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**Eschatology or Utopia?**  
**Catholic social teaching and democratic socialism**  
**The problem of a secular Eschatology**

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“We know not of the future and should not enquire further into it, like those of the driving motives of Morality and the purposes of the same in relation to corresponding reason.”<sup>i</sup> In regard to the corresponding reason to Morality, this, apparently, was not properly elaborated, and the question about a possible perfection of man and of human history remains unexplained. Even Immanuel Kant’s Verdict does not solve the fundamental question of a secular eschatology nonetheless it underlines the Word “secular” and the same leads to the claim that in the modern times, Utopia can only be politically and ethically thought of and developed.

The ethical suspension of the theological eschatology in favor of a pure inner-worldly social development owes itself to a myriad of traditional skeins, amongst them of Christian origin, like the Augustinian difference between “civitas Dei” and “civitas terrena” or the thomistic distinction of “beatitudo perfecta” of the eternal communion with God and the “beatitudo imperfecta” a pure human community.

A distinguishing feature of the new era can be observed in the case of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, where the application of the secular eschatology in the form of a realistic Peace Effort without recourse to religious and confessional foundations have been put into play. The counterpoint was offered 200 years later through the “Communist Manifesto” of Karl Marx with a bitter and inevitable conclusion of Failure for every single effort of establishing Peace through Realpolitik and the revolutionary Exigencies of a secular-political Utopia.

Whereas both, the resigned Reality of 1648 and the revolutionary Utopia of 1848 are considered the true children of the new Era’s maxim “etsi Deus non daretur” (Hugo Grotius), Pope Benedict XVI, in our present time, decisively counters this with his well-grounded conviction “etsi Deus daretur”. What is discarded is the thought: that the Ideal be abandoned for the Reality; that “God is in and above the World”<sup>ii</sup>; that there is the possibility of throwing away the Idea of God in the field of Ethics and Politics and creating a milieu for an ideologically free constitution of the State and the Society.

The New Era deludes itself in the illusion of the Utopian possibility of a continuous Betterment of man and society. It is actually the two sides of the same coin, whose single face is called “Utopia”, which is the question of Origin. Each Utopia is no other than the Return to the roots or the betterment of the Original. Thus the inquiry in the famous Prize Question of the Dijon Academy in 1749: Has the advancement of science and the Arts of Humanity become better? And the same Academy, after the famous 1755 Earthquake in Lisbon further formulated the query and supplemented: What is the origin of the Inequality among men and is it justified by natural law?

The progress of Science appeared for Karl Marx, a hundred years later, to be negatively disavowed and nevertheless, the perennial question of inequality seemingly became

answerable and appeared to be resolvable. Apparently thus, Kant's position seemed obsolete: We know all about the origin of inequality and also the realization of the best possible future. In our time, the communistic Utopia is not anymore viable and is even, contrary to its expectations, responsible for the creation of new burdens and forms of slavery for man. And therefore the main question about the Idea and the human concept of the State, the Society and the Economy must necessarily be posited anew. This question is at once a query about the fine details, and at the same time, the question about the immense and important distinction between Christian Eschatology and the socialistic Utopia.

### **The Revolution of Utopia in Karl Marx**

1848 witnessed two revolutions with the aim of pursuing the conviction of a Will realizing the true "Utopia". The Paul's Church in Frankfurt dared the revolutionary step towards democracy, but ended being frozen in a small German National State (kleindeutschen Nationalstaat). The "Communist Manifesto", however wanted a wider range of revolution with the purpose of eliminating the New Era's class society and through it, Karl Marx opted to utilize the radical way of overthrowing and redefining Man and Society.

(1) Primarily, man is defined as a pure being within in a class (Klassenwesen), whose corresponding history is nothing else but the controversy of the collective and not anymore of a person. "The history of all past societies is the history of collective disputes."<sup>iii</sup> With the historical background of the French Revolution as an earlier preparative form of communism (as utopian socialism) in Saint-Simon, the Person is considered to be only a Function within this present world which continuously evolves into a perfected history. Humanity as a collective develops itself through Generations, just like the individual Person develops in the different phases of his life. And through the contributions of the Revolutionary Realutopia, the different classes in the society will be replaced with only one industrial class. The technical term "classe industrielle" as Society in a productive planning and implementing function is firstly, to be understood as a combat term against the parasitical stratum in a feudal setup but which can eventually receive a positive meaning in the wide context of a managed industrial society. When all the parasitical elements will have been removed and the eradication of the hereditary laws are in place, the only remaining community will be that of producers of equal rights, who would have different capabilities, functions and multi-differentiated Output.<sup>iv</sup>

This early socialistic historical and human image would be further enhanced by Karl Marx when he claims: All of history is class struggle and at once the struggle of individuals with another. And with it bids the technical term Person adieu from the concept of "zoon politikon", or of Thomas Aquinas' "animal sociale". What remains is the pure Means-end Individualism. In this context one will understand the maxim, "homo homini lupus est" of Thomas Hobbes, whose image of Man is parallel to Karl Marx' conception of his political liberalism when he declares: Liberalism is based on the presumption that the communal life of is doomed to rivalry and conflict."<sup>v</sup> And obviously, the conclusion of Karl Marx is the exact opposite: The goal is not the unfettered freedom of potencies and the opposing interests of Individuals but bounded vitality through revolutionary producers and new radical societal contracts which is an emblem of the absolute parity of men.

With it the classical difference between parity and freedom would be rescinded to the detriment of the misused freedom of the bourgeoisie. And what takes place is the realization of a religious otherworldly Eschatology, through the elimination of all contrasts, and the

transformation into a “communio” with God in a secular Utopia of this world through the eradication of all inequality. Since each individual is *sui generis*, whose contrast with one another is irreconcilable, the main idea of the individual person vanishes. This Person will not anymore be understood as someone different, who is the image of an invisible God, but as a member of a class with material needs, and whose desires can be quenched and pacified with great eternal peace when a classless society is realized.

(2) Thus, an immanent and a curtailed Concept of Man. Karl Marx emphasizes with unmistakable clarity that: The bourgeoisie has (...) no other bond to humanity, except the naked self-interest of a cold reciprocal sentiment. The bourgeoisie has drowned the holy religious enthusiasm, the knightly ardor, the philistinical melancholy in the cold ocean of egoism. She has severed the exchange possibility of personal dignity. (...) And with it replace the once hidden religious and political illusions of discrete exploitations into a contemptuous, direct and plain exploitation.<sup>vi</sup>

Indeed, this observation is most keen: The New Era and the beginning of Industrialization and Capitalization led to an imperceptible radical transvaluation of values, which Otfried Höffe delineates when he writes: The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries have experienced the consequences of the revaluation of values and a radical change of Mentality took place. The once illegitimate principles of suspect passions and the illegal debaucheries became the motivating forces which were eventually rid of their illegitimacy and can thusly, be considered neutral norms. Frequently they would even be seen positively, that even the vice of Envy can be translated into an economic competence and that of Greed as praiseworthy business acumen.<sup>vii</sup>

The State and the Society understand themselves like Persons who are no longer the images of the “*civitas Dei*” but a playground where Peace and Freedom of competing and rival individuals take place. This Copernican turn within the self emerging bourgeoisie ethic is the Godparent of the new era’s newborn Capitalism, which in turn, according to the Otfried Höffe’s assessment, is no other than the “ideological Transvaluation Prozess” of the “Victory of Capitalism”.<sup>viii</sup> And this eventually, gives rise to a short-sighted-utilitarianistical view of man that sees him only as a utility factor in the process of producing commodities and goods, and not anymore as a representative of a hidden ideality but only a functionary from production processes. Karl Marx knew too well this conclusion but remained primarily within the confines of this human picture that claims: After having eradicated exploitation, only Labor would remain as the true sense and function of Man in this present world. The true reward is obtained through Utopia which replaces the same satisfaction of needs (and apparently even more justified), and with it, in the foremost and privileged position, Labor, which is nothing else but the technical form and materially dictated realization of the self.

(3) In the revolutionary created Utopia of a classless society, the classical contradictory pair of Community and Freedom will have to be newly classified. Karl Marx emphasizes: Instead of the old bourgeois community with their corresponding classes and their class antagonisms, an association replaces the same, and the development of each one is a prerequisite for the development of the whole.<sup>ix</sup> The old antagonism is seemingly reconcilable. And the key to the problem as seen by Karl Marx is through the elimination of private property and the revolutionizing of the art of production. With it the State or the Society becomes a hypostatized Leviathan of the “Association”, which alone arrogates the decision of the kind of freedom that can be allowed an individual. But since man is fundamentally and falsely seen as a rival of his fellowmen, then according to this enlightened and individualistic peace concept, which is doomed to fail, the only viable means to achieve

this desired peace is through “a despotic intervention into private property and into the bourgeois relations of production.”<sup>x</sup>

Accordingly, a private-property-deprived man is nothing more than just a “homo privatus”, and the despoiled man bereft of individuality and reduced only to his basic needs becomes a “factum brutum”, robbed of whatever kind of higher ideality.<sup>xi</sup> Anon Karl Marx sees the results of a distancing from ideality (a fact already present in the English empiricism), without having to win a real ideality. Therefore, it behooves one to take recourse only through the revolutionary escape towards the secular stepsister of ideality, which is a Utopia, resembling that of the earlier humanistic Utopic form of the renaissance.<sup>xii</sup>

A characteristic of the Utopia of Karl Marx and of Communism lies in a three-fold denial of every kind of ideality: Firstly, the acceptance of an “etsi deus non daretur” for the perfection of the human nature through the sheer contentment of the basic needs, and whose measure lies not anymore in a future ideality but in the reality of History; secondly, through the renunciation of the guidance of man through Ideality and in the place of it a construction of a changed structure; and thirdly, the negation of every form of metaphysic and metaphysical value like Freedom, Personality and State.

#### **THE IDEALITY OF UTOPIA IN CHRISTIANITY: THE PERSONALITY**

After 150 years of existence of the Communist Manifest, the perennial question of humanity about the proper relations between Paradise and Utopia remains unanswered. And in order to properly respond to this question a clear distinction between the Christian concept of Man (and State) on the one end and the democratic Socialism (as the Epigoni of classical communism) on the other end must be shown. This is so because man experiences his inadequate being and in this inadequacy he realizes his unquenchable desire towards the lost Origin and the recovery of this blissful beginning.

The philosophical nomenclature for this utopian, literally inner-worldly ineffable state of paradise is the Ideality. The religious historical name is God. The Christian name has only one person: Jesus Christ as the revelation of the ideal and unconditional love, a revelation of the Father. “No one has ever seen God, and the only one who is in the bosom of the Father has given this good News”, according to the program of the prologue of St. John’s Gospel. Similarly the Constitution “Gaudium et Spes of the Vatican II emphasizes that “Christ is the perfect man” (Nr. 22) – perfect due to the fact of his consciousness of the perfect love of the Father. The ideality that is contained in the platonic tradition of the Allegory of the cave maintains this knowledge of the broken concupiscence as the result of the lost original state. And the same is the motor leading to the necessary renunciation of the contentment of needs in order to realize the ideals, the highest personal ideals and unconditional love. This highest good can only take place in the freedom of the person, but could not, per definitionem, be produced. The utopia however, denies the concupiscence and sees man as a being of this temporal world, whose inner-worldly perfection could be reached through the contentment of his material needs.

Clearly, all efforts to situate Paradise outside of time and of this world into an immanent universe ends up in inhumanity. It is not the idea of communistic and democratic socialism which is false but the point of time which is reduced into the inner worldly goal. Ideality alone maintains the tension between time and not-time, history and eternity. She knows that man’s realization is not only in time and in the world, but understands him from a Christian

view as God's image, as a being of "within and above." It is in the theological language, according to Erich Przywara the classical idea of the analogy of "Reciprocal relations towards otherness", of identity and difference and likewise of ideality and reality of the eschatological Utopia which avoids every form of the total dominion of man over man.<sup>xiii</sup> And this is not any different from the genial idea of St. Thomas Aquinas, an essential reason for the immense hardness and want of sympathy is the lack of Hope in the search of the self.

And the task of the Church at the end of the new era lies essentially with the duty of imparting the idea of time and eternity. Thus, "the first und fundamental contribution of the churches in the society is the capacity to believe in the otherness of time in the world (Weltzeit)."<sup>xiv</sup> This "otherness of time in the world" (Weltzeit) renounces every form of socialism, which is essentially an economic error called materialism, and which reduces man and his history to sheer function. That is why Pope Benedict XVI underscores in his Encyclica "Spe salvi": Marx missed out to proffer, for the new era the necessary Order and this Order eventually becomes superfluous. That he failed to address this issue is something logical considering that his approach was doomed to failure. He forgot that man will always remain human. He has forgotten man's humanity and his freedom. He thought that when the economic circumstances will have bettered, all other Order would follow as a matter of course. His actual error is Materialism: Man is not only a product of an economic environment, and he cannot be healed only through the agency of creating sound economic circumstances. (Nr. 21) This is the crux, in the last analysis, of the fundamental error of the marxistic Liberation Theology.

Truly, it is the new era's discovery between the difference of the Genesis of Value-ideas and Ideals without religion and the validity of Ideals based solely on the fundamentals of Religion, and simultaneously the imperious claim of God's truth of a pluralistic tolerating way of living. Only then can the oft endangered unity of tension between the Truth of the person and the tolerance of the community gain ground. Put differently: God wills unconditionally the Good—Love—but only through the means of personal freedom and personal conversion. That is why St. Augustine says, the end of History should be "ut anima sanetur"<sup>xv</sup>, that the soul may be healed and not --- that the structured be healed, even if it be most expedient, as could be understood within the terms of a socialistic economy. The soul and its healing, however, begin with each single Person and each individual and renewed immortal soul. That is why the Good is entrusted to the time of history of freedom of each man and this Good is likewise at its mercy. Or another way of putting it can be found in the Encyclica "Spe salvi": The proper condition of humanity, the Good in the world, can not only be realized through structures, even if they are good. Such structures are not only important, they are also indispensable, but these can not and must not be detrimental to the human freedom (...) Freedom must continually be maintained for the Good. (Nr.24)

With these in mind, a proper distinction between a sheer this-worldly oriented Ethics of Socialism and an eschatologically inspired Christian Ethics can be made. Time and history are subject to the perfection of the World through the Messiah. It is a time that begins with the creation of the world up until the new creation of the heavenly eternal Jerusalem that will never end. Against this background, one can understand the exigence that the future and "yet" contours of the recognizable world must be different from that of the past and the present. Out of this historical theology comes the Christian Ethics of an unlimited Personalism.

The French philosopher Philippe Nemo summarizes: “From biblical ethics one can derive the biblical teaching about the Last things, the Eschatology. From now on it shall be understood that the world thinks like History and it must be recognized that the spiritual substance of humanity grows out of their historicity. The being of man is human only through his historicity, and it can be holy, when this being is grounded within the time of its transformation. And suddenly almost all magical thinking disappears: Healing cannot be achieved by fleeing into a nearby world instead it can be reached alone through an active love of neighbor within the confines of the real World.<sup>xvi</sup> This is the responsibility of Christian Ethics: the tedious act of paving the way between withdrawal from the world and the worldly degeneration.

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<sup>i</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*: Akademie-Ausgabe, 6, 161f.; B224.

<sup>ii</sup> Compare the classical thought of the Incarnation of God in Person and History of Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, Einsiedeln 1962, 186.

<sup>iii</sup> Karl Marx, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, Berlin 1958, 6.

<sup>iv</sup> Karl Meschede, Art „Saint-Simonismus“, in *HWP VIII* 1126.

<sup>v</sup> Otfried Höffe, *Vernunft und Recht. Bausteine zu einem interkulturellen Rechtsdiskurs*, Frankfurt/M, 1996. 161.

<sup>vi</sup> Karl Marx, loc. cit. 35.

<sup>vii</sup> Otfried Höffe, *Moral als Preis der Moderne. Ein Versuch über Wissenschaft, Technik und Umwelt*, Frankfurt/M. 1993, 164.

<sup>viii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>ix</sup> Karl Marx, loc.cit., 35.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xi</sup> Cf. Erich Fromm, *Das Menschenbild bei Marx*, Frankfurt/M. 1963; Thieß Petersen, *Anthropologie und Ökonomie. Das Menschenbild bei Marx und dessen Bedeutung für seine Kritik an der politischen Ökonomie*, Frankfurt/M. 1997.

<sup>xii</sup> Cf. Beate Gabriele Lüsse, *Formen der humanistischen Utopie. Vorstellungen vom idealen Staat im englischen und kontinentalen Schrifttum des Humanismus 1516-1669*, Paderborn 1998.

<sup>xiii</sup> Eric Przywara, loc.cit.,187.

<sup>xiv</sup> Richard Schenk, *Redimentes tempus. Der Beitrag der Kirchen zur europäischen Einigung*, *IKZ Communio* 24 (1995) 543-557, here 549.

<sup>xv</sup> Augustinus, *De vera religione* III 1.

<sup>xvi</sup> Philippe Nemo, *Was ist der Westen? Die Genese der abendländischen Zivilisation*, Tübingen 2005, 41.