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Tanguy Marie Pouliquen

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Integral development of the person

Tanguy Marie Pouliquen

(Translated by Wilfrid Chaker)

Abstract: This article examines the meaning of the expression “integral personification” of the person as the process by which any individual becomes more and more a unique person by his capacity to assert his uniqueness in an intersubjective dynamic: to receive, to integrate, to give back, to share. The integral personification opens up to the “integrality” of the human being (everything of man), it operates by “integration” (process of interiorisation), it aims at the “integrity” of the subject (his unity: thought, being, action), it ends in the capacity “to integrate” socially the difference (of all men).

The term “personification”, as an act of becoming oneself, which M. Nédoncelle first used, attributing it to *The reciprocity of consciences* (1942), describes the process by which any individual becomes more and more a unique person by his capacity to assert his uniqueness in an intersubjective dynamic. Following J. Maritain, who in *Integral Humanism* (1936) recognised in the spirit the intangible and transcendent dimension that surpasses and fulfils the human being, the process of personification becomes “integral” when it involves all the dimensions of the person (understood as body, soul, spirit and relationships), opened to “the gift of life at its root” (Bergson 1907), a vitality which, inseparable from the person (Henry, 1963), commits that person to a lively fraternal communion. Integral personification reflects the permanent way of being of *docibilitas*, an availability to “learn life from life” (Cencini, 2011), in order to expand it by giving it back.

The historical study of personification follows that of the very concept of “person” that a certain E. Housset (2007) develops into four categories (ontico-categorical, ontologico-categorical, ontico-existential, onticologico-existential) while adhering to the last one as the guideline of “vocation”. The person is called by life to be always more moved by relationship, which is “received by that which commits him personally” (p. 499). What the person becomes, from his spirit itself, is that of an exodus where he grows by existing in and for alterity, according to the triple modality of time, transcendence, but also exile: paradoxically he has to exit from himself in order to become... himself.

From the spirit where man is the “shepherd of the being” (M. Heidegger, *Question II*, 1968) the inner conversion (Kehre) receives the manifestation of the being, the unveiling (a-lètheia) of life. It is because the capacity of relationship must find its interior form of existence. Following G. Marcel in *Being and Having* (1935), the person, challenged by relationships, is called to the locus of being itself, and passes from the mode of having to the mode of being which establishes a living relationship to the interiority of the phenomena. The authentic existence, opening up to the being, develops the attitudes that allow this openness: the willingness to receive from the outside, the commitment that unifies life and finds its peak in hope, the capacity to be in harmony with oneself in the long term, the taking in account of others, etc. It is through these openings that the passage from the individual to the person takes place in a process of personification that brings alive the growing subject by his consent to an infinity of life, of being (Stein, 1950).

This challenge of life, carried by an “onto-don-logy” - the logic of the gift of the being - open to the transcendence of the being, evolves into a vital process of unification in the growing subject. Far from the Sartre's self-referential freedom (*Being and Nothingness*, 1943), the unification is that of the person to the fullness of life that calls him to renounce his ego - the “hateful ego” of B. Pascal. Finite freedom is carried by two movements open to universality, the energy of desire - always looking for more - and by a language (*logos*) which gives it an open

meaning (Bruaire, 1964). Finite freedom aspires to an infinite freedom that can only be satisfied by a truly transcendental and inherent personal and relational infinite finite. This return to the principle of life, while remaining in its cause, opens the integral personification to the religious question: man aspires to be fully connected. More than a result to be achieved, it is a process to be created personally and socially, always evolving towards its accomplishment.

People, being in constant development of themselves, have, as emphasised by M. Blondel, “to undergo a growth” (*The Being and the Beings*, 1935, p. 204), through the quality of the relationships with others which invites them to “surpass themselves” (p. 286). Man is not self-sufficient, “he must act for others, with others and through others” (*Action*, 1893, p. 229). Blondel brings to an end individualism, “by attaching us elsewhere than to ourselves” (p. 230). The alterity is constitutive of the identity, the personification becoming tangible by the opening to “oneself as another” (Ricoeur, 1990).

Integral personification is understood by the intensification of the dynamic of the being and existentially according to the gift of life - to receive, to integrate, to give back, to share – a dynamic of permanent formation of the person (*docibilitas*) as a result of a good vulnerability (Ide, “*Positive Vulnerability*”), malleability of the person who develops himself by unifying himself in order to unify (Pouliquen, 2014). In this structuring perspective, the gift of life refers to four dimensions.

Firstly, the gift of life is primarily to be received. The gift of life precedes us, it is the transcendent level, open to an origin, to a given life. Man receives his life freely, initially from the origin of life, from his parents, from society, from the environment. Here the person is made for welcoming life and to be thankful for it: The origin of life urges gratitude for such a gift.

Secondly, the gift of life should be united with the total existence of the person. Here everyone is called upon to build up themselves, to develop their own abilities, to fortify their life by strengthening their freedom with the help of the

gifts received, there where the search for fulfilment (the last level Maslow, 1971) drives the dynamism of integration (Wojtyla, 1969). It is the anthropological level. The subject as a “person”, becomes what he decides to be. He is what he is by committing himself from the given life, therefore without promoting *the virtue of selfishness* (Rand, 2008).

Thirdly, the gift of life is there to be given back. Life “fills” the person when he gives it. It is specifically the ethical dimension. Without needing a “counter-gift” (Mauss, 1924), and therefore without needing a contract based on reciprocity, but rather with the necessity of a relational experience of two persons, man becomes himself by coming out of himself, by giving himself sincerely to others. He becomes more and more alive by giving that which he has received. Giving life gives... life. The free gift is transformed into a gratifying dynamic because it is relational, that is to say into a free gift of oneself “for” others, by expropriation of oneself for others. Supported by a double gratitude, the person makes himself “available” to others thereby transforming the anonymity of his "me" into a personal and mutually dependent "I", which is a commitment "for him".

Fourthly, to serve communion between people finalises the gift of life. In this perspective, man finds his perfection in the common good through circular relationships, exchanges of quality gifts that he inspires. All true integral personification is communal. Communion is the goal of the personification, by building an "I-you-we" (Ulrich, 1974) which requires practical criteria. The "communal we" is not the sum of anonymous individualities, but rather of unique persons who are responsible together for the building of the common unity. The community is formed by bonds of love, exchanges of freely given gifts, that are not only congenial bonds sharing a natural affinity, but bonds formed by action. The more life is received at its roots – welcomed as a freely given gift –, the more it will be shared freely by circulation of gifts generating a genuine brotherhood. This is why the community itself "aspires to set itself up as a person" (Mounier, 1934), one that is a “person of persons.”

Doesn't considering the primacy of integral personification make it possible to base social relationships in an accompanying mode: that is to serve the growth of the persons, their unification, rather than to exert a hold on them?

Homo viator man - like a being on the way – becomes unified more and more by enlightening his conscience. Conscience is the receptacle of this integration process. Unlike J. Locke [1690] who encloses it within itself - “the person is an intelligent and thinking being endowed with reason and reflection aware of his identity and of his permanence in time” (*Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 1690) - the conscience, driven by the continuously renewed gift of life, is an opening, it accompanies the process of integration by the recognition of the goodness of existence. The conscience acts freely by a *Grammar of Assent* (Newman, 1870), by *Donation and consent* (Tourpe, 2000).

Within this approach, a “unified man” is set in motion by a "dialectic of the recognition" of the difference (Fessard, 1959). The existential awakening takes place by the emergence of conscience to the being, by the awareness of positive feelings of communion, but also by negative feelings (anguish, nausea, absurdity, despair), which are so many ways to the depths of existence. However, there is alienation when a reductive, possessive relationship with people develops, which is completely the opposite of a process of interiority as would be a desire desired from above (*de superioribus*), in oneself (*ad interioribus*) and towards the others (*ad exterioribus*), according to the Augustinian triad.

The invasion of technology (technocratic paradigm) leads to a loss of interiority. A unified man protects and cultivates his "interior life" (Thibon, 2012). Integral personification is an antidote to practical atheism promoted by the technocratic paradigm of which J.-C. Larchet (2016) underlines the effects on intimate life: substitution of verticality by horizontality, rushing ahead (Finkielkraut, 2001), continuous changing caused by continuous dissatisfaction, replacement of the psychic stability by the unceasing changes, agitation of passions (violence, sexualism, greediness, money-cult, emotions, vainglory), superficial communication replacing communion, etc.

A "unified man" seeks to live in harmony with his environment, he is neither a predator of others, nor of natural resources: he leads his life soberly in harmony with the surrounding nature (*For an ecological commitment*, 2014). To this end everything is linked. The ecology of simple life makes sobriety its main benchmark by aiming for less technique (low technology), intensity of life (slow life), unnecessary food (slow food). A certain logic of reduction of consumption can therefore be associated with it. Nevertheless, it is not simply a question of doing less, but rather more a question of recovering the coherence of personal life with the environment by placing the human person (human ecology) at the heart of the ecological reflection.

Integral personification, that unifies the human being in the gift, is positively utopian. The solution (*topos*) to be found is in front of us as it has to be integrated. The gift is always to be invented; it thus invites us to constantly move forward. Integral personification involves cultivating man's desire not by exalting himself, but by expressing the echo of the gift of life, primary and freely given.

As opposed to any reduction of others which dissolves them (Levinas, 1961), the relationship between two unique entities, his own and that of another, calls for an attitude of poverty synonymous with shared non-violence: to serve others and not use them. This mutual service is marked by a vulnerability which leads to an unconditional need of the other, as a result of his uniqueness (Grioux, 2012). The acceptance of the transcendence of others enlarged to the transcendence of the relationships definitively buries any hold on them. The hand that wants to take is turned into a hand that welcomes. In the inner reversal that opens up to the transcendence of others, the offered flower can become fruit (fertility) by dying to its sufficiency. My brother, my sister, "no I will not use you; I will always honor you" underlines the poet C.-K Norwid (1863).

Through conscience, life receives itself from its origin, integrates with the irreducible "I", gives itself back to the "you" of others and builds the unity of the "we" that gathers. The integral personification of the person is ultimately a beautiful four-legged table where it is good to be together: it opens up to the

“integrality” of the human being (everything of man), it operates by “integration” (process of interiorisation), it aims at the “integrity” of the subject (his unity: thought, being, action), it ends in the capacity “to integrate” socially the difference (of all men).

Tanguy Marie Pouliquen

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