. For a discussion of Energy and Essence see my *Freedom to Believe* (Synaxis Press, Dewdney, B.C., 1983) Pp.1-18.

33. *The Acting Person: A Contribution to Phenomenological Anthropology* (Springer, NY, 1979)

34. Along with Berdyaev, the most eminent disciples of Vladimir Soloviev (1849-1900) were: Serge Bulgakov, Pavel Florenski, Semion Frank, and Nikolai Losski. Although some of them thought of themselves as theologians, they were disciples of a philosophy that is antithetical to Orthodox Christianity.

35. *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*. (Marquette University, 2005).

36. Professor of Philosophy at University of Martha Washington.

37. Abraham J. Heschel (1907-1972). See, for example, his *Torah Min HaHasehmeid*.

38. *The Destiny of Man*. Trans. by N. Duddington. (London, 1954), p. 55.

39. Soborny, sobornost indicates a sense of unity, generally a freely chosen spiritual unity, rather than a corporatism of some group or a "collective." Soborny/sobornost, in its Orthodox Christian usage does not indicate a

blind ideological unity, and such a unity is never "absolute," but is free association.

40. *The Divine and the Human*. Trans. by R.M. French. (London, 1949), p. 22.

41. Loc. Cit.

42. Loc. Cit.

43. Berdyaev does not refer in this to a political freedom, but to a primordial (*meonic*) freedom. For a more detailed discussion of this type of freedom, see my *Freedom to Believe*, Chapter IV {Synaxis Press, Dewdney, B.C., 1983) p.34 ff.

44. Gabriel Vahanian declares, "From the death of God to the death of man there was but a short step. And it was taken rather quickly" (*God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization* [New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. xi). The only way is "top down" (God-man); bottom-up (man-God) is no way and no God at the very least because of the {sinful} impotence of "man," his innate proclivity to habitually misuse his energies, even when he truly desires to follow the good. Man is essentially good, but must struggle, with the help of God's grace, to overcome the roadblocks in his nature, his passions, that prevent him from actualising this alone. Man needs Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish his regeneration and restoration.

45. Manent, P., *The City of Man*. Trans. by M.A. LePain. {Princeton, 1998), p. 51.

46. *Leviathan*, ch. 21, 32, 44.

47. For an Orthodox Christian discussion of Kant's "autonomous morality" see Antony Khrapovitsky, *The Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith* (Synaxis Press, 2000).

48. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. by L. White. (1959), p. 40.

49. Manent, P., *The City of Man*. Trans. by M.A. LePain. {Princeton, 1998) p. 146.