

COLIN PATTERSON,
Chalcedonian Personalism. Rethinking the human

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This powerful book arises from the author's impact with the works of Ratzinger and Von Balthasar that show him a personalist theology of great value. The author then sets out to determine the origin of this personalism (Part I) and then presents an original proposal (Part II). The title of the book is justified in the historical part in which it is indicated that the personalism generated by the theology of the Church (which is generally called Chalcedonian) was not successfully applied to the philosophical field, being recovered, many centuries later, by Ratzinger and Von Balthasar. Patterson considers that the perspective of these theologians is very valuable and faithful to the original intuitions of the Church and, for this reason, he intends to recover, promote and strengthen it. The book, therefore, is approached from a theological framework, but this does not prevent the author from showing and using a broad knowledge of the philosophical sources that affect the issues he deals with, including sources from the experimental sciences.

Part I. Chalcedonian personalism

First of all, the author makes one of the best syntheses I have read on the generation of the terms person and nature. The elaboration of a consistent and mature formulation, as is well known, was very complex and, in fact, in the first centuries the main terms (*hypostasis*, *ousia*) were used interchangeably, with a single objective, to defend the Christological and Trinitarian faith against possible misinterpretations. With the passage of time, however, the term *hypostasis* (which would be translated as person), became decisive and original. In the Christological framework, it was first considered that *hypostasis* was the particular and *ousia* (substance) the general, but this vision changed when it was considered that it implied that the person of Christ referred only to concrete and particular elements, which was somewhat poor. For this reason, progress was made towards the idea that the *hypostasis* was, in some way, the place where the *ousia* was anchored, that is, the two natures of Christ, thus approaching the canonical conceptual formulation: one person with two

natures. The description of these new concepts in the magisterial texts, however, according to Patterson, was very sober, limiting itself to definitions or negative affirmations that closed roads leading to error. There was no desire to enter into their theoretical meaning or their connection with Greek concepts. The essential moments were the Councils of Nicaea (325), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), considering Patterson that at this moment the definitive formulation of the magisterial texts is already closed. Much of the merit of this process is usually attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers (4th century), but, according to Patterson, they opted for a connection with the Aristotelian-Stoic philosophy and, therefore, he identifies himself with Chalcedon and not with the Cappadocians, which, on the other hand, allows to mark a difference with Zizioulas who understands that the Cappadocians would found the original notion of person as “individual subsistent”, very different from the Greek conception (and from that of Boethius).

With regard to the reflection on the Trinity, in addition to maintaining the hypostasis-person interpretation, it adds the relevance of relationality and interpersonality, because the divine Persons are defined by relationship to the point that nothing specific can be said of them except in terms of their relationships. Here again, the Councils did not wish to enter into definitions of concepts, but rather to assure the non-existence of error by going to the essential by means of very sober affirmations. “In both cases (trinitarian and christological discussions) two distinct concepts, that of ‘person’ and that of ‘nature’ have been asserted in the teaching of the Church. However, the explicit articulation of the way they are to be related has not found expression within orthodox conciliar statements” (18).

At this point Boethius (480-525) and St. John Damascene (676-749) come into play and will play a fundamental role in the later use of the concept of person in the West, because they will ask themselves about the meaning of these terms, and they will answer mainly through Aristotelian categories. The main fruit of this work is the famous definition of Boethius in which the notion of person coined by Christianity will be explained in Aristotelian terms: “individual substance of rational nature”. For Patterson it is clear that, although a connection with the theological notion of person is maintained, the original character that points to the personal has been lost, and the primacy is now given to the notion of substance, although its individuality is marked. *Hypostasis* (person, subsistence) is now an individual *substance*. Boethius’ definition became canonical and was the main reference in the Middle Ages for the vast majority of thinkers. Richard of St. Victor’s expressions are often remarked

as novel because they begin to speak of incommunicability and existence, but, at the time, perhaps they were not so novel. In fact, Patterson comments that Albertus Magnus analyzed them and did not find them significant (unlike Ratzinger's interpretation). In any case, there is no significant debate about it, nor is it a central topic of discussion, which means that the person plays a second-order role in medieval anthropology.

The question that now arises is, how do we get from here to contemporary personalism and its powerful concept of person? The path, according to Patterson, is going to be a long one, and it will take place mainly through modern philosophy, in its different variants, and not through classical realism, which will remain stagnant without contributing any significant novelty (including Suarez). Patterson presents almost all relevant modern philosophers as part of a path leading towards personalism, indicating what each of them would contribute. He highlights Kant, Hegel (for his historical consciousness, although indicating that many of the future personalists will be anti-Hegelian), the anti-pantheistic tradition of Jacobi, the later Schelling and others; and as outliers, Kierkegaard and Feuerbach who will initiate the development of the I-Thou relationship. We share this list to a large extent, although it seems to us that Patterson has been influenced by the work of Bengtsson (*The worldview of personalism. Origins and early development*), who has analyzed in depth the origins of personalism, but mainly of American personalism, which was idealistic. And, hence the weight (excessive in our opinion) given to idealism in the emergence of personalism in general, not the Anglo-American one, which was idealistic (which is transferred to the definitions of the American encyclopedias used by Patterson). One important figure missing from this list is Newman. And, probably, more weight should be given to existentialism and phenomenology.

Finally, a presentation of contemporary personalism is made, which I am pleased to note is very similar to the one I have elaborated (*An Introduction to Personalism*). Thus Patterson presents French personalism with Renouvier, Laberthonnière, Nédoncelle and Mounier (missing Marcel); American personalism with Bowne, Brightman, Howison, and others; the dialogical personalism of Buber, Roszenweig and Ebner; and, finally, the Thomistic personalism of Gilson, Wojtyła, Maritain, Simon and Robert Spaemaan, to which are added Berdiaev, Scheler and John MacMurray who is a strict relationalist. I agree with this list but I would like to make two comments. Spanish, Italian and some German-speaking personalists (Guardini, Von Hildebrand, Edith Stein), as well as Poles, are missing. And I disagree about the inclusion in Thomistic personalism of Gilson, Simon and Wojtyła. Gilson and

Simon are neo-Thomists, who do not depart from Boethius' definition, while Wojtyla is an original thinker with Thomistic, phenomenological and Kantian sources. In my opinion only Maritain is a Thomistic personalist. And Wojtyla would be an integral personalist. Patterson, on the other hand, remarks that few personalists opt for a strict relationalism as should be admitted according to "Chalcedonian Personalism", that is, that the person only exists in relation. "Yet like other thinkers covered in this chapter, the key difficult seems to be in conceiving of a self and others as dynamically related in a sustained, dialogic relation in a way mirrored in Christians conceptions of the Persons of the Trinity" (87). But, as we will note at the end, it does not seem that this strict Trinitarian relationalism should (and cannot) be applied to human relations.

Patterson now introduces the theological path through the personalist positions of Von Balthasar ("On the concept of person") and Ratzinger ("Concerning the notion of person"). In both cases their critical, though not radical, separation from scholasticism is clear, as well as the influence of personalism and the grasp of the originality of the patristic proposal on the person that collapses in scholasticism. On this position Patterson builds his proposal, although this does not prevent him from being critical of some of his assertions such as Ratzinger's radical relationalism which states. "I believe this idea of the late patristic period is very important. In God, persons are relations. Relations, being related, is not something superadded to the person, but it is the person itself. In its nature, the person exists only *as* relation" "They are, therefore, not substance that stand next to each other, but they are real existing relations, and nothing besides" (444). Patterson argues that there must be poles in this relation because otherwise the revealed reference of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is lost. "The relational subsistent" of Aquinas, we add, seems a much more balanced option. Patterson's terminological wager (taken from the title of a book by MacMurray) is that of "persons in relation", in which the existence of poles is somehow maintained, but insisting on the intrinsically relational character of the human being, including his very self.

Part II.

Now begins the propositional part consisting in providing a "Chalcedonian" anthropology which, however, starts from a complex apophatic status due to its Trinitarian origin since, according to Patterson, "the apparently positive statements we make are in fact simply

assertion about what the Persons are not" (128). How then to fill this void without betraying the Chalcedonian idea and without falling into Aristotelian concepts that also betray it? How to indicate, in some way, what human nature is beyond an inaccessible person? Patterson finds two ways. First, recourse to experimental sciences such as psychology, evolutionary sources, etc., which will be able to show what man is from a natural perspective (something which, on the other hand, is not to be feared). Being interesting, this description seems to be situated in a very peculiar terrain because we have, on the one hand, theological notions and, on the other, experimental notions that, presumably, would generate a "description of human nature from a theological point of view" (223).

The awareness of this tension and disconnection is what leads Patterson to generate one of the most innovative proposals of the book, namely, the concepts "semblants" (chapter 8), which are realities that point to the person (such as the semblant), but without being strictly the person, which would save its ineffability. These would include self, consciousness, mind, soul, action, moral responsibility, etc. The matter makes sense, but what is not clear is the need to coin a new type of concepts when what is being done is to give an anthropological explanation of basic structures of the person; but Patterson is forced to do so by a perhaps too empiricist view of nature and the desire not to resort to classical categories. Personally, we have elaborated the notion of "personalist categories" which perhaps has elements in common with Patterson's proposal. It should be noted too that Patterson affirms that the validity of certain concepts-semblants, such as morality and love, would only be activated in direct contact with and dependence on God. Finally, he tests his theory by analyzing two examples of semblant-concepts: "free will" and "soul", concluding, in the latter case, that it is too closely linked to classical philosophy to be used as a "semblant".

To summarize. We find ourselves before a very powerful and novel proposal conceived as a theological anthropology, although the author's great knowledge of philosophy and of some fields of the experimental sciences gives notable value to what he affirms in these fields. The book is a great contribution to personalist reflection for many reasons, beginning with its reconstruction of the patristic contribution to the idea of person; for having shown that this novel intuition was lost, at least to a certain extent, in the Middle Ages and in Modernity; and that it reappears with enormous and original force in 20th century personalism and, in particular, in the theology of Ratzinger and Von Balthasar. Starting from this discovery, together with the thesis of the Second Vatican

Council that it is Christ alone who shows man to man, he attempts the construction of a Chalcedonian theological anthropology based on these principles: an original vision of the person that separates person from nature; an apophatic vision in which one can affirm above all that which is not the person; and, finally, a relational vision characteristic of the Trinity. How is anthropology constructed from here? First of all, by turning to the experimental sciences to construct the most basic part of the human being and, secondly, by turning to the notion of “semblance” that points to the person without yet being the person, which would make it possible to fill in the negative character of the Chalcedonian anthropology. Our evaluation of this profound, dense and original book is essentially positive, as we have tried to show in what has been said so far. But, in concluding, I see fit to add the following comments: 1) I do not see why it is necessary to use only or mainly Chalcedonian concepts to follow the recommendation of Vatican II, since Christ reveals himself to us through his life narrated in the Gospels. And this reference to an endearing and close Christ could shed light on an excessively apophatic anthropology; 2) that Christ can show man to man does not mean that the Trinitarian structure can be applied without further ado to the human person; indeed, the opposite is evident: it cannot be applied for obvious reasons, namely that we are not God. Would it not be convenient then to qualify this application analogically?; 3) this analogical incidence would affect, concretely, the extreme relationalism so fashionable, according to which, the person would be only relationship (Ratzinger). This does not seem to make sense or be justifiable, not even in the Trinity, which is formed by Persons in relation or, if one prefers, by subsistent Relations (Thomas Aquinas), but not by pure relations. And if it does not happen in the Trinity, even less will it happen in man. However, beyond these collateral comments, we insist that we find ourselves before a book that shines for its erudition, originality and depth, and, likewise, stands out for its grasp of the theoretical originality of the personalist proposal, ancient and contemporary. For this reason, I would like to see it translated into Spanish.

Juan Manuel Burgos