'THE GOLDEN THREAD OF FREEDOM': IMPULSES FOR CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY AND SOCIAL REALITY IN THE WORK OF D. C. SCHINDLER*

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the founding elements of the social and political thought of American philosopher and theologian David C. Schindler. The main aim of the article is to examine possible relations between Schindler's work and the philosophical concept of 'Trinitarian ontology'. It focuses on Schindler's approach towards liberalism and analyses his critique of the modern conception of freedom. It suggests that the main pillars of his idea of the social order might be found in the notion of reality as the symbolical order, the conception of human beings as fundamentally relational, and the renewal of the traditional notion of freedom as rootedness in goodness. It concludes with the suggestion that the proper understanding of social reality requires certain 'social ontology', the metaphysical interpretation of social life as a part of a broad cosmological order which symbolically manifest the beauty of the source of being. And it is the social ontology based on the notion of freedom and relationality which analogically reflects the main principles of Trinitarian ontology.

Keywords

Trinitarian ontology; Social order; Symbolical order; Freedom; Relationality; David C. Schindler

Is there any connection between the reality of Trinity and the world of our own culture and society? With this daring question, we would like to open a series of reflections on the impulses that might be derived from the philosophical discussion about the Trinitarian Ontology for deepening our understanding of the social sphere of human life. The following article examines inspirations for our task that can be found in the work of American philosopher and theologian David C. Schindler.[1] Although he does not address the problem of the Trinitarian ontology directly, Schindler represents the most prominent voice in the current philosophical debate advocating for a metaphysical anchoring of discussion concerning social and political problems.[2] The analysis of his work should thus serve the purpose of marking out the path from social to metaphysical thinking and, through it, to open a way to the possibility of embedding social reality within the Trinitarian ontology itself.

The main aim of the article is, therefore, to present the basic elements of Schindler's political and social thought. In the first two introductory parts, we will briefly mention necessary context: We will address the problem of the relationship between theology and social thinking, noting that we should not assume a simplistic correlation between the mystery of the Trinitarian revelation and the possibility to build a 'Christian social order'. We will continue with the exposition of Schindler's analysis of liberalism, which should provide us with an understanding of the *hic et nunc* of the contemporary social and political situation. Three fundamental elements of the 'social ontology' will be discussed in the main part of the article: we will focus on Schindler's concepts of the symbolical order, human person in relations, and freedom.

Many theologians have noted that it is a deep reflection on the mystery of the Trinity, on which a rich Christian vision of culture and society is grounded.[5] As Klaus Hemmerle states in his founding and

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[1] David C. Schindler currently serves as professor of metaphysics and anthropology at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America.

[2] Cf. Jiří Baroš, 'Katolické výhrady vůči liberálnímu chápání svobody a sociálního řádu,' *Studia Theologica* 23, no. 2 (2021): 94–99, doi: 10.5507/sth.2020.062.

[5] For instance renowned Czech theologian C. V. Pospíšil points out to the close relationship between modern democracy and Trinitarian theology: 'It is not surprising, that there is an unprecedented flourishing of Trinitarian theology in the last three decades

programmatic treatise *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology*: 'A new ontology impels us towards a new society. […] Only the Trinitarian model makes it possible to understand every individual as, in his own fashion, the origin of society and at the same time, to understand society as more than the sum of individuals; to see that society has a single, common life and that this is nevertheless the life of each individual.'[4] A Trinitarian ontology, therefore, has direct implications not only on anthropology, as the project 'Trinitarian Ontology of the Human Person' strives to show, but likewise on sociology. It is our hope that the exploration into David C. Schindler's work will help us to see the necessity of ontological rooting of social reality more clearly.

1. Social Reality in Theology

In briefest possible terms, we will sketch some of the tensions that are comprised in the theological interpretation of social reality to show how paradoxical, at times absurd, human effort to apply principles of the Christian faith in the shaping of our world might be. The difficulty of fallen nature renders in vain all our efforts to build a just social order. At least, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, this experience represents one of the foundational elements of Western civilisation. The danger of pride and the temptation of self-sufficiency are warnings of any simplistic shortcuts in the creation of 'Christian social order'. It is only through the identity of Cross and the triumph of grace 'through utter darkness' that such an aim might be reached.[5]

However, despite necessary prudence and concerns about the instrumentalisation of Christianity, there still remains an awareness that 'in its original unity – of which Adam is the symbol – the human race is made in the image of the divine Trinity'.[6] The social reality

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in connection with a development of modern democracy and with a broadening of a deep awareness of a global sense of belonging.' Ctirad V. Pospíšil, *Jako v nebi, tak i na zemi, Náčrt trinitární teologie* (Praha: Krystal OP, Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2007), 81, see also 61–87.

[4] Klaus Hemmerle, *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology* (New York: Angelico Press, 2020), 60–63.

[5] Cf. Stratford Caldecott, 'The Social Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar,' *Catholic Social Science Review* 5 (2000): 184–185, doi: 10.5840/cssr2000519. On the Christian identity as the identity of Cross see also Henri de Lubac, *L'Eglise dans la crise actuelle* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1969), 29.

[6] International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, par. 43.

shared by human persons is not a state of total alienation but rather a space in which human history and salvation history meet and enable them to rise from natural and historical order to the participation in the fullness of being. On this journey, they realise the peculiar character of their social and cultural existence that at the same time covers and reveals the ontological depth of human fate. They realise the importance of the shared social life and, at the same time, the fact that 'a perfect communion' and 'unity of the human family is yet to be realized eschatologically'.[7]

When we contemplate the social dimension of human life, we come to understand that it is not a purely neutral and autonomous zone of human activity,[8] but rather it represents an agonising striving for a symbolical expression of human personal being created in the image of Triune God. 'The Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes a *metaphysical interpretation of the "humanum" in which relationality is an essential element*.'[9] Metaphysical reflection of the relationality of human beings represents an indispensable part of our thinking about social order.[10] Social reality, therefore, cannot be separated from ontological interpretation, and the latter constitutes an essential element for the understanding of the former. Bearing in mind these initial observations, we can start to examine the thought of David C. Schindler.

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[7] *Communion and Stewardship*, par. 43.
[8] Cf. a critique of liberalism and a concept of religious freedom in the work of J. C. Murray by David L. Schindler in Communio review: David L. Schindler, 'Religious freedom, truth and American liberalism: Antoher look at John Courtney Murray,' *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21 (Winter 1994): 696–741; see also Jiří Baroš, 'John Courtney Murray a Dignitatis Humanae,' *Mezinárodní katolická revue Communio* 21, no. 3 (2017): 100–111.
[9] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, encyclical letter, 2009, 55; cited in: Piero Coda, *From the Trinity: the Coming of God in Revelation and Theology* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 482; see also Joseph Ratzinger *Einführung in das Christentum*, in Czech translation: *Úvod do křesťanství, výklad apoštolského vyznání víry* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2007), 127.
[10] Cf. p. 11 of this article: 'To *be* is to be *substance-in-relation*.' William Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), in Czech translation: *Osoba a bytí* (Praha: Krystal OP, Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2007), 20–26.

2. Our Liberal Presence

All considerations on the order of social reality are necessarily placed in the concrete historical and cultural context. Our social life always unfolds *hic et nunc,* in a given time and place. More distinctively than in other fields of philosophical and theological inquiry, discussions about cultural, social, and political problems are marked by the overall atmosphere of the epoch and its 'signs of times'. It seems, therefore, suitable to open up our treatise on the social thinking of David C. Schindler with his remarks about the current *status quo* of Western civilisation.

But even in his commentaries on liberalism, which represents the predominant political ideology of the West and its analysis is thus indispensable for understanding our contemporary situation, Schindler does not limit himself to an examination of superficial phenomena but instead asks about its inner metaphysical and theological core. This approach seems to be particularly fitting in our attempt to tackle the problem of social reality from the metaphysical perspective of the Trinitarian ontology.

Schindler points to the fact that liberalism came into existence within the Christian tradition of European culture.[11] This tradition constitutes the necessary precondition for the emergence of a new political philosophy of modern times, and the relationship between classical Christian thinking, which absorbed into itself ancient tradition of Greek metaphysic, and liberal political worldview seems to be fundamental for understanding the present political moment. Following the reasoning of French political philosopher Pierre Manent,[12] Schindler conceptualises liberalism not as a logical consequence of an older tradition, or even as its completion, but rather as a radical break up and reinterpretation of all substantial principles of classical metaphysical philosophy. The basic question that arises in front of us is 'whether this rejection actually served to bring out the deepest truths of the Gospel regarding individual freedom and dignity […], or whether this rejection

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[11]   In this regard compare with Pospíšil, *Jako v nebi, tak i na zemi*, 80.
[12]   Cf. Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xvii. However, we should not overlook substantial differences between position of Manent and Schindler. Unlike Manent, Schindler pays considerable attention to the metaphysical dimension of liberalism.

of the Church is a repudiation of Christianity simply, a repudiation one might go on either to celebrate or to lament'.[15] Schindler argues vehemently in favour of the second alternative.

Schindler perceives liberalism as a thorough reinterpretation of every dimension of human existence. This fracture in the previous tradition emerged in the direct reaction to the universal ontological and historical claims of Christian revelation on human nature and human culture. Schindler's main argument against liberalism stems from the fact that it represents a clear departure from the perception of reality as it is embodied in Christian synthesis of the Jewish particular order of history and the Greek universal order of being. According to Schindler, in the work of its founding fathers Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, liberalism replaced the traditional Christian concept of human nature with an abstract notion of the human being isolated from any concrete and actual hierarchically ordered web of interpersonal relations. The society founded on 'social contract' has substituted the 'concretely real' of the actual world with what is 'essentially unreal', which thereafter serves as a basic horizon that penetrates the overall 'construction of reality'. It constitutes 'the originating principle […] "coloring" all the things that follow from it'.[14]

Liberalism, therefore, cannot be perceived only as a practical solution to the practical problems of early modern society. Liberalism is rather a theoretical horizon for a practical policy; its core lies in a metaphysical or theological conviction that God is not a pure act, as it is defined in classical metaphysics, but a pure potency – *potentia absoluta*.[15] God has become only a possibility and his actual reality is arbitrary. In this situation, 'reality of God […] becomes essentially arbitrary […] The actuality of human power suddenly acquires a certain supremacy at the very same time it is rendered anchorless, without an internal order.'[16]

The result of such a situation is a dissolution of the whole order of reality, the renunciation of the ontological foundation of the world. In

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[15] David C. Schindler, *The Politics of the Real, The Church between Liberalism and Integralism* (Steubenville: New Polity Press, 2021), 6–7.
[14] Schindler, *The Politics of the Real*, 22.
[15] Schindler further developed the idea of liberalism as 'a horizon of understanding' in the following article: David C. Schindler, 'Liberalism, Religious Freedom and the Common Good: The Totalitarian Logic of Self-Limitation,' *Communio: International Catholic Review* 40 (Summer-Fall 2013): 577–615.
[16] Schindler, *The Politics of the Real*, 30.

the classical Greek interpretation of being, lower realities of being are always interpreted in the light of the higher. When the highest principle and highest reality is conceptualised as a pure potency, this order is reversed and 'God gets reconceived as a function of religion, religion as a function of human culture, culture as social construct, society as psychology, psychology as neuro-biology, neuro-biology as configurations of physical events, physical events as "accidental collocations of atoms", and so forth.'[17]

These considerations point to the necessity of proper metaphysical foundations of social and political order. In the next part of the paper, we would like to propose several metaphysical principles, which we found crucial for the establishment of such an order. We also hope that they might serve as an initial inspiration for a reflection on the question of social reality in the light of a Trinitarian ontology. We will proceed from Schindler's seminal work *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* which constitutes one of the most important contemporary contributions to the discussion on the metaphysical foundations of social and political order.[18]

3. Symbolical Order

The following section is focused on the direct impulses and inspirations for our topic that can be derived from Schindler's discussion on classical and modern conceptions of liberty. It aims to address three points concerning the symbolical order of reality, relationality of human persons, and freedom itself. Although the main theme of Schindler's book is obviously the problem of freedom, it seems to be more appropriate to start our searching for possible links between Trinitarian ontology and social theory with another key concept of his thinking. A concept which promises to offer fruitful insight into the mutual relation between the transcendent reality of Trinity and the immanent reality of a social order.

An analogy is usually taken as a methodological tool or a path which might be used if we strive to elevate our rationality to the heights of

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[17] Schindler, *The Politics of the Real*, 32.
[18] David C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Moder Liberty* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

metaphysical principles.[19] However, in *Freedom from Reality*, Schindler uses another category for describing the intimate connection between the metaphysical or ontological order and the living cultural or social reality. One of the principal ideas which might be found in the book is the concept of *symbol* and *symbolical order (*of reality). It seems that, along with analogy, the symbolical should be considered as one of the founding principles of the Trinitarian ontology of human person and, derivatively, as a basis for our reflections on a social order.

Schindler applies *symbolical* as a juxtaposition to *diabolical*, which serves his main argument about the diabolical nature of modern liberty. Nevertheless, our concern here is not to discuss the inner nature of modern freedom itself. Thus, we will not address the etymological and philosophical differences between these two. Rather, we will focus on the nature of the *symbolical order* as such. 'We take the form of the symbol to be a description of the nature of things generally.'[20] Symbolical, therefore, serves as a basic metaphysical principle. In developing his concept of symbolical order, Schindler proceeds from the work of French and German philosophers Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Specifically, he uses Ricoeur's concept of 'double-intentionality',[21] an idea that, in a symbol, unlike in allegory, a second, deeper meaning of a sign is inseparable from a first, literal meaning. Symbol unifies both levels and, in the original, etymological sense of the word, '*makes present* a meaning that cannot be simply translated into other terms, that is, replaced by a concept or a set of concepts'.[22]

The richness of symbolical metaphysical thinking cannot be limited only to the technical, external connection between two sides, or two levels of a symbol. Typical of Schindler's metaphysical thinking, he points out the 'boundless wealth of significance', generosity, and abundance, which springs from a concrete indwelling of the source of the meaning in its outer expression. The actuality of the donative and generous character of a symbol is profoundly expressed in a ritual of friendship. It is not a mere coincidence that all key components presented in Schindler's book, the idea of symbolical order, the good,

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[19] Cf. David C. Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 81–84; see also the classic work by Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics – Original Structure and Universal Rhythm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

[20] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 155.

[21] Cf. Vít Hušek, *Symbol ve filosofii Paula Ricoeura* (Svitavy: Trinitas, 2004), 33.

[22] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 153.

freedom, and friendship, are intrinsically connected and form deep unity of being itself. The symbolical expression of friendship in ancient *tessera hospitalis*, which gave an origin to the term symbol itself, does not found the relationship between friends but, on the other hand, grows up from the preceding actuality of this relationship. Schindler here reverses original direction of Ricoeur's epistemological/phenomenological interpretation of symbol and emphasises the ontological basis of symbolical language. It is precisely the generosity of the source that is embodied in the symbolical expression.

This idea of the ontological rootedness of symbolical language brings us to the vision of a whole symbolical order as such. In his discussion of classical metaphysics, especially of Plato and Aristotle,[23] Schindler comes to an idea of symbolical unity as the aptest description of cosmos and thus the whole reality. Citing from Plato's *Timaeus*, he defines the symbolical conception of cosmos in the following way: 'an ordered whole that has its foundation in a transcendent cause, understood as most perfect and so as most essentially generous.'[24] The symbolical nature of social and cultural phenomena is linked together in one unified whole. In this regard, Schindler's symbolical interpretation of culture might resemble the approach of symbolical anthropology, which views the immanent order of culture precisely as a dense network of symbols. In the words of American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, culture is 'a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.'[25] The decisive moment in which Schindler takes a different direction than Ricoeur with phenomenological analysis or Geertz and symbolical anthropology lies in the participation of symbolical order in transcendent meaning, above all in goodness. And it is this moment which opens the idea of cosmos as a symbolical order to Trinitarian ontology.

Symbolical order, which the cosmos is, is not an order extrinsically constructed by human beings but an order which springs from the participation of men in goodness. In our opinion, it is the poetic quality of Schindler's language which largely contributes to his successful exposition of this issue. Description of reality as symbolical order

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[23] See the Part III Retrieving the Origin as the Essence of Freedom of Schindler's *Freedom from Reality*.

[24] Plato *Timaeus* 29e, cited in Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 155.

[25] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

requires symbolical deepness of the language. And Schindler masters it. In this perspective, we might say that the symbolical order is not an extrinsic 'joining with the transcendent good', but rather 'a joining together of realities *in* the good; the transcendent becomes present in the differentiation of the unity and a unification of the diverse'.[26] The concept of participation emerges here as an essential dimension of the symbolic order.[27]

Schindler develops this idea of participation in his analysis of Plato's idea of freedom.[28] In this context, the image of the 'Golden Chain' of love appears, which binds together all degrees of reality, 'from the most purely intelligible to the most purely sensible' in a chain of ontological dependence.[29] As Schindler explains later in the book, this golden chain or thread, through which every man participates in the ontological deepness of reality, is the *intrinsic* and *active* foundation of human freedom and the precondition for fruitfulness originally associated with it.[30]

Although Schindler does not address in detail the role of Christianity in shaping of the symbolical order, from several remarks dispersed through *Freedom from Reality*, it is obvious that it is in Christian revelation, where the idea of symbolical order reaches its fullest expression.[31] In the light of revelation, we can see a transcendent first principle, 'the radical generosity that is the source of *all* things,' entering into history. The foundation of a meaningful cosmos itself thus became a part of human history. Symbolical order, therefore, cannot be observed only as ahistorical, immutable cosmological order but must always include recognition of historicity in a concrete tradition.[32]

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[26] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 197.

[27] Cf. David C. Schindler, 'What's the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context,' *Nova et Vetera* 5, no. 3 (2007) (a version of this essay has been published on-line in *The Saint Anselm Journal*: https://www.anselm.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Institute%20of%20SA%20Studies/4.5.3.2g_31Schindler.pdf).

[28] For a discussion on participation by Plato, see: Schindler, 'What's the Difference?,' 4–8 (online version)

[29] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 298.

[30] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 309.

[31] The role of Christian revelation in bringing about the fullness of the symbolical order and freedom should be addressed in the second part of the intended trilogy of which 'Freedom from Reality' is the first part.

[32] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 270–271.

Our considerations about possible connections between the Trinitarian ontology and social order will consequently take the idea of symbolical order of reality as its starting point. It is in the symbolical order where we can see human persons participating in goodness, 'sharing in a larger, ordered whole, a sharing that naturally tends to objectify itself in public realities, and thus to join people together, to join man and nature, God and the world.'[33]

4. Human Person in Relations

The second point for our considerations concerning the relationship between Trinitarian ontology and social reality might be found in Schindler's reflections on human relationality. The mystery of human life in relation represents one of the pivotal themes in the philosophy and theology through the 20th century and into the beginning of the new millennium. Begun by the now-classical treatment of the theme in Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, the question of relation and relativity makes a recurrent topic of modern thought. As it is clear from other papers presented in this issue, this question is also a crucial one for the anthropological consequences of Trinitarian ontology.[34]

Now, let us briefly describe how this point is addressed in the work of D. C. Schindler.[35] In his interpretation of the classical notion of freedom, relation to the other forms an intrinsic part of liberty. It is also the recognition of otherness that is an essential requirement for the ontological affirmation of the priority of good, which enables human freedom.[36] But quite interestingly, Schindler posits his arguments about the relationality of human persons in the framework of another, seemingly different, question of equality. How are the principles of freedom, good, and otherness related to equality, and what this might tell us about human relationality?

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[33] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 156.
[34] In the expression of Joseph Ratzinger: 'The human person is the event of being of relativity.' Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, 'Retrieving the Tradition, Concerning the notion of person in theology,' *Communio International Catholic Review* 17 (Fall, 1990): 439–454.
[35] Apart from our discussion on *Freedom from Reality* see also: David C. Schindler, 'Enriching the Good: Toward the Development of a Relational Anthropology,' *Communio International Catholic Review* 37 (Winter 2010): 643–659. For Schindler's philosophical anthropology see further: David C. Schindler, *Love and the Postmodern Predicament: Rediscovering the Real in Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018).
[36] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 3–4.

The discussion of equality is a part of chapter 2 of *Freedom from Reality*, which is focused on the interpretation of the political thought contained in John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*. Here, Schindler examines the political consequences of the metaphysical priority of potency over actuality in Locke's reasoning. Equality is, in Locke's interpretation, one of the basic descriptions of the state of nature. The equality of nature fundamentally means an abstraction from all differentiations brought about by the actuality of the relations of things in the real world ordered in the hierarchy of sub-ordinations and super-ordinations. The substitution of the world of actual ordered relations by the supposed abstract equal state of nature consequently implies 'a radically nonrelational understanding of human beings'.[37]

For Schindler, the relational conception of human nature stands in stark opposition to Locke's own mechanical vision of the universe. In Locke's cosmos, humans are merely 'unrelated and undifferentiated units lying next to each other all at the same level'.[38] To protect the reality of human lives and their actual value, it is necessary to protect the above mentioned symbolical order of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. The relationality of human beings thus presupposes an idea of hierarchy, which is the hierarchy of goods that encompasses the differentiation of actual relation and connects them into an analogical unity.

Hence, we can observe the emergence of two contrasting visions of humanity. On the one hand, Lockean quantitative and mechanical idea of human nature tends to the spatial understanding of equality. Equality primarily means my *potency* to develop the space of my own freedom, which is not endangered by the intrusion of others. In this sense, human relationships are seen as an encroachment upon or threat to my freedom. They have the form of hostility, which limits my potency. Therefore, political and social order tends to 'fence off' individual human beings from one another. In other words, individual human persons come to live in a constant competition with one another, which is not far from the state of a constant civil war.[39]

On the other hand, we find the society of men linked together by the 'golden chain of freedom', which binds them in one *polis* and, at the

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[37] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 85.
[38] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 85.
[39] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 86–87.

same time, embeds them in the symbolical order of the good. Schindler emphasises the essentially communal characteristic of human liberty, most particularly in his exposition of Plato's and Aristotle's conception of freedom. In the conclusion of his interpretation of Plato on this point, this fact is emphasised in the following words: '[…] the deepest meaning of freedom in Plato is fruitful attachment to all others in the good, a being bound by the liberating golden thread of reason and common law.'[40] This vision of social and political life primarily in relation to what is absolute is significant for our efforts to find a path from a Trinitarian ontology to social reality. The praise of God lies at the heart of our shared political life, in Plato's words 'the only serious thing is praise of God.'[41]

Accordingly, the idea of the indispensable orientation of humans towards a shared life in political society is conveyed in Aristotle's political philosophy. Mutual relations in a polis are, moreover, conditioned by the actuality of the common good, which precedes all interactions of citizens and enables their freedom and relationality. In this sense, a polis, basically a community joint in life, precedes its individual members, not as a compromise of their individual freedom, as it might be considered in a modern conception of freedom, but as 'its precondition, or indeed its very essence.'[42]

The specific character of human relationality has been demonstrated above. We have shown that relations form a substantial part of human nature, one of the defining principles of the human being. In this view, metaphysical relationality contrasts with the modern anthropological vision, rooted in Locke's conception of freedom, of men formally independent and equal and, therefore, isolated and in competition with each other. If we dare to deepen our reflections on this theme, we might even conclude that human relationality symbolically expresses the relationality of being as such.[43] And it is in the contemplation of the metaphysical meaning of relationality where one of the main concerns of Trinitarian ontology lies.[44] In the words of W. Norris-Clarke, the self-communicative relationality of beings rises from the fact that

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[40]   Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 322.
[41]   Plato, *Laws* 803c, cited in Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 317.
[42]   Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 357.
[43]   'To *be* is to be *substance-in-relation*.' Norris Clarke, *Osoba a bytí*, 20–26.
[44]   Hemmerle, *Theses*, 36–38.

'they are all diverse modes of participation in the infinite goodness of the one Source, whose very being is identically self-communicative Love'.[45] Theologically, this idea finds its most proper expression in the mystery of the Trinity. Nevertheless, revelation and philosophy do not contradict here each other but together point to the innermost depths of being.[46]

At the end of our reflection of human relationality, we can therefore see the source of the Good, Love, and self-communication that lies in the heart of human life in relations and which is undeniably Trinitarian.[47] Thanks to David C. Schindler, we can also realise the social and political dimension of this mystery and the close connection between human relationality and the metaphysical source of social life.

5. Freedom

Freedom is, by its very nature, one of the fundamental characteristics of human nature. As was observed by Piero Coda, freedom is the unique expression of human dignity, and in an analogical sense of *maior dissimilitudo in similitudine*, liberty points to the Triune God as its archetype and principle. In a certain sense, 'the Trinity is Freedom'.[48] Freedom should therefore play a prominent role in our considerations on Trinitarian ontology. As Coda reminds us, freedom is an essential manifestation of being and, in the light of Trinitarian revelation, is identified with *agape*, with love. This ultimate unity between freedom and love is perceived most importantly in the act of giving: 'being the being of love, it is the very act by which each one of the divine Persons […] is himself in the giving to the others who in turn return him to himself'.[49] The essence of freedom is, therefore, to be found in the realm of love and relations. These reflections open up a direct path to Schindler's deliberation about freedom.

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[45] William Norris Clarke, 'Person, Being and St. Thomas,' *Communio International Catholic Review* 19 (Winter 1992): 606.

[46] Norris Clarke, *Osoba a bytí*, 19.

[47] František Burda, *Za hranice kultur* (Brno: CDK, 2016): 153–157; see also Jan Hojda, 'Diakonia jako účast člověka na věčném sdílení trojiční lásky: Teologicko antropologická východiska diakonie na pozadí encykliky Deus caritas est,' *Studia Theologica* 18, no. 3 (2016): 142–143.

[48] Coda, *From the Trinity*, 501–502.

[49] Coda, *From the* Trinity, 503.

If a true notion of freedom is necessary for a proper understanding of being, it is also indispensable for a proper understanding of society. An authentic grasp of freedom is what distinguishes the symbolical and diabolical order of social and political life; it is what orients the polis towards the good or towards its bitter division. We will therefore conclude our considerations with the sketch of Schindler's conception of freedom.

Freedom is abundance.[50] Schindler strives to reconstruct an appropriate notion of freedom from the very roots of European culture and to put it in contrast with the modern idea of liberty. As we have noted several times, it is not our aim in this paper to present Schindler's critique of modern freedom as such, but it might be useful to briefly summarise its main traits to highlight the differences between both ancient and modern conception of freedom. Schindler describes the basic shape of modern liberty through comparison and synthesis of the concept of freedom in the writings of Locke, Spinoza, and Kant. He summarises common tendencies in their understandings of freedom in several points: For modern philosophers, freedom is a kind of active power that is incompatible with human heteronomy. It reduces political order to the preservation of the individual's natural rights through the regulation of external behaviour. It is also characterised by a rejection of any a priori specific religious claim and by the tendency to collapse into the objectivity of some form of determinism, whether it be natural, logical, psychological, metaphysical, or political.[51] He concludes that modern liberty is 'a view of freedom as spontaneous and unconditioned causality, or as active power that produces affects as a result of self-originating energy *rather than* receiving determination from outside of itself.'[52]

The ancient tradition of liberty is strikingly different. Schindler searches for the foundations of this tradition not only in the work of the great Greek philosophers, but he reaches as far as to the beginning of Indo-European languages and culture.[55] Both Greek *eleutheria*

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[50] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 290, 315–316.
[51] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 133.
[52] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 147.
[55] Greek word ἐλευθερία derives from the Indo-European root **leudh-*, from which comes the old Slavic and Germanic word for 'people' (*Leute*, etc.). Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 287.

(ἐλευθερία) and Latin *liber* have etymological connotations that deeply differ from a modern idea of autonomy and independence. They emphasise the flourishing of both the individual and the community enabled by the common source of maturation. Freedom is akin to the unimpeded growth of a seed which reaches its fullness and thus points to 'fruitful inner abundance', 'perfection', or 'completion'.[54] The connection between freedom and the idea of the good is here obvious.

We can find an echo of these linguistic reflections in Plato and Aristotle. Plato found freedom in belonging with others to the good. Again, we can see here opposition to any individualised notion of freedom. What is most my own, what defines me, and what enables me to fully develop myself is not a mere potentiality, a clearly demarcated free space, but the universal good, which is in turn 'ownmost' for everyone.[55] Such a conception of liberty is not and should not be perceived as an obstacle to human self-determination. As Schindler reminds us, Plato confirms that the soul moves itself. But it is the good and the beautiful that is a cause of its self-motion. Therefore, freedom is not an external category attached to human existence, but the intrinsic and active participation in the good, which is both the source and the goal of the life of the soul. I can be free because the good is productive and effective in me. What is given does not limit me but constantly opens new horizons of experience: '[…] one who is in love with beauty for its own sake […] constantly surprises; his actions spring from within, with all of the "newness" we associate with birth'.[56]

Schindler considers both Plato and Aristotle as parts of one tradition, which genuinely grows from the roots of European culture and which recognise the original sense of fruitfulness and abundance in their concept of freedom. Even philosophically, Aristotle should be perceived as a member of Platonic tradition.[57] In this regard, they develop the concept of freedom in a similar direction. According to Schindler, Plato 'emphasizes the absoluteness of the good', while Aristotle 'underscores its *appearance* to each of us as the principle of our action'. Whereas Plato focuses on 'the ruling power of the good', Aristotle 'highlights the

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[54] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 290–291.
[55] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 297.
[56] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 313.
[57] For the comparison of Platonism and Aristotelianism see Endre von Ivánka, *Plato christianus* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2003), 62–63.

way we mover ourselves'.[58] Nevertheless, all these distinctions form one complex classical tradition of freedom. Aristotle's concept of freedom finds its expression in the virtue of liberality. What is essential for our exploration of the importance of liberty in social order in the light of Trinitarian ontology is an emphasis on freedom as a simultaneity of receiving and giving with respect for the primacy of the actuality of the good. In Schindler's interpretation, Aristotle's liberality does not mean acquisition or cumulation of one's own property, as it appeared to be in the case of Locke's concept of freedom, but it is rather a communication or a passing on of what one discovered and gained in his life. Liberality culminates in the activity of contemplation, which itself is the freest action that receives the reality of this world in wonder and does not instrumentalise it for man's own purposes but rather affirms the intrinsic goodness of being. This is yet another expression or echo of the original sense of freedom as 'the superabundant goodness that generates something truly other.'[59]

Conclusion

The difference between the modern and the classical concept of liberty is once again clear. But what should be our primary reaction to learning about the deep flaws of the modern notion of freedom? Does it represent a new call for yet another nostalgic and reactionary conservative revolution? The main aim of Schindler's discussion of freedom is to renew our sense of a given reality that transcends our action. In other words, the recognition of the primacy of actuality over potency is a chief factor in the renewal of the classical tradition of the metaphysical notion of freedom, which cannot be simply confused with any notion of nostalgia or plain conservativism. Rather it aims to the rediscovery of the real source of our freedom, which animates and liberates all human actions. We should again realise that the problem of liberty is not in the first place a problem of external structures, which we should emancipate ourselves from, but rather a mystery of the inner source of the abundance of goodness. Therefore, the recovery of freedom cannot be grounded in a revolutionary transformation

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[58] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 324.
[59] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 350–352.

of cultural and social institutions but primarily in the painful search for the metaphysical roots of the symbolical order of reality. It is our quest for beauty, goodness, and truth in grateful affirmation of what is given, which might bring about the true meaning of freedom. In the words of David C. Schindler, 'the essential response to the diabolical is not execution but exorcism, which […] means a reorienting of the given reality to what is good and true.'[60]

In this regard, it would be aimless to make a plain juxtaposition of old and modern philosophy or old and modern culture and then try to interpret them through either conservative or liberal perspective as progress or decline of our civilisation. As Schindler puts it, 'to affirm the goodness of modernity, in an ontological sense, requires a recovery of its roots in tradition'.[61] The reality of modernity should be placed in the context of the tradition that gave birth to it and which, despite explicit detachment of modern philosophy, still inspirits the goodness present in it. To put it another way, 'saving modernity requires us to interpret modernity against itself'.[62] It is also important to note that it is not only Greek tradition of Plato and Aristotle that represents the ancient tradition of liberty. On the contrary, there is 'an insufficient sense of genuine novelty of human action' in Greek philosophy, and ultimately 'Plato and Aristotle failed to understand and appreciate that man as such is free'.[63] It is only with the advent of Christianity, and specifically in the resolution of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the ancient Church, that a full understanding of freedom could be developed. The proper position of freedom in the social and political order thus cannot be founded only in the revival of the tradition of Greek political philosophy but ultimately consists in the Trinitarian ontology.

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[60] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 282; as Schindler mentions in another part of the book: '[…] the response to possession is not *execution* but *exorcism*, which is not a rejection but a reorientation, from the innermost depths, to the good.' Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 195.

[61] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 283.

[62] Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 283; Schindler cites here Robert Spaeman, 'A Philosophical Autobiography,' in *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essay on Nature, God, and the Human Person*, edited by D. C. Schindler and Jeanne Schindler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13.

[63] According to Schindler 'this inadequacy is due to an inadequate conception of the primacy of actuality, a conception that tends to reduce potency to act in such a way that potency, so to speak, "adds nothing" simpliciter.' *Freedom from Reality*, 286.

It is our hope that the discussion of the fundamental ontological principles presented in this article, mainly the idea of the social reality as the symbolical order analogically manifesting the beauty of the source of being, the idea of human being fundamentally defined as a being in relations, and the idea of proper freedom rooted in the goodness of things, prepares us for a deeper understanding of social order in the light of the Trinitarian ontology, the Trinitarian understanding of being.

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