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# ***Christian humanism and the Challenges of Contemporary Culture in the Post-communist lands***<sup>1</sup>

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After 1989, the post-communist countries opened to the West. What began to arrive from the West? Where atheism had formerly ruled, sects began to report in. Where once there had been the living Church, an intense process of secularization began. Liberalism and post-modernism provided ideological support for this invasion. Liberalism supported moral permissiveness and anti-clericalism. Post-modernism represented the destruction of realistic knowledge and of the tradition of western culture. This situation opened up new fields of work for Christian humanism. Christian humanism as the expression of a full human culture that includes faith and reason, art and morality, is a strong and intelligent barrier against the flood of evil and falsehood. This humanism must be integral. It cannot be reduced to a matter of faith alone or tradition alone. This humanism must be morally right. It must be intelligent, and this would be impossible without realistic philosophy. Finally, it must be present in the living Church, which is something more than a bureaucracy or museum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to speak before such as an esteemed group of people. We have come to this congress in Rome from many lands and different continents. We share a concern for the future of Christianity and the future of philosophy in the world. Christian humanism faces many challenges. One challenge is the situation of culture in the post-communist lands.

The phenomenon of post-communism is most difficult to define. It describes the countries of the Soviet bloc in which the official ideology was communism, but this communism had different faces, from very aggressive to relatively moderate. Communism was especially opposed to religion and private property. The situation of Christianity in communist countries varied widely. For example, there was complete atheism in the Soviet Union and East Germany, while in Poland the Church had unquestioned social and even

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political power. In the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1939, 130 bishops and 200,000 clergy were murdered, 300,000 clergy were imprisoned, and 40,000 places of worship were destroyed. In Poland after the introduction of Communism at the end of the Second World War, there were initially harsh persecutions and show-trials. About 1,000 priests were imprisoned, and about 80 were murdered. Even the Primate of Poland, Stefan Wyszyński, was imprisoned. Yet the Church successfully defended herself. There was an increase in vocations.

The faithful participated en masse in religious services, and they built new churches. Some bishops even built as many hundreds of Churches in their dioceses, in one case even 300. Although the state authorities opposed this construction, the people were greatly committed to this work. Finally, at a time when communism seemed to be firmly entrenched, Poland gave to the world a Pope. The private ownership of land was liquidated in all the communist countries except Poland. There were some collective farms in Poland, but most of the land was in the hands of small private farmers.

With the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Bloc, many countries regained their independence. Some of these countries, such as Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia had been republics of the Soviet Union, and as such integral parts of the Soviet Union. Others, such as Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania, were satellite nations. These states exchanged the communist system for the capitalist system, and socialism for liberalism. The word „post-communism” describes a strange system and a strange situation but does not explain this state of affairs. The main beneficiaries of these changes were the communists. They took no responsibility for the evil they had inflicted of these societies for so many decades. They eagerly divided state property among themselves. This property is no longer state property, but much of it has become the property of communists. Post-communism is the appropriation of state property by communists. They took land, factories, the media (including television), and schools.

Have the communists abandoned their ideological aims? Is not neo-Marxism, whose ideas have a superficial agreement with liberalism at the level of ideas, sometimes a component of post-communism?

When the Soviet Union fell these societies opened to the west. What began to arrive from the west? Where atheism once ruled, sects arrived. Where there was a living Church, a process of intense secularization began. Liberalism and postmodernism supported this invasion at the ideological level. Liberalism proclaimed moral permissiveness and anticlericalism. Postmodernism marked the destruction of realistic cognition and the tradition of western culture.

Societies left morally and intellectually weak by communism began to totter. They were not prepared to meet these new threats. The new threats were effective not because of their own strength but because the victim was weak. We should remember that for many years people living in the communist countries had imagined the west as the long-awaited savior. Meanwhile the west as it really invaded the media, the schools, and the Church was regarded with suspicion. At times people could have the impression that the west had the same aims as communism, only the means were different since they were more „democratic”. The west did not differ from the east in the matters of abortion, euthanasia, anti-clericalism, and demoralization. People could see more and more clearly that that Christian humanism must fight in both the east and the west for the authentic rights of man. What is the phenomenon of Christian humanism?

There are three kinds of humanism. Although the word „humanism” comes from the Latin *humanus*, it is a modern term. Humanism is the direction of civilization toward man as the center of all the domains of culture. There have been several currents in the history of humanism, and one of these has been Christian humanism. Christian humanism has arrived relatively late on the scene. It arose as distinct from Renaissance humanism, which was a return to paganism in western culture, and as opposed to socialist humanism, which is a form of atheism.

In the ideological war with Christianity that was still being waged during the Protestant Reformation, the opponents of Christianity presented a picture of the Middle Ages as a theocentric culture that neglected human matters to focus upon scholastic speculations that were abstracted from reality, as opposed to a humanism that focussed upon man. This Renaissance humanism was not atheistic. It did not deify man, but it did invoke the entire pantheon of pagan, Greek, Roman, and eastern gods. The deification of man first occurred in nineteenth-century socialism in which man and God were presented as mutually exclusive alternatives. Society must choose either man or God. The concept of Christian humanism was introduced to stem the advance of neo-paganism and socialism, which had turned out to be types of pseudo-humanism. Christian humanism also emphasizes that Christianity is not divorced from man, because man is the subject of culture. Man, however, is neither his own maker nor his own end, but his maker and his end is God, and so authentic humanism must be Christian.

It must be Christian because God is not the same as Zeus or Mazda of the Zarathustrians, but is the One God in three persons. The officially endorsed culture of today, the culture promoted by the mass-media, legally supported by

the state, and taught in the schools, is burdened with a double heritage of false humanism, the pagan and the socialist humanism, but there is no room in this culture for Christian humanism.

Unless we understand communism we cannot understand post-communism. The lands of the Soviet Bloc were under the socialist system. The status of property was a most important issue: communism denies any right to private property, while liberalism is based upon private property. Yet in the complex ideology of communism, the nationalization of property, where the state expropriates private property, was not an end in itself. The purpose of nationalization was to deprive society of a base from which people could nurture their traditions and create their own culture. The purpose of communism was to destroy personalistic culture in order to advance the cause of mass culture. Man would be reduced to an element of society and would be nothing apart from society. If to be a person means to be in real possession of human rights guaranteed by the state and civilization, people had no such rights under communism. These rights were not protected by statutory law nor did people have any means to realize them. Authentic human rights are expressed in the natural law. Private property is a means for guaranteeing these rights. St. Thomas Aquinas recognized private property as a consequence of the natural law.

Under communism, the right to life did not extend to newly conceived and unborn people. Marriage could be ended in divorce. The media and political authorities were accustomed to the ways of deception. It is a paradox that the natural law was also abrogated in the west in the name of the rights of man. In the west there is no protection for unborn life or marriage. Worse yet, homosexual marriages are being legalized, something that did not occur even in the communist countries.

Except for their different approach to private property, we may have the impression that today the socialists of the east have come together with the socialists of the west to form one happy family. Europe is losing its western identity and its Christian heritage. Where is the Christian intelligentsia in all this?

The Christian intelligentsia is not a group that comes down ready-made from heaven, but is the effect of a long process of education. This process begins in the home and continues in the Church and school. Parents have less and less time in the home for to raise and educate their children, or to converse with them or discuss matters. Their teachers are television and the street. Television does not educate an elite, but only the dull mass-man who is incapable of

reflection, disoriented by a chaos of information, and driven by his own primitive reactions. We can apply the words of Heraclitus to him: the eyes of people who have the souls of barbarians are bad witnesses. The schools undergo constant new reforms and experiments and their patron saint is John Dewey, a determined foe of Christianity.

In the Catholic schools, only the religion is Catholic, and even the religion has been traded for the sociology of religion, for religious studies that, as it turns out, may be taught by representatives of other religions or even atheists. Such people are qualified to teach, since these religious studies present the various forms of religious worship, including fetishism and animism. Religious studies are not the same as religion. Religion opens man to the true God, to transcendence. Will a young student choose to be a Christian if at school an atheist will be his teacher in religious studies, an atheist who adds a large dose of skepticism, and even contempt and hatred toward Christianity? It is rather doubtful.

Catholic education was based on the *trivium*, which was the foundation of humanistic education. After the *trivium* came the *quadrivium*. Philosophy was the crowning point of the *septem artes liberales*. After the Second World War, the communists conducted a reform of education in which they very deliberately eliminated rhetoric, logic, and philosophy from the curriculum. Greek disappeared, and then Latin. In this way the foundations of classical or humanistic education, which formed skills in understanding texts and in verbalizing thoughts, were destroyed. The *quadrivium*, that is, the mathematical sciences, or the natural sciences (biology, chemistry, and physics) were put in the place of the *trivium*. This system of education was aimed at producing a new generation of the socialist mass-man. Ideology would be his wisdom.

This ideology was inserted everywhere, at every stage of education, but it was imposed with particular force upon the minds of the intelligentsia, that is, college and university students. Every student had to take an examination in Marxism.

In order to break the clergy, they were taken into the army. When Department IV was opened in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a file was opened for each cleric to gather information that could later be used for blackmail or to enlist them in the service of the state. Communism was a system of intelligently organized evil. Are people in the west certain that all that has ended? In many post-communist countries the post-communists are in control, and many countries do not allow the scrutiny of outsiders. Do they know who they are admitting so easily into the European Union? Are they not at times too naïve?

To stand firm against this evil we need the morality that springs from tradition and is fortified by religion. We need an educated mind to decipher this evil. The Marxists feared traditional morality. To fight it they propagated a socialist morality and made a tacit alliance with so-called progressive Catholics. The traditional Polish morality that had grown from Christianity was outflanked. On the one hand the Marxists were aware that philosophy was an intellectual threat to their ideology. They did not see every kind of philosophy as a threat. Just as they permitted political pluralism under the form of the farmer party (The United People's Party) and the liberal party (the Democratic Party), so phenomenology and analytic philosophy were also tolerated at certain state schools. These philosophies posed no threat to Marxism.

Moreover, some Marxists who were looking for philosophical ennoblement pretended to be phenomenologists and analytic philosophers. They also looked to positivism and neo-positivism. They did not do this out of love for truth, but because the conception of science in these philosophies was anti-theological and anti-metaphysical. Thomism was an authentic ideological and philosophical enemy of Marxism. It was an ideological enemy because it was connected with Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular. It was a philosophical enemy because Thomism was a type of realism. Marxists did not fear phenomenology or analytic philosophy because like Marxism they were forms of idealism. The starting point for phenomenology is found in the phenomena that remain after the application of *epoche*, which is the method of separating content from existence. The starting point for analytic philosophy is language at the level of meanings. If the reason for being is existence, neither phenomenology nor analytic philosophy can be considered a form of realistic philosophy. Marxism as well is not realistic because being is reduced to matter, and matter is reduced to impressions. One of the leading Marxists who was also a member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party wrote of Thomism: "One condition for the complete ideological victory of the Marxist-Leninist world-view in Poland is to overcome the ideological influences of philosophical trends that are foreign with respect to class. This primarily concerns Thomistic philosophy, a philosophy with a explicit fideistic face, which is the official philosophy of Catholic schools."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A. Schaff, *Narodziny i rozwój filozofii marksistowskiej* [Origins and development of Marxist philosophy], Warsaw 1950, p. 403. Cf. M. A. Krapiec, *Byt i istota* [Being and essence], Lublin 1994, p. 229. It is interesting that this author mentions the level of the printed editions of Marxist works up to the year 1950. 200,000 copies of the *Dziela wybrane* [Collected Works] of Marx and Engels, 275,000 copies of Lenin's *Materializm i empiriokrytycyzm* [Materialism and empiriocriticism], and 300,000 copies of Stalin's *O materializmie dialektycznym i historycznym* [On dialectical and historical materialism].

Yet it seemed that the development of classical philosophy in Poland could not be stopped, although we do not know what the future holds. Socialism today is shifting emphasis from ideology to technology. Technology possesses its own latent ideology and philosophy, but these are not as aggressive as Marxism, which was supposed to replace philosophy and religion.

Marxism needed its own philosophy because it had to confront the class of learned people always present in society. Initially professors from before the war who had no sympathy for Marxism were admitted to university chairs. They were not admitted out of respect for their learning, but so that young Marxists could be educated. When they acquired the necessary degrees, they took the place of the non-Marxist professors in order to impose their own ideology on all the humanities.

Marxism attacked the humanities at the ideological, personal, administrative, and financial level. The greatest paradox was that within Christian schools some had an inferiority complex to Marxist and similar versions of the humanities. The new authorities created intellectual salons in the Byzantine style. The dream of many catholic scholars was to be admitted into the salons. This is still so today.

The treasure of classical philosophy resides not only in its realism but also in its theoretical character. Marxism recognized only practical ends. These were not ends in the realistic sense as the completion and perfection of nature, but were purely *a priori*. We may recall that according to Aristotle an end is a form or nature as it is or will be actualized. If an end is outside of nature or contrary to nature, then at the political level or the level of civilization that end leads to totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is not concerned with nature or the subject. What ultimately gave communism its totalitarian character was its pragmatism concerning idealistic ends in the name of which they did not need to concern themselves with reality.

The totalitarian dimension of Marxist communism in its Soviet edition was evident to Catholic intellectuals educated in classical philosophy. This clarity of vision is more and more lacking among the intelligentsia of the west, whose ranks have been increasingly reduced by liberalism. They saw the evil of communism, but they perceived it in political terms and not in intellectual terms. The western intelligentsia, journalists and professors, have been leaning to the left.

The countries of central and eastern Europe needed economic support from the west in the times of communism, but matters are much more complicated in the area of culture. The language barrier did not allow the outside world to see the full intellectual potential possessed by scholars such as those of the Lublin philosophical schools, although some works, especially some by Fr. Prof. M. M. Krapiec, were published in English. We are in the process of preparing and publishing "The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy". The fourth volume has just been offered to the Pope.

It is worthwhile to engage in dialogue and exchange thoughts in the Catholic schools of Europe, North America, and South America, to the extent that philosophical thought is alive in universities and seminaries. Despite the fall of the Soviet bloc, anti-Christian ideology is still present in different forms and on different philosophical foundations such as liberalism and postmodernism. Marxism is not yet finished. The west succumbs to various ideologies because it becoming weaker intellectually as the mass media and consumerism become stronger. There is a great need for dialogue between the east and the west within our common heritage of classical philosophy. Classical philosophy is the only antidote to the pluralism of philosophical errors that lie at the foundations of many dangerous ideologies. There are still some sane and healthy schools.

Great tasks lie before an intelligent, educated, and upright Christian humanism. Christian humanists must remain aware. They must be humble of heart. They must hold to social and international solidarity to gain a sphere in public life for Christianity in which Christianity can have an influence on culture, which is endangered in the western and post-communist countries. Just as ideology perverts the purpose of culture, so mass culture robs culture of its deeper meaning. As Pope John Paul II says, man lives a truly human life by culture, and culture is the meaning of his existence. We must restore this role to culture.

Since our encounter with a false understanding of culture was more painful in the communistic countries than in the west, there are schools in those countries where we have a clearer perception of the dangers that contemporary culture bears when it is cut off from the past, guided by hedonism, and deprived of all that is transcendent. Therefore the west should try to understand the experience of the post-communist countries before those countries are submerged completely in a neo-socialism more dangerous than communism itself. No other humanism than Christian humanism can offer a rational and realistic solution to this risky and even tragic situation of contemporary mankind.