

Wrong Understanding of Freedom in the Contemporary World in the Context of the Anti-life Practices

Contemporary world is the place of torment for millions of human beings – unborn, disabled, sick, weak and elderly. It is a great laboratory, where, in the name of science and for the good of humanity, tests and genetic experiments are conducted on humans. It is also a production line, where new life is “created” to order. It is an arena of undisputed reign of man, which – not for the first time in history – considers himself God. Man became the lord of life and death. He changed the definition of humankind. Meanwhile, he has given new interpretation to the fundamental values of freedom, truth and law, disconnected from their original meaning, viewing freedom as arbitrariness, which leads to internal slavery; as the ability of doing whatever he pleases. Man has attacked the objectivity of truth, giving everyone the right to evaluate and interpret it according to individual beliefs or particular interest. The law has been replaced by lawlessness – sometimes of absurd proportions – making man a bargaining card in political games.

Self-assured in his greatness and rightfulness of his actions, man failed to notice that his modern, progressive, planned world, sinking in the chaos of vain-glory, slavery and lawlessness is slowly heading towards its own destruction¹.

In “the image and likeness” of God

God not only made man the greatest of His creations; He created man to resemble God, making him in His “image and likeness” (*ad imaginem et simili-*

¹ The article is a revised Polish text: *Falszywe rozumienie wolności we współczesnym świecie w kontekście praktyk przeciwko życiu*, „Studia Franciszkańskie” 22 Poznań 2012, 35-60.

tudinem – Gn 1,26)². An interpretation of this fact, so fundamental for man, originates in the Book of Genesis. During the seven-day process of world creation, man was created as the last of all creation in a way that was completely different to previous beings created by God that were called to the existence with the particle “let”. The laconic “let us make” that preceded the act of creation of man in the first description, changes into a personal act of God expressed with the words “formed” and “breathed”. This description also specifies the material with which man was created, talking about “the dust of the ground” and “the breath of life”.

Man, formed of the dust of the ground became a material image of immaterial God. Man was given his earthly cover; however it is not this that makes him similar to the Creator. The Old Testament understanding of “image and likeness” (hebr. *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ*) indicates we should treat them as complementary, almost as synonyms, despite them having their own specified meanings. An image is defined as a material image, a fleeting shadow whereas likeness can be described in both abstract and concrete terms. For the ancients however, an image is something more than external likeness, it is also a representation of a person that it depicts. Given this, the relation of an image to a person cannot be merely physical, attributive but it has to have a deeper internally-important reference³. For man is not an external mirror of the non-material God⁴, hence the likeness must be related to something else.

In man, the Creator placed the “idea” of His Divinity. He equipped man in those best “elements” of Himself that allow man to realise and experience his own humanity. Man was equipped with rational nature, free will, ability to think, talk, consciousness of his existence, self-awareness, ability to know himself. He also received this mysterious breath of life with which the physical dimension was enriched with spiritual depth: *between God and man*, as Gianfranco Ravasi writes, *there is this common “breath”, called conscience, spirituality and internal life in the highest meaning of the word*⁵.

² In *The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible*, edited by D. Senior et al., Oxford 1990 this quotation is: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (Gn 1,26).

³ Cf. S. Łach (ed.), *Księga Rodzaju*, vol. I-1, Poznań 1962, 193.

⁴ A literal understanding of the words from the Bible: *Uczyńmy człowieka, według Naszej celem...* led to false conclusions and led some to believe that the Divine Being has some form, shape, figure and hence is physical. What is more, negating the physicality of God meant, according to such thinkers, negating the existence of God. For more on that see *Tora Pardes Lauder, Księga Pierwsza Bereszit*, S. Pecaric (ed.), translated by E. Gordon, Kraków 2001, 13.

⁵ G. Ravasi, *Il Libro Della Genesi*, Roma 1996, 53.

Giving blessing to the first parents, God told them to be fruitful and multiply, rule over the Earth, its entire creation and all of its wealth. However, the earthly existence of man required freedom, autonomy, the possibility of making decisions, choices and performing an endless number of acts of will. These can be spontaneously done only by a free person. Hence God, being Himself non-determined in His actions, endowed man with freedom – the original and constitutive factor of a human being⁶. Only in freedom, a resounding, free and conscious human “yes” or “no” can be heard, and only such an answer is meaningful. Freedom should not be understood only in a psycho-physical sense as the lack of physical inhibition or the possibility of a free choice. Such a definition would mean an impoverishment of freedom but also a marked limitation to the Divine gift, since it is freedom that constitutes this distinguished sign of God’s image in man. That is why human freedom is demanding. For Leopold Staff: *freedom is not a relief but a hardship of greatness*⁷. It is a continuous “humanisation”, growth, pursuit of perfection and good, a never-ending confirmation of God’s image in man, but also a great care to view this image in every man, a memory of the teachings, commands, warnings issued by the Father that puts His trust in His child, it is an obligation to live a life that pleases God. It is, ultimately, a continuous testimony about the One from whom man originates and to whom he aims to come back. This gift is as dangerous as it is generous. Freedom, in the words of G. Ravasi, is a glory but also a risk taken by the noblest of all creation⁸. This creation, however, turned out to be a very imperfect and defective image of its Creator.

First test of freedom

The first, and at the same time the most important, test of understanding of freedom took place in the Garden of Eden. There, God placed man telling him: *You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you*

⁶ Cf. B. Mondin, *Wolność jako istotny i pierwotny czynnik konstytutywny osoby ludzkiej*, in: *Wolność we współczesnej kulturze*, Materiały V Światowego Kongresu Filozofii Chrześcijańskiej KUL – Lublin 20 – 25 sierpnia 1996, collected work edited by Z. Zdybicka, J. Herbut, A. Maryniarczyk, A. Łyskawka, N. Szutta, translated by P. Kawalec, Lublin 1997, 53.

⁷ L. Staff, *Oto twa pieśń!*, from *Tęcza łez i krwi*, w: L. Michalska (red.) *Poezje zebrane*, Warszawa 1967, 78.

⁸ Cf. G. Ravasi, op. cit., 72.

are surely doomed to die (Gn 2,16- 17)⁹. The symbolism of the tree is still unclear. One of the interpretations identifies the tree with the possibility of deciding about what is good and what is bad without observing God's commands¹⁰. It is not however of key importance in the story. The fragment, as it would seem, describes the first limitation to human freedom. The words of the Creator clearly describe a prohibition "thou canst". There, where a prohibition is present, a possibility of breaking it – fuelled by renewed serpent's calls – suggests itself to a weak human nature. Man hesitates, faced with a dilemma of choice. Should he remain faithful to God's prohibition, or should he break it, facing all the consequences of that decision? God's warning against death is in the end silenced by the deceptive promise made by the serpent to the woman: *You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad* (Gn 3,4-5).

Human nature is put to the test, the first man falls, condemning himself and the entire humankind to a continuous balancing between good and evil. From now on, those who walked in brightness enjoying God's friendliness, walk in darkness having to encounter Evil with every step. The painful experience in the Paradise was supposed to make man aware that limitations are a part of human nature and that between freedom and the statement that "anything goes" there can be no equality. Unfortunately, this act of disobedience meant that the understanding of freedom in the mind of man become thus permanently contaminated and distorted. Man, in the words of St. Augustine: once chose, always forced to choose, was sentenced to a never-ending process of making a choice.

However, the creation-loving God does not leave the lost man alone. The salvation of humankind, as the preventive measure counteracting the fall of the first parents, is initiated in the very act of creation, since the Creator knew and foresaw it all. After many centuries, He sent His Son to free man from his internal slavery by sacrificing Himself. This expression of boundless love of God for man that found its culmination on the cross, had been preceded by more than thirty years of Jesus' presence on Earth. The only, true, personal God sharing with man joys and sufferings of everyday life, brings the world a recipe for a good life, stated in simple words: *If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (Jn 8,31-32). For a Christian, there is no other way to the real freedom, apart from the one indicated by the teachings of Christ. The Holy Scripture gives to man a kind of "instruction" of a good use of freedom.

⁹ All quotations from the Bible come from *The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible*, edited by D. Senior et al., Oxford 1990.

¹⁰ Cf. S. Lach (ed.), op. cit., 208; vid. also G. Ravasi, op. cit., 55-56.

Paul's "everything is lawful for me"

In the early days, it was St. Paul who became a tireless proponent of Christianity and who in one of his letters¹¹ famously wrote: *everything is lawful for me*, but in order to make it more precise he adds accordingly: (...) *but not everything is beneficial*, and: (...) *but I will not let myself be dominated by anything*, and later on: (...) *but not everything builds up*. Despite the fact that Paul's words relate to a specific historical context and are an answer to the moral problems of the contemporary citizens of Corinth, the timelessness of his phrasing admits also a broader interpretation.

The addressees of the letter are warned by the apostle against abusing sexual freedom as this enslaves the body and consequently an entire human being. Yet man, including his body, belongs to Christ, is a temple of the Holy Spirit, as the price for his redemption was enormous. It is then necessary that a human being imposed on himself certain limitations, thanks to which he will not fall into slavery that is a negation of freedom. Talking about consuming meat from the pagan sacrifices, St. Paul calls for such use of freedom which does not give offence to others. Human freedom has its precisely defined boundaries, set in the first place by conscience but also by regard to other human beings and their freedom¹².

Paul's "benefit" is not measured in terms of profit or a moneymaking business. It is not a cold calculation of what pays off and what does not. Man, freed by Christ from the sin towards freedom, is allowed what is good, honest, just and right. Each human action should be preceded by a deep reflection over this (the uniquely Pauline notion of a "benefit"). Endowed with freedom, man should be aware that each and every time his action is an obligation to do good, since all that God created was good. Hence, man, in a way by design, is directed towards good. On the other hand, this freedom comes with a level of autonomy, independence of human action in that God cannot order anything to man, since this would have undermined the essence of God's gift. Jacques Maritain describes man as being a person that is a universe of spiritual nature, so independent of the world that (...) *even God, who is and acts within, acts in man in a special way, with a surprising softness, indicating how much He values him: respects his freedom, though He lives in its heart, stimulates but never violates it*¹³. Out of this unimaginable respect there originates this call of God, inviting but not forcing anything, ever-

¹¹ We mean here the First Letter to Corinthians, verses: 6:12 and 10:23 respectively.

¹² Vid. M. Rosik, *Pierwszy List do Koryntian* (Seria: Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Nowy Testament VII) Częstochowa 2009, 225-231.339-346.

¹³ J. Maritain, quotation after S. Kowalczyk, *Z refleksji nad człowiekiem: Człowiek – społeczność – wartość*, Lublin 1995, 115.

present in human life: “if you want”. Unfortunately, man stunned with the great mystery of God’s trust, starting with the fall in the Paradise, experiences the tragic paradox of his own existence, each time when by willing good, he does evil.

Over the centuries, man worked out and realised many notions of freedom, not always consistent with God’s intention, sometimes even supplementing it or substituting with purely human reasoning. This way he created his own, false view of this notion, based for the most part on the relativity of truth, objectification of man and boundless trust in reason, leading in consequence to undermining of God’s laws and excluding God from the sphere of human life.

Long before Christ, Protagoras presented a notion of man being a measure of all things, which started this very dangerous habit of free interpretation of truth, serving the person’s own best interest.

Sophistic “multitude” of truths

From the time when the Sophists had appeared in the Greek public space, there was a shift from the natural philosophy towards notions concerning man as an individual and as a part of a larger society. This radical shift towards man was no doubt caused by the increasing value crisis and the need to change the old, maximalist order, where knowledge was certain, objective and universal. Sophists not only “de-loaded” knowledge of obligations but also questioned the position it traditionally had held in the process of cognition. In other words, knowledge was pushed to the margins, the quest for knowledge for its own sake was abandoned and sciences were used to support the Sophists’ own particular goals.

The same happened to the truth, which was drained off its “objectivity”, favouring relativity and dependence on individual needs. Such thinking stemmed from the minimalist theory of knowledge based on four main assumptions: sensualism, relativism, praxicism and conventionalism. These philosophising teachers and pedagogues, as the Sophists were described, moved to empiricism, which shifts the centre of gravity in terms of knowledge towards the senses. Man gains knowledge of the surrounding reality with his senses, hence everyone can have a different view on the same object, can think of it in different terms; it follows that truth is no longer considered to be unique, but that there are different truths for different individuals. Moreover, the Sophists assigned a kind of a “weight” by making it dependent on its usefulness. My truth can be “better” than yours, since it is more useful to society as a whole. And a truth held within a given society is not true objectively but as a result of a kind of social contract. Society itself decides which truths are held within it and which are not.

This, evidently dangerous, false notion of reality found its expression in the famous maxim by Protagoras: *man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not*¹⁴. And if by “the measure” we mean an evaluative norm, and by “the things” – all the facts, then there is no absolute criterion of truth, false, good and evil; everything is relative and depends on a given individual. This way, generally speaking, man – as viewed by the Sophists – became a master of himself. Paraphrasing the poet, it can be said that man is now his own rudder, sailor and vessel and sets himself the ports to which he is headed. The tragedy of the Sophistic ideas lies in the fact that the word and thought had lost their object, rule and the connection with the being and the truth, which had an undeniable impact in the subsequent history of human thought¹⁵.

Aristippus’s search for pleasure

This very same negation of knowledge and undermining of authorities were also characteristic of the Cyrenaics. Assuming that the only important elements of knowledge are those that can be described using the categories of good and evil, the Cyrenaics rejected as useless the following fields of knowledge: natural philosophy, mathematics, physics and dialectics, claiming that the human mind is not capable of understanding the objects studied there. And even if it had been, there would have been no use of it, since such knowledge does not bring happiness, which is the main aim of human existence. The sensual experiences – and not even their causes – are only knowable things. And these experiences are subjective to the person experiencing them. Similar subjectivism can be found in the views of the Sophists; in this case it relates to the theory of knowledge, i.e. epistemology, in a broad sense.

Aristippus, the main representative and the founder of the Cyrenaic school, initiated a unique approach to ethics, called hedonism that stated an absolute precedence of the material element over the spiritual one. Cicero even claims that *Aristippus worries only about the body, as if we did not have a soul at all*¹⁶. According to Aristippus, the states that are experienced by man can be either good or evil. Good and evil are understood here precisely in terms of the categories of physical pleasure and pain. Man instinctively strives for pleasure, being the highest good, and avoids pain, since such a state is imprinted in the human nature. Human efforts should be devoted to Horace’s “seizing the day”

¹⁴ Protagoras, quotation after G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica. I Dalle origini a Socrate*. Milano 1989, 247.

¹⁵ Cf. G. Reale, op. cit., 296.

¹⁶ Cicero, quotation after G. Reale, op. cit., 427.

and looking for pleasure, since the past is gone and the future is uncertain. In the vast catalogue of physical pleasures, the sexual sensations – obviously devoid of any sentimentality or engagement, as human body was only considered to be the tool used for pleasure, an object of satisfaction – take a prominent place. Such an existence is similar to the life of animals, which is governed by instincts. The model of life proposed and promoted by the philosopher is devoid of any constant values and higher goals. Man viewed through Aristippus's lenses appears dehumanised, becoming a purely psycho-physical being directed solely by his sensations, since he knows nothing else.

The Cyrenaic view brings a gloomy vision of society consisting of individuals that are utterly individualistic and egoistic and looking only after themselves. Such perspective gives a very distorted view of freedom. Since, if the boundaries of good and evil are only dependent on pleasures and pains, there is no place for a deeper reflection, as there is no other point of reference: above all the perspective of infinity is absent from human mind. Subsequently, freedom itself cannot be related to greater goals. Freedom for a hedonist is merely a possibility of doing what he pleases, in accordance with the egoistic notion of benefit. Such understanding of freedom makes it completely detached from truth and value, hence it renders it merely apparent. That is why *man as presented by the freedom-loving Aristippus appears to be a life-long prisoner of his consciousness, unfolding before him deceptive appearances of his supposed freedom and might*¹⁷.

Omnipotence of human reason

The main change in thinking and views on the world, man and his problems began in the early modern period and continues until today. The modern man, disappointed with the achievements of his predecessors, looks for new principles on which to base his worldview. Step by step, however inevitably, he frees himself from the medieval thinking, dominated by the Christian faith and aimed at eternal life, and moves towards temporal, physical world, regarding reason as the only tool required in gaining knowledge about it. The increasing resistance against ancient authorities and the hegemony of the Church leads him towards science – the certain, precise knowledge that relates to the reality, which is above all verifiable by using reason and experience. From now on, reason and experience replace medieval man's faith, religion and revelation. The modern man, armed in reason and experience, unlocking the secrets of nature, will be led to believe that he discovers the laws governing the world and is able

¹⁷ A. Krokiewicz, *Etyka Demokryta i hedonizm Arystypa*, Warszawa 1960, 184.

to control it. The centre of gravity has shifted from the spiritual, metaphysical, transcendental, inexplicable towards the clear, certain and undeniable.

Descartes – a great mathematician – is one of those thinkers that helped this shift to happen, as for him the reason became the highest authority in terms of knowledge. His analysis, marked by methodical doubt, the lack of trust for the senses that can delude one with false images, culminates in the famous phrase *cogito, ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am. If I think, it undeniably means that I exist. If a thought exists, then its creator – a thinking subject, aware of its own existence – must also exist. This way, from the existence of thought, Descartes deduces the existence of a thinking being, a self-aware “I”. And if “I” – an imperfect being – exists, there must also exist God – an infinite and perfect being, since something cannot originate out of nothing and has to have a cause. This way, even the Creator is viewed by Descartes through reason, as He, though undeniably existing, is being “called out” by the reason. Only the reason is “conscious” of God’s existence.

This perspective on reality, based on freedom and experience, serves to question not the existence of God as such but His influence on man and the universe. God in the modern philosophy loses His personal character, becoming merely the first cause of the existence of the universe, a perfect Intelligence, which having finished its task of creation, refrains from further interference. Hence, the world is viewed as a structured machine, governed by the laws of nature, able to be deciphered, explained and measured with the use of mathematical and physical laws. And, if the world is merely a material phenomenon, functioning without God’s interference, then man is also deprived of any supernatural references and left to himself.

Thus, a new, liberated, self-aware, mature, independent, nature-oriented, fully trusting in reason and experience individual is born, able to once and for all deal with the entire dogmatic legacy of the “backward” Middle Ages. As a result, a fight against the Church and religion becomes commonplace, led by the “apostles of the modern thinking” such as Diderot and Voltaire, who in their writings promoted deism; or D’Holbach and his materialism and atheism. This attempt of “erasing” God from the history of man gains momentum in the nineteenth century as a result of development of natural sciences and the revolutionary theory championed by Charles Darwin.

The Biblical description of man, present in human consciousness for centuries before, is destroyed and treated almost as a myth that has no connection to truth whatsoever. Darwin’s theory of evolution gave grounds for doubting the uniqueness of man as the centre of creation and instead made man just one of the animals, which descended from the lower primates and after thousands of

years of evolution took the shape of a modern human being. The alleged descent of man from monkeys, questioned God's plan of creation and salvation of humankind. The Divinity of Christ and purposefulness of His mission were also called into question. However, despite the fact that in the age of reason, God became somehow an unwanted phenomenon, He could not have been outright ignored. The sphere of faith was however severely limited to the personal, internal experiences, and religion, as a relic of the old worldview became, in the words of Karl Marx, a kind of opium of the simple, uneducated masses.

Such long-lasting and systematic actions against the Catholic Church and the values it stood for have permanently undermined the Christian roots of Europe. The "dethronement" of God gave rise to the thinking directed at man and mainly the material aspect of his existence. The modern individual, deeply rooted in nature, has been limited to its earthly, physical and rational aspects. Out of this replacement of faith, spirituality and transcendence with human reason and experience, there came secular humanism and scientific materialism. The modern man yet again gravely sinned with vainglory, reaching for the fruit of the forbidden tree; he did this not to gain knowledge equal to God's, but rather to replace Him¹⁸.

Modern thinking, obviously, views the notion of freedom in a new, specific, way. Its range is extended to the size, which is most likely never before imagined. The goals and priorities of man change over the centuries. As the Antiquity is aimed at unification with cosmos and divine intelligence and Christianity is aimed at God, the Creator as the end of all endeavours and the highest reference, Modernity attempts to secure nearly universal freedom from: oppressing political, social and economic structures; religion, God and church hierarchy; finite and static Aristotelian-Christian cosmos; ancient authorities; medieval scholasticism; all that imposes restrictions and limits the enlightened man's modernity¹⁹.

Yet, what, as it seems, limits man – not only the modern one, a contemporary one as well – the most is religion, still functioning in the public space. Hence, the liberal nineteenth century circles of Western societies postulated not only the freedom of religion of any denomination but also a freedom of no religious affiliation of any kind. This possibility of choice, given to man, has led in consequence to a large extent to the religious indifference but also to the search for some kind of substitutes for the values that previously were provided by religion. As a result, people subscribed to ever increasing number of new, more or less dangerous ideologies as alternatives to religion. The more man, trusting in his own powers, focused on physicality, the more – on the basis of

¹⁸ Cf. J. Paweł II, *Przekroczyć próg nadziei*, Lublin 1994, 56.

¹⁹ Cf. R. Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, New York 1994, 342-343.

the counterweight effect – he moved away from eternity. The bigger he became in his own eyes, the smaller he made God.

Paradoxically however, he was so taken with the vision of his own greatness and independence that he impoverished himself to a great extent and limited himself to a one-dimensional being able to comprehend only what is fathomable by reason or what is reported to him by the senses. He rid himself of the spiritual dimension, condemning himself to materialism, usefulness, sensualism, pragmatism, hedonism, relativism. Eventually, the earthly fundament, in which he had put his trust and had built upon, was also shaken. Human reason, considered all-powerful, faced with the discoveries it had made, showed its indolence. The world appeared fleeting, exceeding the realm of human knowledge, since the tools used by man were insufficient. Science – the secular religion – that had been the powerhouse of progress and development and had been followed by a multitude of believers, obtained the status of limited trust, as the knowledge no longer irrefutable but unsure and limited, moreover often getting out of control and acting against man.

The Nietzschean death of God and the liberation of man

Out of these increasing existential problems of the late nineteenth century, the Nietzschean “superman” was born, an individual that was deeply breathing freedom, living his life to the fullest, placed beyond good or evil, towered over others, the rightful creator of values stemming from his will to power and creative energy. However, the death of the Christian God was the pre-condition of his existence. The Nietzschean philosophy of life²⁰, opposed Christian philosophy where compassion, love, mercy and good were championed. In the opinion of Friedrich Nietzsche, this was the religion of the weak, average, dull, sick, defective, praising the God that with His commandments, orders, prohibitions, limitations and obligations was an enemy of life, oppressor of man, an enemy of life instincts and free spirit. The death of God, killed – according to Nietzsche – by man within himself, was therefore a warranty of man’s freedom. This way the glowing disproportion between the perfect God and a miserable, weak, sinful man was eliminated, man unable to meet God’s guidelines, could not free himself from guilt, remorse and committed offences. The strive for perfection, interrupted with constant falls, brings only frustration, reduces the joy of life and limits creativity. Hence, one needs to break the shackles and cut off from

²⁰ F. Nietzsche’s philosophy of life is treated in detail in e.g. T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku: nurty. Filozofia życia, pragmatyzm, filozofia ducha*, vol.1, Kraków 2009, 71-114; vid. also S. Kowalczyk, *Filozofia wolności: rys historyczny*, Lublin 1999, 147-153.

what enslaves man. According to Nietzsche, the death of God is the burial of all sense, higher virtues, values, ideals; the destruction of such a point of reference that is stable, unchanging, and undeniable²¹.

Unfortunately, this killing of God had its catastrophic effects on humankind and these are still perceptible. The orphaned man, left to himself, was forced to take over the control over the world. He became the lawmaker, deciding about what is truth and false, good and evil. And since he looked at the world from his peculiar point of view, he dispelled the “myth” of the absolute truth, proclaiming that absolutely everything can be variously interpreted and disputed. It became obvious that moral laws and previously indisputable values would sooner or later be the subject of similar reformulations. The analysis of this thought makes one conclude that everyone has their own morality, according to their needs, so to speak, dependent on particular needs and suited to their purposes. This morality varies greatly however, between average and outstanding individuals. Hence, according to Nietzsche, it is justifiable to distinguish two types of morality: for masters and for servants, for the strong and for the weak. Morality of the masses, a mob, a herd is contrasted with the morality of the superman – the man of the “higher level”, raised above all the others, able to do more than the rest. Only his morality is the right one.

When it comes to the values, Nietzsche propagated the concept of “transvaluation of values”, negating the existence of the commonly accepted values and replacing them with a number of new ones. Yet, even this Nietzschean “superman” was not able to replace the Creator with dignity. Since, if God was for man the highest value, on which all the other values and the entire moral law were based, then His absence mercilessly exposed rational powerlessness of man, which not only failed to create “new” values but by negating the “old” ones, descended into nihilism. Man got rid of God, values and morality altogether. By becoming an atheist, man recovered his supposed independence, freedom, joy of life, the possibility of a fuller development.

Interestingly, by affirming freedom to such a degree, Nietzsche criticises the notion of the free will understood as a full control over one’s actions. Man, he argued, cannot be fully responsible for himself, for his character or personality. Neither can he be held accountable for his actions, their motives or effects. And if man, says Nietzsche, cannot be responsible for his actions, neither can he be punished. Punishment, as Nietzsche understands it, is a perfect tool of priests, used to manipulate and control people. It can be only used against free

²¹ Vid. D. Leszczyński, *Filozofowie i ich filozofie: opowieści dla niewtajemniczonych*, Wrocław 2002, 239-251.

people that can be held responsible for their actions. Hence, the rejection of the notions of the punishment and fault is for Nietzsche an element of his fight against Christian normative ethics²². Man owes his freedom not to free will but to a kind of internal energy, peculiarly called the will to power.

In this philosophy of new morality, it is extremely hard to answer the question: who is man? Perhaps, not as much who he is but who, according to the thinker, man should be. For Nietzsche “creates”, as indicated above, a new man, an individual devoid of responsibility, free will, which goes beyond the morality of the masses “governed” by this, notoriously hard to define, will to power. An individual becomes a kind of “mixture” of desires, instincts and impulses, which, coupled with life and nature, form a part of the element, which has neither aim nor direction²³. To the Nietzschean superman, distinguished for his strength and energy, everything seems legitimate and justified. It is this kind of people that should take control over the world. An outstanding, creative, strong individual means more than the entire mass of shapeless, average and dull people.

It is obvious that in such an approach there is no place for spirituality and moving towards eternity since for life stimulated with the will to power only here and now is important, and life is an end in itself: it is life for life’s sake, just as for Schopenhauer, art is art for art’s sake. Here and now has the highest and the fullest value. It seems to be a merely biological existence, in the sense that it has no transcendental points of reference. The body and its impulses, the instincts governing it, matter more than the actions of some soul. Life is not, as it would seem, a Darwinian fight for the survival of the fittest, but a strife for development and enlargement, understood as self-improvement; it is the rejection of what is weak and disabled and embracing of what is strong and permanent.

It would be a mistake to consider life in terms of dignity or values, instead of quality. Hence, what oscillates between life and death, should belong to death, since the latter is devoid of this will to power, which is vital in the development of man.

This nod of the philosophy of life towards death was a perfect basis for several murderous ideologies and, in more contemporary terms, for a gradual elimination of the “non-perfect” man from the public space.

An outline of contemporary freedom

Nietzsche’s philosophy was specifically chosen to close our outline of the chosen, man-created notions of freedom, which clearly resonate in today’s views

²² Cf. Z. Kuderowicz, *Nietzsche*, Warszawa 2004, 96-100.

²³ Cf. *ibidem*, 98.

on the topic. Analysing this rich catalogue of ideas on how to make human existence possibly easy, simple and agreeable, one cannot but conclude that man today is generously using the freedom-related experiences of his predecessors. And, as it used to happen in the past, the man of today also placed the mindless exclamation mark after the Pauline “everything is lawful for me”, getting rid of all the “buts” from his thinking in the process. In so doing, he completely missed the point of God’s vision of human life, disgracing the image of God in himself. Owing to his rational nature, man believed in his greatness to such degree that he began to use his freedom in a way that was completely contradictory to its nature. He treated freedom as a purely physical possibility of free actions, which have no deeper references. Inspired by Nietzsche, he negated the values, announced the death of God and sat on the earthly throne, becoming, as Protagoras would have it, the measure of all things.

He used freedom as a kind of tool, used not for development but for the fall, to realise his own particular, selfish interests. Viewing freedom as a purely negative notion, man used it as a means to “free” himself out of all the uncomfortable limitations. Such use of freedom leads to solving problems or overcoming obstacles in the simplest possible way, excluding the reflection on what is good and what is evil, right or wrong and not referring to any morality, values, ethics or rules. The new quality of life, promoted by the adherents of this kind of freedom, gives man a broadly conceived right to do whatever he pleases and what suits his interest. Such “using” of freedom means that it is no longer a given, engaged, reflexive action, no longer does it ask sensible questions and seeks out the best answers, neither can it be still defined as a permanent human action characterised by responsibility for an individual and for the others. Such freedom “from” everything that bounds and limits is today clearly opposed to the freedom “towards” something that serves to develop man, allows him to reach humanity in the fullest, control his weaknesses, instincts, impulses or desires.

The contemporary world is being enslaved with the power of wrongly-conceived freedom. There is one aspect that is particularly striking and worrying about this perverted and distorted image of freedom. Today human freedom, one of the most beautiful of the God’s gifts, is dangerously directed against the fifth commandment “thou shalt not kill”. Such actions are obviously nothing new, since a murder as a consequence of the fall of man and a witness of his defective, weak nature is imprinted in the history of man since the very beginning. Old Testament describes the first murder: that of Cain against his brother Abel. However, contemporary man confirmed in the view that freedom is nearly limitless, ever so willingly reaches for the life of another human being to kill him and paradoxically calls it law justifying it therewith.

Today, the chorus of voices demanding the right to decide about themselves and others, the right to have children at any price or, in the case of women, the “right to their own abdomens” is getting much stronger. This right, aimed against other human beings and the individual freedom is no longer limited by other individuals. Man yet again attempts to overtake the creative competences of God, wanting to decide on who is allowed to be born and who is not, who should live and who must die. He also – with an increasingly stronger voice – claims the right to decide on the beginning and end of human life.

This is exemplified by the widespread practices of killing, in the majesty of law or outside it, of the unborn children, elderly, sick, terminally ill, etc. These, too, are not unheard of in the history of humankind. Since this history is, to some extent, the history of man’s condemnable as well as laudable deeds. Abortion, the killing of the elderly or injured also existed in the Antiquity²⁴. And even back then one encountered both support and condemnation of such practices. What, however, as it would seem, differentiates the past and the present is not only the scale of the phenomenon – often claiming millions of victims – but also, or perhaps above all, the determination and tenacity with which some circles, groups or organisations strive towards legalisation of such actions and deeming it normal, natural practice, common in the civilised, development- and progress-oriented world. Evil, disguising as good, becomes very dangerous.

The almost universally felt lack of respect for human life – life that is being defended by the Catholic Church for its sanctity from the conception till the natural death – is a result of gradual and consistent creation of the civilisation of death, a sui generis culture of death²⁵, manifesting itself as multifaceted actions aimed at biological annihilation of man. The actual killing, deciding about the life of another person in the name of freedom, as it is understood now, are strongly related to the culture of death of values and spirituality. This culture is in turn a long-maturing, bitter fruit that had already been growing on the tree of the Ancient Aristippian hedonism, Protagorean relativisation of truth, or the ubiquitous liberal ideology, originating from the Enlightenment.

Contemporary hedonism

Hedonism is a multifaceted phenomenon but it is always an invitation to use and enjoy life before it is finally cut off by death. However, this use of life

²⁴ Vid. M. Wojciechowski, *Między polityką a religią*, Warszawa 2010, 11-30.

²⁵ John Paul II writes about the “culture of death” in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, especially in the numbers 68-70; vid. also J. Nagórny, *Między „kulturą śmierci” a kulturą życia – wyzwania współczesności*, *Ethos* 19(2006)4/76,232-248.

is in hedonism always viewed in sensual categories, related to Horatio's "carpe diem", which is often connected with having pleasant feelings. Life becomes a sum of pleasant sensations, and seeking these, a proper aim and meaning of human existence. Hedonism, like many other destructive ideologies, not only does not give an answer to the question of what man is but it also deforms the truth about humans to a great degree.

Contemporary hedonism, as it would seem, is led by consumerism, which favours having over being. The latter is conditioned by the former. The question of whether to be or to have is often given the following answer these days: one needs to have in order to be someone. Man ceases to be a value on its own and is instead judged on the basis of what he owns. Enslaved with the desire to collect and use material goods, man becomes an object in the world aimed at their production. Pursuit of pleasures, earthly delights, of what is material and temporal effectively distracts from what is transcendental and spiritual, from what the destiny of man is and defines the limit of his aspirations.

A distorted relation with others is a simple and unavoidable consequence of such actions. A Godless materialist, living in a given society and partly dependent on this society, becomes an inwardly-looking egoist with his "ears shut", allowing him to listen to his own needs and desires but ignore those of his brethren. An often adopted attitude is characterised by total indifference and can thus be summarised: man does not care about the others; and his consciousness is becoming devoid of such notions as sacrifice, devotion, selflessness, commitment, responsibility. This deep-running wound, often makes it difficult or even virtually impossible to establish proper relations with others, since the egoist is doomed to internal loneliness, is unable to descry and understand his brethren, unable to sacrifice himself for the others²⁶. Moreover, his own ego makes him ignore and disrespect the boundaries set by the freedom of others.

The cult of money, focus on securing one's well-being, search for superficial happiness here on Earth without referring to the perspective of eternity push away ideas, standards, principles, which could prove to be panacea for such a reality. Even human life has its value today, provided it fits well into the materialistic framework, where the producer becomes a product, deemed attractive until it remains youthful, healthy, beautiful and lively, etc. Otherwise, everything fades away. From such a perspective, the life of an unborn, elderly, crippled, homeless, poor or disabled is worth so little that in many cases it is

²⁶ The notion of freedom as responsibility for the Other in Lévinas is described by M. Jędraszewski, *Wolność jako odpowiedzialność za Drugiego. Biblijne inspiracje koncepcji wolności w filozofii Emmanuela Lévinasa*, in: *Wolność we współczesnej kulturze*, 369-379.

permissible to kill such people, perversely justifying it as doing it for their own good. Phenomena such as abortion, euthanasia, cryptanasia, social Darwinism, artificial insemination and the like, no longer form a nightmarish vision of the future but are very much a thing of the present. Contemporary world aims at a complete and final rejection of the notion of a person that lies at the root of the Christian doctrine by means of biological annihilation.

The abortions performed these days, also called the holocaust of the unborn, are counted in millions. This procedure, supported by many worldwide, has become a very profitable business. Indeed, one can venture to say that if the death penalty had been so profitable, the scaffolds would have been brought back to the streets.

A great tragedy of our times is that women are being manipulated into rejecting the newly conceived life, becoming a passive tool of the civilisation of death. Contemporarily, it is more and more frequent for women not to understand their calling and hence often oppose it. They become emotionally and psychologically unable to bond with their own child, moreover, they seem not to grasp that a new human being is developing within them and no one can arbitrarily decide about its life. In fact, women seem to make this decision precisely in the name of falsely conceived freedom or erroneously imposed priorities. Woman – mother often gives place to the woman of success, who realises herself professionally, climbing up the ladder of success, striving to match man's standards at any cost and in doing so confirm her social status²⁷. This change in mentality and ways of thinking, which has been evolving for years, harm both women and their families. Furthermore, viewing life through how good it is for a given individual separates one from another, makes the true engagement impossible and corrupts the notion of love. Hence, a perceived lack of time, numerous more important things to do, economic considerations, fear of the difficulties of parenting, change in the lifestyle and a sense of giving up one's freedom often become sufficient reasons to reject a child.

Human freedom, which is being manifested at every step, also touches on the intimate area of human sexuality. Man stops being perceived as a physico-spiritual being and is instead reduced to his physicality; he himself making his body a tool and an object of pleasure. If, in such circumstances, a child is conceived, it seems only understandable that it cannot be wanted, since it is an effect of playing with human sexuality, treated instrumentally, and not a wanted,

²⁷ Out of a number of publications devoted to the contemporary woman – her calling, dignity, family and social function, the collection of articles: *Ethos* 8(1995)1/29 deserves a special attention.

awaited and longed-for being. It quite often becomes a problem, which needs to be sorted out as soon as possible.

Thinking and talking about euthanasia, dubbed assisted suicide, it is impossible not to mention the related practices – cryptanasia and social Darwinism. All these are widely used in the Netherlands²⁸, and “assistance” given by third parties in taking away human life is their common denominator. Upon closer examination, one can divide euthanasia into active, performed at the request of the patient (the most commonly known type) but also a passive one, when all the emergency procedures are withheld, with the patient being refused even the simplest life-saving procedures. This quite often results in slow and painful death of the patient. Whereas cryptanasia is a discrete form of killing, without the patient’s consent or knowledge. And the ideologically motivated social Darwinist practices allow one to “clear” society from the weak, disabled or useless individuals.

Old age, illness, genetic flaws, physical deformations and all other defects and deviations from the so-called “norm” are today a sufficient reason to consider human life not worth living and to decide about its end. For it is hard, as the proponents of such actions would argue, to find sense and value in a life of this kind. It even seems, as noted by Ryszard Fenigsen, as if the world is slowly going towards replacing death with euthanasia – the killing performed by brethren²⁹. The cult of the beautiful, young and healthy body promoted in the media has taken control over minds to such an extent that what is repulsive, ugly or crippled must arouse disgust and aversion. Otherness is inconceivable; it is ridiculed, finger-pointed, deemed unworthy of existence. Life in accordance with the hedonist doctrine should be characterised by a certain quality, a given level, whereas the suffering flies in the face of all this, since it means one is not able to fully benefit from all the charms of existence and in addition these are being denied to all the people “condemned” to co-exist with the suffering individual. Today, suffering is being eliminated from the public space, since it reminds man about his transcendental, hence non-material, dimension. Thus in the context of Christianity – the religion that suffers the most for what it stands for – it cannot be accepted as a paradigm of each and every human life.

²⁸ Such practices are described and thoroughly criticised in a shocking and moving book containing philosophical reflections and written by a Polish cardiologist that for years worked in the Netherlands. Vid. R. Fenigsen, *Eutanazja – Śmierć z wyboru?*, Poznań 2002; and also R. Spaemann, *Śmierć – samobójstwo – eutanazja*, *Ethos* 12(1999)3/47,107-114.

²⁹ Cf. R. Fenigsen, op. cit., 120.

The proponents of the killing argue that *the value of human life depends on the value assigned to it by others*³⁰. It is not, therefore, a superior, inviolable value, but a value that can be evaluated and decided upon by others. In practice, as exemplified by what is going on in the Netherlands, the killing is an effect of the social pressure, since the society expects the sick and elderly to ask for euthanasia when, in reality, this decision is in many cases a desperate call for help, attention and love.

The problem of infertility is now common in many couples, whether resulting from, or independent of, the couple's actions. Artificial insemination is one of the solutions promoted in medicine today³¹, wrongly perceived as a way of treating infertility. Nowadays, there seems to be nothing wrong with applying a wide range of artificial insemination techniques aimed at conceiving a child in a way, different from the union of a woman and a man³². No doubt, a desire for a child is something very positive and natural. However, it does not mean that this desire should be realised at any price and using any method known to medicine. Such thinking is a disguised form of egoism, where the child stops being a gift for the couple and becomes a demand, a thing that is due, which will satisfy their self-love and eliminate the feeling of "emptiness" in the marriage.

In many cases, the prolonged use of contraceptives to avoid the unwanted pregnancy leads to infertility problems when the couple finally decides they are ready for the baby. Then, artificial insemination becomes the proverbial last resort. This way, an attempt is made at reviving what has been previously consistently being killed. One often encounters the opinion that the time for a baby will come and a young couple should first earn a decent living, fling, enjoy life and freedom. This way, openness for a new life that can appear "at any moment" is replaced by a well-defined time when parents feel they desire a child and are ready for it. A child becomes, in a way, "an element" of living together, carefully planned just like a purchase of a house or a car. It helps create an image of a happy, loving family.

³⁰ Ibidem, 57.

³¹ The book A. Katolo, *Contra in vitro*, Warszawa 2010 describes the artificial insemination procedures in the following dimensions: technical, anthropological and moral.

³² Vid. M. Olszewski OFM, *Podstawy braku moralnego usprawiedliwienia dążenia do uzyskania potomstwa przy zastosowaniu techniki in vitro*, in: *Studium franciscanum in caritate facere*, edited by T. Janka OFM, Poznań 2009, 177-182; vid. also A. Paszewski, *Manipulacje genetyczne – problem granic etycznych*, in: *Granice poznania a bariery etyczne*, Teksty wykładów wygłoszonych na sympozjum naukowym zorganizowanym przez Oddział Polskiej Akademii Nauk i Papieski Wydział Teologiczny w Poznaniu dnia 19 maja 1998 roku, collected papers edited by A. Wójtowicz, Poznań 1998, series: Dwugłos Nauki i Teologii. Zeszyt III (1998), 15-29.

A desire to have a child at any cost is today yet another symptom of wrongly-conceived freedom. Fertility is a gift from God and can be either offered or denied to a couple. The painful experience of infertility does not mean that man can and should try to change this state of affairs without taking into account the potential consequences of his actions, since one cannot say that in this case the end justifies the means.

The relativisation of truth

The classical, Aristotelian, definition of truth describes it as something stable, constant and undeniable. In this interpretation, the truth is viewed as an absolute, nonnegotiable, non-interpretable and unchangeable value that is independent of the opinions of others, external circumstances or the subject learning the truth. Hence, there exists a kind of correspondence between the subject and the object of cognition (being the objective reality).

The ancient notions of knowledge included those questioning the possibility of knowledge and arguing for the impossibility of knowing the truth itself. The Heraclitean theory of continuous change, instability, constant transformation maintains that change is the only constant thing. According to the theory, the truth cannot be grasped and approached as something stable, since it also undergoes constant change. Whereas, the Sophistic approach to truth makes it subservient to man's needs and a tool of social manipulation. Truth becomes relative, loses its objective "power" and is subjectivised. As a result, it seems "normal" that everyone is entitled to their "own" truth, since there are as many truths as there are people,

Nowadays, this dangerous practice of relativising the truth with the origins reaching back to the Antiquity, spreads dangerously, becoming a commonly accepted and applied phenomenon. Since the times when man trusted his reason enough to reinterpret the notion of freedom, giving it a purely human meaning, truth has been "replaced" by what was considered to be truth, depending on circumstances. The absolutisation of human freedom, its glorification above all other values meant that it is freedom that the other categories such as: evil, good, morality, truth etc. are being adjusted to. These become man's personal affair, which is being decided upon in his conscience³³. Freedom, understood in human terms, also justifies a human approach to truth. As everyone is different, they view the world and its problems in a different way and have the right

³³ On the relation between truth and freedom vid. A. Maryniarczyk, *Wolność a prawda*, in: *Wolność we współczesnej kulturze*, 309-317; and also A. Szostek, *Wokół godności, prawdy i miłości: rozważania etyczne*, Lublin 1995, 160-178.

to their own truth. Since, if one, objective, universal truth is eliminated, then there is no escape from creating pseudo-truths, half-truths in its stead, allowing the multitude of interpretations and solutions where there is only one clear, simple and undeniable solution.

Relativisation of truth has become a useful and popular tool in all kinds of polemics, discussions and arguments concerning the fundamental human right to life. As a result, paradoxically, one can talk not only about the right but also about the “truth” against life³⁴. The supporters of the anti-life practices spread lies, called truths, on abortion, euthanasia, artificial insemination etc. Ridiculous theories are created, non-scientific arguments are shuffled and statistics are abused to serve as foundation blocks of contemporary murderous ideology, giving a basis for thus manipulated people for apparent self-judgements. One cannot help but notice that a “new truth” is being constructed, the truth acceptable for the civilised and progressive man that understands the aim and point of such actions, supports and accepts them fully.

Bearing that in mind, human beings at the earliest stages of their development are denied humanity. In other words, the moment from which a human becomes a human is being blurred thus challenging the fact that he or she is human from the time of conception. From this perspective, it is just a “bundle of cells”, a “pre-embryo”, a pre-human, hence not fully a man yet, therefore “something” that is easily disposable³⁵. Abortion is treated as one of the many regular and common procedures being performed these days. Women are being convinced that a child is a threat to their freedom and independence and so by performing an abortion they do not do anything wrong. On the contrary, this confirms their newly acquired status of being able to decide about their own life³⁶. A law is made, supporting a kind of “gradation” of life, where the life of

³⁴ The expression “law against life” in common usage is an absurdity and from the logical point of view a contradiction; this is dealt with by T. Styczeń: *the law against human life is an anti-law considered to be law, it is lawlessness identified with law* (...); the Code of Justinian already contains the following passage: *Hominum causa omne ius constitutum sit* (law has been created for the sake of men), vid. T. Styczeń, *Wolność i prawo – Za czy przeciw życiu? Etyk wobec „nieskuteczności” prawdy*, *Ethos* 9(1996)3-4/35-36, 37-53.

³⁵ Some of the many arguments against deeming a newly-conceived child a human being are discussed by E. Sgreccia, *Sztuczna prokreacja a eugenizm*, *Ethos* 7(1994)3/27, 102-108; vid. also A. Katolo, op. cit., the part describing the ontological status of a human embryo, pp. 85-98; as well as idem, *Embrion ludzki – osoba czy rzecz?*, Lublin – Sandomierz 2000.

³⁶ Vid. G. Garrone (ed.), *Przecież to dziecko! Świadectwa o dramacie aborcji*, translated by A. Kania, Kraków 2001; and J. Dzierżanowska-Peszko, *Aborcja. Przyczyny i konsekwencje*, Opole 2005.

an already born person, even that of a criminal, is worth more than the life of an already existing but unborn one. The ideas are being promoted regarding conscious and responsible parenting, the parenting threatened by an unwanted child. Abortion is being described as a panacea for the “overpopulation” of world and as a way of solving problems related to it.

The killing of the elderly or sick is referred to as humanitarian action “for their own good and in their best interest”. The noble motives of those striving to “reduce” the suffering of such people are mentioned. Organisations and movements for euthanasia desperately call for the right to a “dignified”, in their opinion, death; the death that should be decided upon by the very people it concerns, their family or the third parties. In many cases, euthanasia is being treated as the best, the only and completely acceptable solution. This way, societies are being convinced that the decision regarding the appropriate timing and methods for ending a human life is no longer a realm of the Creator but of the people themselves.

Mass media play a crucial role in promoting such “solutions”³⁷. Viewers, readers and listeners are “subtly” bombarded by an image, a text or an audio transfer that is designed to play on emotions, move deeply, induce mercy and, consequently, to model and shape the human psyche and conscience in order to gain support for such actions. Nothing confirms this better than the appearance in the media of moving and touching stories of suffering people and their relatives fighting for the right to die. As a result, a regular murder is called a “Christian act of mercy”.

The achievements of contemporary medicine allow successful treatment of many previously terminal illnesses. However, the aims and tasks set by medicine do not stop here. Disturbingly, the interest in man as an object of controversial, unethical research and experiments is on the rise. This way, medicine, which is supposed to help and support man, dangerously turns against him, acting not only against nature but God Himself.

The artificial insemination techniques are often referred today as a wonderful possibility for people unable to naturally conceive a child. Such medicine is often described as pro-life, with its proponents “forgetting” that killing is also a part of the very process of “production” of a human being. Artificial insemination is, practically speaking, a life at a price of other lives, since in order to “create” one life one cannot avoid eliminating others. One cannot undermine or deny the fact that human embryos are being destroyed as a result of such

³⁷ More on manipulation and propaganda mechanisms used contemporarily vid. T. Janka OFM, *Manipulacja i propaganda w mass mediach źródłem fałszywego obrazu człowieka, świata i Boga*, in: *Studium franciscanum in caritate facere*, 205-225.

actions, that there is a problem of their surplus, that multiple pregnancies do happen, often resulting in the elimination of the embryos (the so-called selective abortion) and that attempts are made at enhancing the genetic material.

The rationale for the existence of sacramental marriage and family is undermined by arguing that basically everyone who can afford it, can “have” a baby, since they have the right to it. The child is thus devoid of personal dignity, since it is treated as a commodity. The medical and socio-psychological consequences of artificial insemination are also hidden. These include the killing of embryos, an increased risk of various illnesses for both the “test tube” baby and its mother, or the so-called “multi-parenting” phenomenon often resulting in identity problems³⁸.

Also, the so-called negative and positive eugenics are both related to the problem of artificial insemination³⁹. Whereas the aim of the former is the donor selection as well as ovary and embryo selections, leading to elimination of the “biological material” that does not satisfy certain criteria, the latter is aimed at the possibility of modification of genetic heritage resulting in a continuous improvement of human beings, at – colloquially and generally speaking – the “creation” of a human being with a specified visual characteristics, intelligence level, character traits satisfying the agreed on requirements. Other people are to decide on “what” kind of person, in a broad sense of the word, will be created. It is not difficult to figure out that the practices supposedly motivated by the well-being of man, in reality aim at taking the control over humans and promoting a new definition of humanity.

Liberal ideology

Liberalism, a doctrine originating in the Enlightenment period that perceives freedom of the individual as the highest value, has penetrated into all the significant areas of human life such as personal (moral and ethical), religious, social, political and economic relations. Evolving for years, it has grown into many, often contradictory, sub-types and strands. Notwithstanding its historical origins, it is based on the deep current conviction about the self-sufficiency and infallibility of human reason, capable of governing the world on its own, in accordance with the quoted Protagorean claim that man is the judge of all the existing reality. Ardently developed liberalism has become a kind of secular religion, a dogma emphasising the absolute independence of individual and

³⁸ Both medical and socio-psychological consequences of artificial insemination are described in A. Katolo, *op. cit.*, 30-64.

³⁹ For more on that see E. Sgreccia, *op. cit.*, 93-114.

social reason⁴⁰. One can risk putting forward a thesis that the ubiquitous liberal thought is nowadays becoming a superior ideology, absolutely dominant, the assumptions of which have been permanently instilled in the human mind.

Paradoxically, the liberal worldview that elevates the individual freedom and viciously fights against any attempts at limiting it, in reality serves to enslave it even more than any other destructive ideology, since it promotes a false kind of freedom, a freedom that is only apparent, mendacious, separated from love and truth; these values cannot exist in isolation, since they are complementary to each other, forming an inseparable, intertwined unity in such a way that there is no truth without freedom and love, freedom without love and truth does not exist, and a true love cannot exist if it does not have truth and freedom at its basis.

In contemporary understanding, liberal amounts to what is permissive, lax, emancipated, progressive, open or tolerant. The man of a liberal bent often waives a host of higher values and principles, defines his own morality, gives up spiritual wealth provided by faith, relativises the truth, questions not only the supernatural but the natural order too, as he believes no permanent universal laws can limit his freedom. He designs, lives and implements a life focused on emphasising his own “ego” based on ready-made solutions he is presented with by the world.

Liberal thinking, so strongly present today in all areas of human existence, is dangerously prominent in the social and moral arena, dealing with the private lives of individuals that form society. One observes a kind of apotheosis of freedom, freedom understood in human terms as the right to decide on all that concerns a given individual and which can be expressed as: I have the right to live my life as I like it and no one is going to tell me what to do. The problem emerges when man – reassured about his individuality – is seeking acceptance, demands legalisation and treating as normal actions that not only undermine his dignity but also violate the well-being of others. On the one hand, the activities arousing indignation and objection include: pornography, paedophilia, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, prostitution, abortion, euthanasia, artificial insemination, medical experiments, substance abuse, gambling and others, whereas, on the other hand, a lot is being done to justify or tolerate such activities by invoking human freedom.

It seems that the classical Latin, explanation of the term tolerance as “patience”, “persistence” in the face of something, “withstanding” or “enduring”

⁴⁰ Cf. F. Sardá y Salvany, *Liberalism is a sin, translated into English and Adapted from the Spanish work by Roman Catholic Priest, Dr. Don Felix Sarda Y Salvany By Conde B. Pallen, Ph.D., LL.D.1993*, 48.

certain hardly acceptable actions, views, opinions, differences, beliefs, deeds or rituals has lost its original meaning and today is a fashionable word interpreted in quite a different way. To tolerate, means to agree to, allow or even support all kinds of deviations, degenerations, perversions as a sign of openness, freedom, modern progressive thinking as contrasted with what is old, traditional, rigid and backward. It is often forgotten that even tolerance has its limits and cannot mean a thoughtless “yes” to all kinds of human behaviour.

Liberalism badly damages human sensitivity, spirituality and religiousness. Historically speaking, it was used as a tool used to inflict serious damage to the Catholic Church, aimed at destroying its structures and noticeably weaken its position in the world. The hope was that this way, all the manifestations of religious life are stifled and the public space is rid of all references to God. The Church, as an institution and a community of people that was established and consecrated by Christ Himself and which is preaching and guarding the same and unchanged for centuries values and laws, was viewed as a serious threat to freedom, progress and the future of mankind. Obviously, one could not allow the rigid dogmas to rule the enlightened reason. That is why liberalism assumes universal and radical rejection of the Christian dogmas and all the Divine truths, being a prototype of all heresy and the highest rebellion against God and the Church⁴¹.

The Church, in the past and in the present, reminds us that liberalism is just a dressed up evil, sin, sickness, which develops silently and remains invisible and yet is very effective at destroying morality and spirituality. In its name man acts today as if God did not exist, as if His commandments were merely an archaic set of laws, out of which one can choose what one is pleased with, provided this does not interfere too much in one’s well-structured life. A proponent of liberalism is “lukewarm”, dull, without a moral core, waving like a flag on a windy day, changing its position in accordance with the swings of opinions, views, beliefs or positions. Whereas Christ, as recorded by St. John the Evangelist in Revelation, states clearly: *I know your works, I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth* (Rv 3,15-16).

Nowadays, a merciless fight on part of the liberals is being fought against incredibly inconvenient Catholic Church and its followers. The twenty-first century continues to witness the death of those prosecuted for their faith and beliefs. The places of cult are being desecrated; believers in Christ are being

⁴¹ Cf. *ibidem*, 41; on liberalism vid. also S. Kowalczyk, *Liberalizm i jego filozofia*, Katowice 1995.

harassed and humiliated. The determined actions against the Church are being taken also in the so-called highly developed countries, where, however, different techniques are in use. Power play, for obvious reasons, is replaced by more subtle, hidden methods. For a very long time, with a silent backing from influential groups, organisations and political elites, a game has been skilfully and intelligently played in the mass-media, using a plethora of manipulative techniques aimed at deforming the image of the Church and undermining its authority. The world still believes that the future it brings to man is a most interesting one, the future with no place for God and His law. The Church of Christ is criticised for a number of reasons, including its unchanging stance on key issues, unwavering in preaching the truth, reminding about the sacred dignity and value of all people, or the defence of human life, considered sacred, from the moment of conception until natural death.

It seems that the words of John Paul II are the best summary of what has been said here; the words spoken 4th June 1997 in Kalisz, during a homily at St. Joseph's Sanctuary: *The measure of civilisation – the universal, timeless measure encompassing all the cultures – is its attitude towards life*. The objectification of man, happening nowadays, the lack of respect for human life, the lowering of its value and dignity and the mass thoughtless elimination of millions of beings all indicate that man is facing the phenomenon, which is more and more frequently viewed as, and openly called, the civilisation of death. This expression, however, perceived from a logical point of view, is a kind of oxymoron, an obvious contradiction, an irritating absurdity. The creation of civilisation, from the Christian point of view, is a prolonged, positive response of man to the biblical request to subdue the earth. This is precisely why God calls man into life and tells him to populate the earth. Hence, it is not death but life that is the causative force behind everything. As death creates nothing, it cannot be a basis for the existence of anything. It is human existence that determines the progress of civilisation. But civilisation cannot be built in the name of the wrongly conceived notions of freedom, truth, law, progress, development and future by sacrificing innocent human beings.

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Summary

WRONG UNDERSTANDING OF FREEDOM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ANTI-LIFE PRACTICES

The article entitled *Wrong Understanding of Freedom in the Contemporary World in the Context of the Anti-life Practices* presents issues related to the fundamental values of human life. Contemporary world reveals a deep individualism of man. Human freedom is the highest value. In the name of freedom, man can decide who can live and who cannot. False understanding of freedom is the cause of many human tragedies. Abortion, euthanasia, or any other anti-life practices show that falsely understood freedom negates the fundamental human right to life. The return to natural law and to the Christian ethics is a guarantee of true understanding of human freedom.

Key words: freedom, hedonism, human reason, relativisation of truth, abortion, euthanasia, artificial insemination, medical experiments.