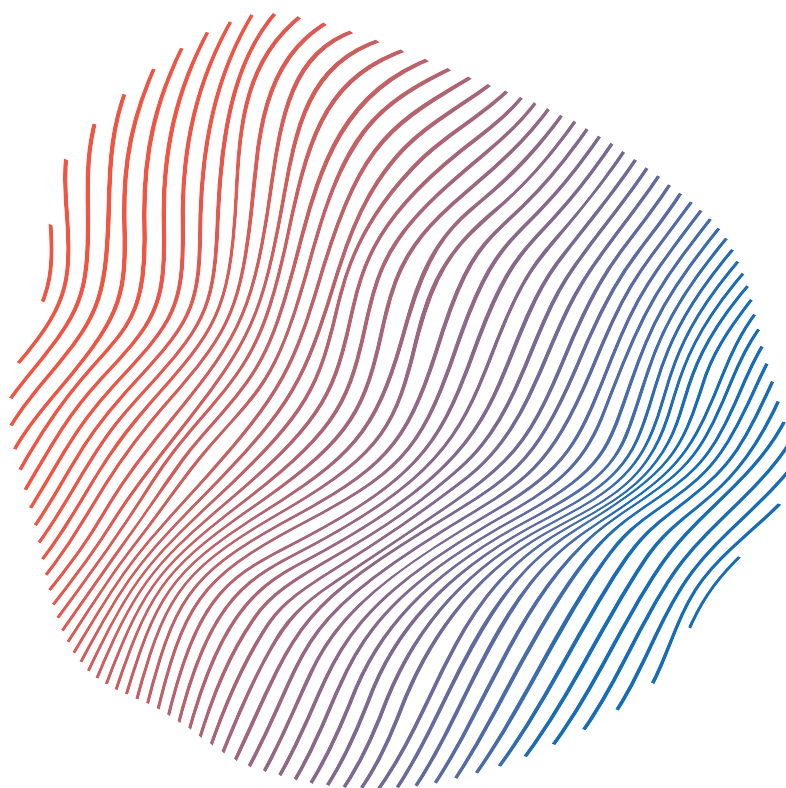


1001 Umanesimo Tecnologico

numero Ø | dicembre 2020



Saggi Accademici | Impresa, tecnologia, società |
Arti, ricerche, azioni | Dibattito contemporaneo

IO01_ Umanesimo Tecnologico

Anno I, n° Ø,
dicembre 2020

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livello in Grafica e Comunicazione, Accademia di Belle Arti SantaGiulia. Cattedra di Tecniche Grafiche Speciali II e Fenomenologia dell'immagine. *Coordinamento e supervisione: prof.ssa Francesca Rosina, prof. Marco Sorelli, prof. Massimo Tantardini. Per questo numero una menzione agli studenti: Alessandro Masoudi (progettazione grafica). Sara Baricelli, Giulia Bosetti, Elena Gandossi, Francesca Mucchetti (composizione, layout e impaginazione). Paola Vivaldi (assistenza di redazione). Il naming nasce da un'idea degli studenti: Guglielmo Albesano, Virna Antichi, Alessandro Masoudi.*

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Periodico realizzato

da Accademia di Belle Arti di Brescia SantaGiulia con la collaborazione di Phoenix Informatica.

Direzione, Redazione e Amministrazione Edizioni Studium S.r.l., Via Crescenzo, 25 - 00193 Roma - Fax. 06.6875456 - Tel. 06.6865846 - 06.6875456 - Sito Internet: www.edizionistudium.it
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Direttore responsabile: Giuseppe Bertagna.

Stampa: Mediagraf S.p.A., Noventa Padovana (PD).

Ufficio Marketing: Edizioni Studium S.r.l., Via Crescenzo, 25 - 00193 Roma - Fax. 06.6875456 - Tel. 06.6865846 - 06.6875456 - email: gruppostudium@edizionistudium.it

Ufficio Abbonamenti: tel. 030.2993305 (con operatore dal lunedì al venerdì negli orari 8,30-12,30 e 13,30-17,30; con segreteria telefonica in altri giorni e orari) - fax 030.2993317 - email: abbonamenti@edizionistudium.it

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Accademia di Belle Arti di Brescia SantaGiulia

<http://www.accademiasantagiulia.it>

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Giovanni Battista Montini and the Critical Theory of Society

For a Critical Theory of Modernity: The Marxist Way and the Catholic Way

By Giacomo Scanzi (Accademia di Belle Arti di Brescia SantaGiulia)

Abstract: The XXth century is a period filled with contradictions. Over this century, the philosophical and anthropological maturation process of the so-called modernity reaches its completion. From different contexts, contrasting viewpoints arise and clash against the century's false perspectives and its ideological core. During the second half of the century, we witness the unprecedented encounter of the two main belief systems of such time: Marxism, represented by the School of Frankfurt, and the Catholic ideology, which has been advancing on from Jacques Maritain to Giovanni Battista Montini (Pope Paul VI). Ultimately, through Marcuse's influence, we observe the birth and development of a subversive Catholic theory, which reaches its culmination with Pope Paul VI's thought.

Key words: Modernity, Ideology, Illuminism, Post-capitalism, Consumerism, Euphoria, Metaphysics, Domain, Word, Life

1

The issue of modernity, particularly with regard to the technological evolution of society, with its branches in the realms of power, democracy, and public opinion control, traverses the twentieth century like an unstoppable breeze. Critical thought on contemporary times, cultivated with inevitably different nuances within various cultures, has accompanied, from the

early decades of the century, the unbridled race of the so-called "progress," attempting to identify its intrinsic limits, social dangers, anthropological subversions, and inevitably, its political implications.

It is primarily philosophers, followed by historians, who confront what appears to them as a true "crisis of civilization," which takes on almost apocalyptic proportions when fascisms occupy the geographic spaces of old Europe and the very spaces of existence.

Over the course of thirty years, until the youth rebellion of 1968, the production of critical texts on contemporary society became vast and widespread [1].

At the heart of this analytical-critical approach is the fundamental belief that the so-called modernity has entailed an irrational deviation of the so-called rationalistic framework that emerged from the Enlightenment and Positivism, with a political appendix on the failure of the supposed socio-economic reasonableness of Marxism and its historical realization in the USSR [2]. Indeed, as Horkheimer and Adorno put it, this irrationality is intrinsic, as a principle of dialectical contradiction, to the Enlightenment itself [3].

The stages that accompany the unfolding of this critical reaction to contemporary times, with their historical phenomenology, at least

symbolically, can be traced in the events of the Great War and the October Revolution, in the political and military experience of European fascisms, in the processes of democratization and economic reconstruction, up to the full realization of the technological society with the American myth and the cultural primacy of scientific thought; to what we can summarily call post-modernity, in which lies the thought of the last great representative of critical theory of contemporary society: Zygmunt Bauman [4].

Between the beginning and the end of the 20th century, continuing to the present day, there is a substantial modification of the collateral effects produced by the progressive invasiveness of technology and machines on capitalist and post-capitalist societies in the years closer to us: society has shifted from an alienated one, thus potentially revolutionary, to an euphoric one, therefore essentially controlled. This transition is marked by the transfer of possession of technological means from a few masters and specific places (the factory) to the individual and the non-place of planetary techné.

The weakness, or perhaps the impossibility of practical outcomes, of the operational proposals, of the answer to the crucial question “What to do?”, is a common characteristic of this group of critical theorists of society. From Breton’s Surrealism, and especially Aragon’s, with its confused political drifts, to Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, without forgetting Camus’s *The Rebel* (which in its own way can be ascribed to this group) [5], it is almost impossible to find plausible solutions. Certainly, Marcuse, despite his almost absolute pessimism regarding a possible practical outcome of the critical examination of technological modernity, served for a certain period as a

reference point for young Europeans in revolt. “That young Europeans found in *One-Dimensional Man* the words to express their feelings against their societies was, in a way, a paradoxical outcome. Although deeply infused with Hegelianism and Marxism, philosophy of history, and psychoanalysis—essentially what is most European in modern culture—Marcuse’s book is, in fact, a deeply American text, in the sense that it has its roots in the author’s stay—just thirty years old at the time of the book’s publication in 1964—in American society. In this society, the homogeneity of values, the uniformity of life models, the deep adherence to the principles that make democracy and production function simultaneously, have always been much more pronounced than in Europe. It is not, therefore, an audacious hypothesis to suggest that Marcuse mistook for a fatal and generalized historical change what was primarily the perspective effect resulting from the immersion of a European, socialized in a culture with many dimensions, in a social structure and a culture inherently more one-dimensional. But so it goes. Feelings don’t care about philology when they meet texts meant to express them, and for the youth of 1968, *One-Dimensional Man* seemed to perfectly describe what was happening in all advanced industrial societies, including Europe.” [6]

The events will contribute to restoring to Marcuse’s work its value as a prospective vision, which, in 1964, seemed like a distortion but today appears extremely relevant, especially in the old continent. With the revolutionary ambitions of the youth protests having vanished or failed, European society has quickly resumed its unidimensional path, fully embracing the American model, precisely according to the ideological and psychological parameters pointed out by the German philosopher.

In particular, the passages on “false needs,” [7] and on “the prevailing forms of social control [which] have a technological character in a new sense” [8] are particularly significant.

What Marcuse highlights on the ideological level and in the manipulative mass psychologies, even to the point of defining the totalitarian character of modernity and an “advanced society that makes technical and scientific progress an instrument of domination,” [9] Horkheimer and Adorno trace back to the irrational root of the father of all ideologies, that Enlightenment, seemingly liberating every political and social rationality, but which in reality carries within itself the seed of its irrational and mythological contradiction. Just the opening of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* makes the scope of the Frankfurt School’s critical theory clear: “Enlightenment, in the broadest sense of thought in continuous progress, has always pursued the goal of relieving humans of fear and making them masters. But the fully illuminated earth shines under the sign of triumphant misfortune.” [10] Even in *Dialectic*, the strong idea of a new totalitarianism masked by rationality reappears as a guiding interpretative line throughout the work, where science and technology become the tools of reasonable domination, promptly re-mythologized and used for every operation of manipulation of reality, nature, and thought. Thus, every experience lacking meaning – because the aim of the false rationality of the Enlightenment is precisely the elimination of meaning – becomes a parody of experience and happiness. While in Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* one could speak of “euphoria in the midst of unhappiness,” [11] for Horkheimer and Adorno, “laughter becomes the instrument of a fraud perpetrated against happiness,” [12] for which “the collective of those who laugh is the parody of true humanity,” [13] capable of pro-

ducing a “false harmony” [14] that is actually a “caricature of solidarity.” [15] In short, it is a reduction to unity of the very heterogeneous space of happiness and its languages. The homogeneous happiness remains the only space granted, where consumption and entertainment are the potential substitutes for meaning.

The thought of the Frankfurt School outlines the idea of a betrayal of modernity that has nothing to do with any nostalgia for the past. We are not, therefore, dealing with more or less veiled forms of reaction to progress, nor with a desire for steps backward in society. The critical theory of modernity and progress is not, then, an act of historical-philosophical revisionism; rather, it is an unmasking. The recognition that both the most advanced capitalist society and the socialism embodied share the same broken and falsified root inevitably leads to a reconfiguration of one’s political identity, the complex weave of affiliations.

Capitalism and Marxism, as they are both born from the same mystification of reason, have a single common goal: the reduction or emptying of meaning, of every natural experience, to unity. The number, and only one, is thus the canon of the Enlightenment. “Enlightenment,” Horkheimer and Adorno write, “recognizes a priori, as being and happening, only that which can be reduced to unity; its ideal is the system, from which it deduces everything and anything.” [16] It is easy to trace in the historical realization of Marxism the climax of this process, which in its own way becomes a myth; even bourgeois society, that of so-called freedoms, “is dominated by the equivalent. It makes the heterogeneous comparable by reducing it to abstract magnitudes. Everything that cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, becomes, for the Enlightenment, appearance; modern positivism confi-

nes it to literature.” [17] Thus, we can trace, in this diagnosis – as Carlo Galli [18] argues – a significant critique of the processes of globalization and homogenization that began a few decades after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

2

The Marxist field is not the only one to embark on the path of critical theory of modern society. An analogous reflection can be traced, although with very significant differences in approach and outcome, within the Catholic sphere as well. It is primarily the French culture, in this case, that initiates the critical examination, starting with a work that would have a great influence in Italy thanks to the translation by a young priest from Brescia, Giovanni Battista Montini, future Pope Paul VI. This work is *The Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* by Jacques Maritain [19].

“The book,” writes Montini in the Preface, “in the persons of its most qualified proponents, traces the origins of contemporary subjectivism, in which many recognize that peculiar character which constitutes the modernity of thought, and which a similarly painful modern experience denounces as the cause of the three great revolutions, euphemistically called reforms: religious with Luther, philosophical with Descartes, social with Rousseau, which afflict the soul and the century of our time, and which, infatuated as it is with those reformist dogmas, our age fails to discover either remedy or escape.” [20]

The consequences for Montini are clear:

“From Luther to our days, religion bent into religiosity, remaining with no other content than the emotion of man remade blind to the

mysteries of God; after Descartes, philosophy humbled itself in doubt, to the point of despairing of the truth, and content with its own immanentistic experiences; and society, which in Rousseau saw the new systematizer, tumbled and lost the primal love that once unified it, thus decaying, struggling and succumbing, tormented by subversive and anarchic passions.” [21]

Certainly, the Maritainian-Montinian diagnosis focuses on that religious sense which was increasingly fading in the consumer society, leaving man ever more alone in the face of the fascinating and totalizing advance of technology and science. This is a theme that Maritain will more thoroughly develop in *Integral Humanism* [22]. Thus, within the Catholic field, a current of thought began to emerge, one committed to understanding modernity in order to later explicitly articulate its radical critique. This is a position that Maritain himself defines, with a radical tone, as “anti-modern” [23] in nature. European Catholic culture in this first three decades of the twentieth century is pervaded by numerous and very different impulses rejecting modernity, ranging from an anachronistic desire for the restoration of the *civitas christiana* (the Christian society), to the dream of a return to the Middle Ages (such as Gemelli’s medievalism with its corporate structure), and even to decidedly reactionary and pro-fascist forms such as those embodied by Charles Maurras’ *Action française*. The Maritainian and Montinian critique does not follow these paths.

The diagnostic part of modernity, or rather, the modernized humanism proposed by *Integral Humanism*, is based, just as Camus in his *The Rebel* would later do from a totally secular perspective, on the human attempt to challenge God on the grounds of love and death, justice

and the absurd. Thus, if “with the Renaissance, the creature raises towards the sky the cry of its greatness and beauty” [24] and “with the Reformation, the cry of its distress and misery,” [25] in any case, “whether groaning or rebelling, it asks to be rehabilitated.” [26] It was, in short, a challenge of the human to the divine. A revolt that was first and foremost metaphysical, to use Camus’ words, which provoked – emphasizes Maritain – an “inner hell of man trapped within himself,” [27] but on which, we must recognize, “uncontestable enrichments of civilization” [28] have flowed.

At the root of atheism, a category that should be reconsidered today because it is too rooted in the 19th-20th centuries, there is for Maritain (as for Camus) a kind of “resentment against God and a revenge against God, which man refuses to place at the head of his moral life because he does not forgive him for the world and the evil – I mean the existence of evil in the world.” [29]

A substantial atheism that, in its Western bourgeois declension, has roots in a conception of man in consumption that no longer even has the courage for a true, heroic, and radical metaphysical revolt. The Western bourgeois man is, in short, “a pharisaic and decadent production” [30] that “prefers legal functions to love (he is not erotic, as Sombart claims); and to being, he prefers psychological functions (therefore, it can be said that he is not even ontological).” [31] Therefore, “bourgeois humanism rejects the ascetic principle and pretends to replace it with the technical or technological principle, because it aspires to a peace without conflict, progressing indefinitely in harmony and perpetual satisfaction, in the image of the non-existential man of rationalism.” [32] And it is precisely this euphoric, rationally grounded, and thus politically orien-

ted non-existentiality, that forms the strongest point of contact between a Catholic-inspired critical theory of modernity and a Marxist one.

3

The issue of modernity caught the attention of the young Montini as early as the first years of the 20th century, when, after becoming a priest, he wrote to his grandmother Francesca: “You are among us the voice of times rich in faith and patriarchal virtues, and if to us young people, destined to live in a generation of turbulent transformations, there is any comfort and strength, it is the thought that the hope of reviving, in modern style, the wisdom that nourished the age of which you bring us the memory is not in vain.” [33]

“In modern style”: for the young priest, who was only 23 years old, this referred primarily to languages and methods that would allow the great heritage of faith and culture that had been passed down from generation to generation to be transmitted intact.

The “turbulent transformations” concern first and foremost the customs, the organization of society just after World War I, the urbanization and the related secularization of a people bewildered and attracted by the novelties of factory life and new consumer habits. We are still within the perimeter of a society that is changing, but apparently only in its outward manifestations, in habits, in religious practice; on the horizon, a culture is emerging that increasingly shows hostility toward life and even the existence of the Church. If anything, the great novelty is an expanding hostility toward religion, which is taking on the forms of a mass otherness. In essence, a strong and demanding interlocutor is taking shape, assuming a new connotation, almost a category of thought

and spirit: the World.

Christ, the Church, and the World with its attractive power, with its unquestionable greatness, with its dangers becoming more widespread and radical: in the end, we are not far, for now, from the intuitions and struggles that had characterized the previous generation, that of Giovanni Battista's father, Giorgio, and even that of Giuseppe Tovini, the father of the Catholic movement in Brescia, who, in their struggle against the liberal state, had accepted the contemporary world, distancing themselves significantly from any temptation to look to the past. [34]

Time was no longer a distant, unreachable entity, something to endure with the resignation suggested by faith, but a challenge to be accepted, a reality to be governed in the transition from a society that was not only economically but also anthropologically rural, to one in which the factory and the city became central and all-consuming of lives.

In this early phase, for the young Montini, who was also called to lead Catholic university students gathered in the Fuci (Federation of Catholic University Students), the issue of Church-World relations was entrusted first and foremost to a modern reading of Saint Paul: "It is well known," he writes, "the broad and insidious beginning of Paul's discourse at the Areopagus in Athens: he tries to value even pagan religiosity to bring it to a Christian religion (Acts 17). And this episode, the boldest of its kind in the New Testament, indicates the system of missionary penetration that would later be followed in Catholic apostolate: to preserve the ethical-psychological fabric corresponding to natural morality and the deep religious tendencies of the environment, in order to insert the supernatural into it (with the 'naturalness' so dear to Blondel). The par-

tial coincidence of the order of faith with the actual human condition serves as leverage to lift this same human condition to the level of Redemption." [35]

But in this open relationship with the World, the problem immediately arose for the young priest from Brescia, a problem that would often return when he became Bishop and later Pope, of the clarity of positions and firmness in principles, the only condition for establishing a correct relationship with contemporary times. His gaze is primarily directed inward, where the processes of secularization seem to be undermining the very religious and existential fabric of the people of God: "In the face of the anti-Church, Saint Paul tries all ways to approach it: he does not polemicize, he affirms. In the face of the pseudo-Church, Saint Paul becomes theoretical and irreducible, and energetically rejects the insincerity of compromising practical agreements. Charity itself enlightens and burns. And he teaches us to imitate him: where in our world Christ is absent, every cordial and persuasive effort must be made to make him present. Where in our world Christ is distorted and diverted to other purposes than those of eternal salvation, we must be proud and firm in defending him." [36]

Once again, this is an issue not only of substance but also of language as a solid narrative form of experience, an experience that is itself strongly tempted by secularization, which Marcuse would have described as "the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless denial", and thus easily assimilated "by the status quo as part of its hygienic diet". [37]

It is within this framework that the young Montini's concerned appeal to not misunderstand comes into focus: in this case, everything is resolved, Montini writes in *coscienza universitaria* (university consciousness), in "acts

of consciousness” that, under the empire of so-called contemporaneity, present themselves as something “no different from a dream, hallucination, or illusion”. [38] To speak of Christ, for Montini, requires a method and clarity: “Better to fail than to equivocate,” he would write in the pages of *Studium* in the 1930s, foreseeing the danger of transforming the Church’s experience into a pseudo-church, bent on sentimentalism, adapted to the needs of existential well-being, tempted by the infinite semantic shifts that reduce the Word to its caricature, always faithful only to the interest of the moment.

The pseudo-church is, for the young priest from Brescia, who has theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral concerns before philosophical ones, the thread running through all his critical position toward modernity. But for Montini, pseudo-church also means — and perhaps above all — pseudo-humanity.

The critical reflection initiated in his youth deepens, in decidedly mature terms, during his experience as Archbishop of Milan.

Appointed Archbishop of the Lombard metropolis by Pope Pius XII, Montini made his entrance into the city of Ambrose and Charles on the day of the Epiphany in 1955. World War II had introduced deep afflictions into Western societies and, above all, a face-to-face confrontation with evil, which had become history in a sort of historicization of the devil, and immediately after, once the mortal danger was overcome, a euphoric reconstruction of existence and society arose, posing new questions for the man of faith and the Bishop.

Modernity, now taking on concrete features like lifestyle, the allure of money, and total trust in science and technology, which — to use Marcuse’s words — are becoming “an in-

strument of domination” [39] over society and the lives of individuals, in Milan materializes as a lived experience, in which man can finally show his unidimensional traits: “People,” Marcuse’s words again, “recognize themselves in their goods; they find their soul in their car, in the high-fidelity record player, in the two-level house, in kitchen equipment. The same mechanism that ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is rooted in the new needs it has created.” [40]

Yet Milan carries with it a deep and significant religious experience, rich in a secular tradition and its own liturgy, and therefore in a discourse and a patrimony of signs that can still speak to the hearts of men. Now, more than ever — for Montini — it seems that the ancient hope he entrusted to his grandmother Francesca over thirty years ago can come true: to preserve and transmit in “modern style” the ancient heritage of faith in a troubled world. And at the same time, the truth of the Church can be reaffirmed against any caricatural form of religious experience.

A Bishop in the heart of modernity: the issue is first and foremost relevant to languages because the modern man sees and judges: “The figure of the Bishop [...] is not simple. So much exteriority surrounds him [...]; it may be that today this figure confuses rather than clarifies ideas about what the Bishop truly is, and instead of offering a genuine expression of his mission, it becomes, in the eyes of the people, now inexperienced with the symbolic language of the Church, a strange and anachronistic figure, a purely decorative conventional costume, or an incomprehensible representation of unknown realities.” [41]

But the new Archbishop does not hesitate; he knows he is “one who enters the game now”. [42] In other words, it is a matter of looking

directly at man, beyond theoretical reflections, intellectual depth, anchoring to ancient texts, and even tradition. Of the modern man, one must first experience him, feel his heartbeat, his smell, walk at his pace, listen to his voice, understand his language, probe his soul.

Here lies the distance with the philosophers of the critical theory of post-industrial society, who arrive at a sort of historical pessimism: "It is not enough to think to understand the uni-dimensional man; friendship, companionship, sharing his fate, and finally, the passionate indication of a better destiny are necessary." Thus, if "the modern man is a disoriented one, because he has lost his true orientation, which consists in looking toward the sky", [43] one must point out where to turn his gaze. If "the modern man [...] is like someone who has left home and lost the key to get back in", [44] he must be given the keys to find the natural place where he belongs.

Place: it is a solid, essential, decisive word for Montini. Place is to be contrasted with the "non-places" that Zygmunt Bauman would later point to as a crucial element of his "liquid modernity." [45] Place is the home, place is the city, place is the Church. Every history, personal and social, takes place in a defined space, which in turn defines it.

But there is another dimension that the Archbishop places at the foundation of his critical reading of modernity: the issue of time. Time defines man in nature and history, marks and accompanies his change and fulfillment. Time of doing and time of being, the time of man and the time of God. And yet it is precisely time that is the wild variable modernity has imposed on the new man, subverting his very perception of himself in relation to the world and to the absolute. Once again, Marcuse notes: "The machine seems to instill in workers

a kind of hypnotic rhythm." [46] The old issue of Marxian alienation is surpassed by rhythm: "Things run rather than oppress, and bring with them in the current the human tool, not just his body, but also his mind and even his spirit." [47]

The world that appears to the eyes of the Archbishop is "feverish and kaleidoscopic, [...] protean and with a thousand faces" and "runs like a giant launched forward. But let us be careful: where is it going? Does this giant have eyes?" [...] The modern man has hunger and possession of "means," [48] but lacks anxiety about "ends." The spasmodic anxiety for speed, the myth of leisure time, the increasing whirl of induced needs, what Marcuse calls "false needs," generate an extraordinarily painful result: "a euphoria amidst unhappiness." [49]

Certainly, the Archbishop looks at the swirling movement of the Lombard metropolis with an admiring gaze. There are no retrospective temptations; he does not dream of returning to the arcadian world of pre-industrial society. Work is too important for the promotion of man: "One of the most notable efforts of our time, of our period of civilization, is that of speed, that is, gaining time, using the time that passes more intensively, because it is known that only in this measure, within these margins of the succession of one act to another, can we enjoy life. [...] It makes a great impression on me, and I would almost say it is edifying, when in the morning one leaves early, to see all this bustling of people running, taking trams, who have no peace unless they arrive on time, and so the anxiety of arriving on time: God bless them, because they are fulfilling their duty. [...] But then comes the day of God, the holiday. [...] We must say it with bitterness: even we Christians have often secularized the

holiday” [50].

Work and rest. Weekdays and holidays. Restoring the right proportions – we could say the measure – of the time of existence, for Montini, constitutes the precondition for a clear and serene encounter between the Church and modern man, between the Bishop and his people. It is about restoring the right relationships between past, present, and future, so that the human chain can be understood in its historical totality, both as an event and as salvation. Hypercontemporaneity, which reduces everything to a perpetual present because it is experiential and intelligible, is one of the great temptations that grip modernity and weigh on the shoulders and spirits, especially of young people. The myth of today crushes lives onto the barren ground of phenomenological experience, removing from the human horizon both memory and hope.

Behind him, the Archbishop has two great examples of Ambrosian bishops: Ambrose and Charles. Montini is fascinated by the figure of Ambrose. He dedicates nine discourses to the patron of the city for the respective feasts on December 7. In Ambrose – he almost announces programmatically – “we perceive the man, and therefore we love the saint” [51]. The relevance of the illustrious predecessor is perceived and communicated by the pastor to the faithful and revolves around the issue “for example, of making a pagan and now faithless city Christian” [52]. If this is the reading key externally, internally the Saint imposes himself as an episcopal model: “A man religious by excellence, he was a bishop, blending in his inner experience and his external action the two salient characteristics of religiosity: the richness of the soul and the power of action, the individual moment of religion and the social moment, personal holiness and ecclesiastical

discipline” [53].

Like Ambrose, St. Charles assists the Archbishop with his modernity. The question arises again: “What would St. Charles do today?” [54].

Thus, Giorgio Rumi notes, that “until the mid-twentieth century, St. Charles represented not only the ideal type of bishop, but the most important source of the Ambrosian ecclesial substance, the most incisive and authoritative implementation of the dictates of Catholic reform [...] it is Giovanni Battista Montini who overcomes the crest of apologetics, advancing with vigilant resolve and responsible trepidation into the terrain of a comparison of that ancient model to the reality of our times” [55].

St. Charles and us: in fully adhering to the Borromean model, Montini leaves no “trace of that contemporary arrogance with which, after so much traditionalism, one now turns to the faith of the fathers” [56]. The Archbishop is interested in “the spirit of the laws” [57] which is inseparably linked to the extraordinary fascination with time and its passing.

The contemporary man is demanding. He demands clarity and truth above all. Against every temptation of mimicry, the Archbishop calls for seriousness and responsibility. “The modern man needs clarity [...]. He goes to the cinema, and everything seems clear to him; he goes to the theater, and the same happens; he opens the radio and television, and everything is understandable [...], but finally, he goes to Mass, and of all that unfolds before him, he understands nothing. Why, precisely for this stupendous, immense, infinite act, for this divine drama in which all the destinies of humanity are centered, must there be so much misunderstanding, so much lack of intelligence, largely due to ourselves, the Ministers of

the Lord, who have not adequately instructed the people?” [58].

The Archbishop's sorrow is evident when the consequence of this “lack of intelligence” translates into an ironic reading of the experience of faith: “Today it is fashionable [...] to fight the Church. This is even easy. It is easy to ridicule the Church; it is enough to mock its human aspect. And nothing is closer to ridicule than the deformation of the sublime” [59]. Montini always has in mind that Pauline idea of the anti-church and the pseudo-church: “The topic is relevant. Relevant for the exclusions, for the oppressions, for the persecutions [...]. Relevant for the discussions [...] on the nature of the Church [...] and almost always about two characteristic problems of our time, that of authority and that of relativity. [...] Some who [...] disdainfully refuse to obey it with sincere cordiality, others want the Church to be more in line, more relative to History, to adapt to the times” [60].

And if “failing is better than equivocating,” the mission of 1957 appears precisely to present to the city and the diocese the true, unambiguous, and non-mimetic face of the Church, so that Christ can shine in His true light.

“When we want to be pious and manifest authentic, living, and personal feelings of religion, do we seek devotions – whose legitimacy and beauty I do not discuss – or do we draw religion from its genuine sources? [...] Our religion then expresses itself in the easy formulas we put on all the bulletins [...]. Perhaps we even go further, reducing the great mysteries of God – like that of Providence – to small utilitarian shops that make a little money and perform cheap miracles. And we give this religion to our people and to our time, without realizing that around us there is irreligiosity precisely because the majesty

of the Faith is not visible [...]. We forget that modern man finds it harder to bow before the thousand lights with which we have filled our churches than before the living God whom we should present to him. [...] It is harder to speak to men of our time repeating the little devotions with which we have burdened – rather than enriched – our piety, than to speak of Christ [...] and of God, who becomes to us a Father [...]. Let us not replace the small religion with the great” [61].

Montini has no doubts: only by speaking authentically of Christ is it possible to captivate contemporary man and turn him away from the false myths that fill his life. The issue of dialogue arises in Montini's sense, long misunderstood and distorted by superficial publicists and parts of the Church itself, attracted by the sirens of mimicry. The Archbishop knows well: the danger “is to confuse the approach to the indifferent, the distant, the adversaries with assimilation to their way of thinking and acting. We will no longer be conquerors, but the conquered. Dialogue, a necessary method for the apostle, must not end with a denial, or oblivion of our truth, to the benefit of error or the partial truth we wanted to redeem” [62].

The Mission is also a direct challenge, almost a bet thrown by the Archbishop to the man who works, who runs, with direct, friendly, intimate language: “Remember what I tell you: listen! There is the art of listening! You, perhaps, in your hurry, in the continuous film of experience passing before you, are more apt to perceive and less to listen. I tell you: ‘Listen for a moment, deepen, allow yourselves a pause of inner attention, try to confront yourselves with this great, sublime, and familiar vision of life and the universe! [...]’ And then return to your work and tell me if you have not become better men [...] better professionals” [63].

The results are not as hoped. And Montini still looks for responsibility within the Church: “Instead of giving him the essential [...] we have often presented a phenomonic, external, superficial, devotional, optional Christianity” [64]. However, the Archbishop recognizes that “the Mission has highlighted the immense pastoral needs of our city; the world of culture, the world of offices, the world of business, especially the world of young people, and the world of work, are waiting for a new, loving, intelligent, and systematic approach. We cannot leave out of the scope of the Christian spirit the largest social classes of our citizens, and the most important phenomena of modern life” [65].

so dear to Blondel). The partial coincidence of the order of faith with the actual human condition serves as leverage to lift this same human condition to the level of Redemption.” [35]

But in this open relationship with the World, the problem immediately arose for the young priest from Brescia, a problem that would often return when he became Bishop and later Pope, of the clarity of positions and firmness in principles, the only condition for establishing a correct relationship with contemporary times. His gaze is primarily directed inward, where the processes of secularization seem to be undermining the very religious and existential fabric of the people of God: “In the face of the anti-Church, Saint Paul tries all ways to approach it: he does not polemicize, he affirms. In the face of the pseudo-Church, Saint Paul becomes theoretical and irreducible, and energetically rejects the insincerity of compromising practical agreements. Charity itself enlightens and burns. And he teaches us to imitate him: where in our world Christ is absent, every cordial and persuasive effort must be made to make him present. Where in our world Christ is distorted and diverted to other purposes than

those of eternal salvation, we must be proud and firm in defending him.” [36]

Once again, this is an issue not only of substance but also of language as a solid narrative form of experience, an experience that is itself strongly tempted by secularization, which Marcuse would have described as “the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless denial”, and thus easily assimilated “by the status quo as part of its hygienic diet”. [37]

It is within this framework that the young Montini’s concerned appeal to not misunderstand comes into focus: in this case, everything is resolved, Montini writes in *coscienza universitaria* (university consciousness), in “acts of consciousness” that, under the empire of so-called contemporaneity, present themselves as something “no different from a dream, hallucination, or illusion”. [38] To speak of Christ, for Montini, requires a method and clarity: “Better to fail than to equivocate,” he would write in the pages of *Studium* in the 1930s, foreseeing the danger of transforming the Church’s experience into a pseudo-church, bent on sentimentalism, adapted to the needs of existential well-being, tempted by the infinite semantic shifts that reduce the Word to its caricature, always faithful only to the interest of the moment.

The pseudo-church is, for the young priest from Brescia, who has theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral concerns before philosophical ones, the thread running through all his critical position toward modernity. But for Montini, pseudo-church also means — and perhaps above all — pseudo-humanity.

The critical reflection initiated in his youth deepens, in decidedly mature terms, during his experience as Archbishop of Milan.

Appointed Archbishop of the Lombard me-

tropolis by Pope Pius XII, Montini made his entrance into the city of Ambrose and Charles on the day of the Epiphany in 1955. World War II had introduced deep afflictions into Western societies and, above all, a face-to-face confrontation with evil, which had become history in a sort of historicization of the devil, and immediately after, once the mortal danger was overcome, a euphoric reconstruction of existence and society arose, posing new questions for the man of faith and the Bishop.

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Giacomo Scanzi

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Note:

[1] «Basterà qui ricordare – scrive Luciano Gallino nell'Introduzione a H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, Einaudi, Torino 1999, pp.VII-VIII – gli Studi sull'autorità e la famiglia, opera collettiva del 1936, e, dello stesso anno, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica* di Walter Benjamin; *Ragione e rivoluzione* (1941) ed *Eros e civiltà* (1955) di Marcuse; la serie degli Studi sul pregiudizio pubblicati negli Stati Uniti a cura di Horkheimer e Samuel H. Flowerman (1949 e sgg.), che includono la fondamentale ricerca sulla Personalità autoritaria di Adorno e altri (1950); la *Dialettica dell'Illuminismo* di Adorno e Horkheimer (1947) e la *Dialettica negativa* dello stesso Adorno (1966); le grandi ricerche di Karl A. Wittfogel sulla società cinese e il dispotismo orientale (1931-57); la *Storia critica dell'opinione pubblica* di Habermas (1962); sino alle analisi di Horkheimer sul conflitto tra ragione strumentale e ragione oggettiva raccolte in un unico volume nel 1967 a cura di Alfred Schmidt, egli stesso collaboratore e autore della Scuola francofortese».

[2] «L'illuminismo – scrive Carlo Galli – è insomma un razionalismo irrazionale, un affrancarsi del mito che non si libera dalla mitologia, di cui condivide la coazione a pensare se stesso e le proprie condizioni d'esistenza come natura e destino. La riflessione è cattiva natura riflessa; e la mediazione si dà come cattiva immediatezza». C. Galli, *Introduzione a M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, Dialettica dell'illuminismo*, Einaudi, Torino 2011, p. XV.

[3] M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, *Dialettica dell'illuminismo*, op. cit.

[4] Z. Bauman, *Modernità liquida*, Laterza, Bari 2011.

[5] A. Camus, *L'uomo in rivolta*, Bompiani, Milano 2013.

[6] L. Gallino, *Introduzione*, cit. p. XI.

[7] H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit. p.19.

[8] Ibi, p. 23.

[9] Ibi, p. 30.

[10] M. Horkheimer T. Adorno, *Dialettica dell'illuminismo*, cit., p. 11.

[11] H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit. p. 19.

[12] M. Horkheimer T. Adorno, *Dialettica dell'illuminismo*, cit. p. 150.

[13] Ibidem.

[14] Ibidem.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] M. Horkheimer T. Adorno, *Dialettica dell'illuminismo*, cit. p. 15.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] «Insomma, se non c'è in questo libro – in ogni caso un testo in qualche modo “classico” del nostro secolo – un insieme di strumenti per analizzare e risolvere le sfide che la storia ci pone davanti, ci sono almeno una voce e una testimonianza. Che fanno di *Dialettica dell'illuminismo* una sorta di possibile antidoto al rischio del nostro incantamento; al rischio che acconsentiamo a racchiudere la nostra libertà in spazi sempre più angusti, che accettiamo come naturale l'affermarsi del “pensiero unico” e di un unico modello mondiale di civiltà e di produzione (la cosiddetta “globalizzazione”); al rischio per certi versi opposto ma concomitante che liquidiamo troppo facilmente come

“altro” dalla nostra civiltà razionale la barbarie che riaffiora nei neotribalismi in cui pare spegnersi la modernità con il suo universalismo». Cfr. C. Galli, Introduzione, cit., pp. XLII-XLIII.

19) L'opera viene pubblicata in Italia nel 1928 dall'Editrice Morcelliana di Brescia con la traduzione e la Prefazione di Giovanni Battista Montini.

20) Il testo della Prefazione è stato pubblicato sul Notiziario dell'Istituto Paolo VI di Brescia (d'ora in poi Notiziario), n.42, novembre 2001, pp.57-59.

21) Ibi, p. 58.

22) J. Maritain, *Humanisme intégral. Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté*, Aubier, Parigi 1936, tr. it, *Umanesimo integrale*, Borla, Roma 1977.

23) «Con Antimoderne del 1922 – scrive Pietro Viotto nella Presentazione di *Umanesimo integrale* – Maritain precisa la sua posizione: superato l'iniziale materialismo e socialismo, superato anche il bergsonismo che pure l'aveva portato allo spiritualismo, il suo pensiero si presenta come “antimoderno” per quanto di immanentismo, di naturalismo, di irrazionalismo, di individualismo contiene la filosofia moderna, ma decisamente “ultramoderno” rispetto alle conquiste della scienza, della filosofia, della politica, di questi ultimi secoli, che hanno affermato la loro autonomia rispetto la teologia e la religione. Purtroppo questa presa di coscienza del valore autonomo della cultura dalla religione è avvenuta polemicamente, in opposizione alla teologia; e si è giunti allo scientismo, all'idealismo, al socialismo che pretendono l'autonomia assoluta della scienza, della filosofia e della politica». P. Viotto, Presentazione in J. Maritain, *Umanesimo integrale*, cit. p. 8.

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