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**THE CONCEPT OF PERSON IN MOUNIER'S PHILOSOPHY:
CONVERGENCES WITH ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

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Abstract: As a representative of French personalism in the twentieth century, Emmanuel Mounier can be an interlocutor for the orthodox theology of the person, especially given the fact that he does not hide the Christian sources of his philosophy. The present article identifies his main lines of thought on the concept of person, namely the three dimensions: incarnation, communion and vocation. The incarnational dimension expresses the link of person with the material world and manifests itself in the person's commitment to society. The communitarian dimension expresses the constitutive relationship of the person with mankind, with all other human persons, and reveals itself in the constant effort of dispossession and abnegation in favour of others. The vocational dimension manifests, for its part, the indelible connection of person with God, and its expression is the act of meditation and interiorization. These are the dimensions that reflect a dynamic structure of person. The article then tries to formulate an answer to the questions: can one perceive a certain compatibility or affinity between his thought and the orthodox view of the person? If so, what would it be? For this purpose, Mounier's vision is succinctly confronted with three orthodox theologians of the twentieth century: the Russian theologian V. Lossky, the Romanian theologian D. Staniloae and the Greek metropolitan I. Zizioulas.

Key words: person, individual, communion, vocation, incarnation, commitment, dispossession, meditation, love, apophatism.

1. Introduction

This article aims to identify the constituting elements of personhood in the philosophy of Emmanuel Mounier, the advocate of French personalism in the 1930s, and reread his work in the light of contemporary orthodox theology. More specifically, it addresses the following questions: is there any compatibility between Mounier's concept and the orthodox view of personhood? If so, what would be its defining features? I investigate the possibility of a dialogue between orthodox theology, as inherited from the oriental patristic tradition, and western philosophical or theological thought of the Latin patristic tradition; regarding Mounier's philosophy, scholars see in his personalism an "Augustinian orientation" (Petit 2006, 231-9). I will analyse in the first chapter the three dimensions of personhood as defined by Mounier, namely embodiment, communion and vocation, and will single out commonalities with the orthodox theology in the second chapter. As an introduction however, I must first address a preliminary question: why did I choose this philosopher as a term of comparison with the orthodox theology? My choice was determined by the two following arguments:

a) Firstly, Mounier himself openly testifies in 1934 a certain *Christian filiation* of his philosophy: "It is no secret that the positions I am defending here are of Christian inspiration, and that many of the elements gathered, for example, in *Esprit* are Christian elements" (Mounier 1961, 217). Among his sources of influence, there is the orthodox philosopher Berdyaev (Lurol 2000, 69-117) of whom Mounier considered himself a follower (Arjakovsky 2006, 51, 166), regularly attending the circles he organised in the late 1920s and early 1930s where philosophers and theologians of all faiths met (Berdyaev 1958, 333). It is regarding this commitment to the Christian faith that, at the time of his death in 1950, Mounier would be praised as a "man of the Church" (Marrou 1950, 888) as well as a "God's persevering witness" (Depierre 1950, 905). Concerning the personhood, Ricœur furthermore distinguishes in Mounier's thought elements "inspired directly" by Christian themes (Ricœur 1950, 868-70). It is worth recalling that the 1930s marked, initially in France and then almost everywhere in the Catholic world, the end of an isolated theology and the beginning of "a new stage of fine symbiosis between theological reflection, philosophy and science" (Campanini 2006, 282). In other words, Mounier's work is to be situated in this movement of return to religiousness, where the philosophical reflection is primarily penetrated by a "deep religious intentionality". Specialists such as Petit (2006, 25-91), Possenti (2006, 263-77), Campanini (2005) or Bély (1999, 94-108 and 2005, 215-32) have for instance, devoted themselves, for the past two decades, to highlighting the contribution of Christian theology in the construction of Mounier's personalism.

b) The second argument in support of my choice arises from the fame that Mounier enjoys during the XXth century and from the influence of his philosophy both in Europe – Italy, Spain (Ferreiro 2005, 299-312), Poland (Witko 2011, 145-55), the German-speaking countries (Nicoletti 2005, 313-18), etc. – and outside Europe – Latin America (Andreola 2005, 333-44), especially Brazil (Villela-Petit 2005, 329-42), and Africa (Nanema 2005, 343-67). His thought stimulated and inspired philosophers of his time, such as P. Ricœur (Pagliacci 2006, 337-55), as well as theologians, such as K. Wojtyła (Petit 2008, 71-90 and 2009, 75-92), the future Pope John Paul II (Domenach 1985, 176). Thanks to the latter, French personalism even played a meaningful role in the evolution of the conciliar Catholicism of Vatican II (Loubet del Bayle 1998, 236). Considering this relationship of Mounier with the Catholic world, I was of the opinion that confronting him with the orthodox theology would provide with an interesting material for critical examination.

2. The concept of person in Mounier's philosophy: 'incarnation', 'communion' and 'vocation'

The first issue of the French journal *Esprit* published in October 1932 begins with Mounier's article "Refaire la Renaissance" where the author advocates the "primacy of the spiritual" as a way out of the crisis then facing the Western world (Mounier 1961, 137). According to him, this path was the unique appropriate reaction towards the "primacy of the material", induced by Marxism and liable for the metaphysical and moral "disorder" of that time. Mounier proposes an authentic revolution aiming at the rehabilitation of the spiritual, i.e. a revolution "in the name of the spirit" (Mounier 1961, 149). Insofar as "spiritual = personal" (Mounier 1961, 175), we can already see the roots of his future engagement for the person and its dignity. In this sense, the revolutionary program for a new Renaissance implies a *personalist revolution* and a *communitarian revolution*: "[The Renaissance] is to be renewed in two ways, if, complete, it is twofold, personalist and communitarian" (Mounier 1961, 184). The *person*, as a correlative of *communion*, is therefore the prime solution to the European and global challenges, and the prime objective for the new Renaissance.

What is the person in Mounier's philosophy? As noted by Bély, his concept relies on the *apophatic and mystic tradition* of Christianity (Bély 1999, 96). Although he is well acquainted with the apophatic tradition of Neoplatonism preached by Plotinus, Porphyry or Damascius, that postulates silence in front of the mystery, Mounier takes on the *Christian apophatism* legacy stemming from Dionysius the Areopagite. Unlike Neoplatonism, this apophatism consists in conjugating the *negative* way with the *positive* one. Consequently, undertaking in a 1934 article to answer the question: what is a person?, Mounier structures his essay in two parts: the first, formulated in negative terms, attests the difficulty of

grasping the person conceptually, and the second, formulated in positive terms, nevertheless dares to break through the wall of mystery. The first part includes three fundamental *negations*: 1) The person is not the *individual*, whose features are dissolution in the material, dispersal, isolation and avarice; 2) The person is not the *consciousness* which we have of it, i.e. the roles that she plays on the stage of society; 3) The person is not to be confused with *personality* which stands for *character* and is considered as a “vicar of the person”. Furthermore, the second part of Mounier's essay proceeds with three *affirmations* which he introduces this way: “[The person] is a *presence* in me. We can, however, describe the person according to the volume in which this presence manifests itself [...]. The person is the total volume of man. [...] *Vocation, incarnation and communion are the three dimensions of the person*” (Mounier 1961, 176-8). Given the permanence and the importance of these three dimensions, which constitute Mounier's personalist inheritance (Villanueva 2005, 21-2), we will now analyse each one of them in greater detail.

2.1. The incarnational dimension of person

From the outset, it is important to observe that the first anthropological assertions put forward by Mounier in his founding article “Refaire la Renaissance” (1932), already anticipate the three dimensions of the person. Aiming to highlight the *relational being* of the man, the author declares that he is constitutently affiliated to three realms: “Under him, the realm of the material where he ought to bring the divine spark; next to him, the realm of mankind [...]; above him the totality of the spirit which offers itself to his embrace and pushes him beyond his limits” (Mounier 1961, 153). His connection with these three realms constitutes the foundation of a “new relational humanism” (Toso 2005, 35 and Danese 2005, 29-49), that is to say, a humanism which opens to *material world*, to *mankind* and to *God* by virtue of his *embodiment*, *communion* and *vocation* to transcend himself. But the relational being of mankind is assured only to the extent that these three dimensions go together. The absolutisation of one to the detriment of others consequently results in materialism, communism or spiritualism.

As for the “embodied and inserted condition” of mankind, it rests on the dichotomous relationship of the *soul* to the *body* (Mounier 1962, 217). Emphasising incarnation, mounierian personalism proposes the perspective of a “spiritual realism” opposed to both the idealism (or spiritualism) and materialism of the Marxist era. This amounts to putting forward that the person is reducible neither to the spirit alone, for it could not exist in seclusion of the body and thus independently of nature, nor to the sole body, for it could not be confused with objects or impersonal things. The person is “flesh and spirit” (Mounier 1961, 180), that is, “an indivisible unit” (Mounier 2010, 13); the reduction to the body, as mainly proposed by materialism, is corrected by the affirmation of vocation,

whereas the reduction to the spirit is rejected by the affirmation of incorporation. Let us observe the latter, because it is one of the three affirmations that followed the three negations in his 1934 article: "My person is incarnated. It can never, therefore, get rid completely of the servitudes of the material, considering the conditions in which it is placed [...]. The problem is not to escape from the sensitive and particular life, amongst things [...], but to transfigure it" (Mounier 1961, 178).

The categorical affirmation of the incorporation of the person brings Mounier closer to Christian theology whose "axis of thought" is, as he himself observes, "the indissoluble union of soul and body" (Mounier 2010, 24), and especially to Catholic theology for which the carnal condition of the human person is a "dominant theme" (Mounier 1961, 773). Of the three dimensions of the person, incorporation is particularly straightforward in Christianity where the Verb and the Cross restore the "friendship between mankind and nature" (Mounier 1961, 154), unknown to the man of Antiquity: "That the human condition is the condition of an embodied being, nowhere else does this result of reflective analysis receives a greater substantiation than in the religion of the Incarnate Verb" (Mounier 1961, 772-3). It is through the restorative work of the Verb that the heaviness and thickness of the sensible world can no longer be an argument in favour of the schism between the world and the spirit, as it was in Greek philosophy or Gnosticism.

At this stage of our development, it should be noted that Mounier assigns to each dimension of the person a specific field of practice. If vocation proceeds from *meditation*, and communion from *dispossession* or self-sacrifice, incorporation involves, as far as it is concerned, *commitment*. Here lays a very important aspect of Mounier's thinking, as far as he can be proclaimed to be the "theorist par excellence of commitment" (Kemp 1973, 26). He himself described his philosophical project as a "personalism of commitment" (Mounier 1962, 190-6), and scholars also attest his "philosophy of commitment" (Petit 2006, 215-9). As a being "by things and by others", as "me-here-now" (Mounier 1962, 192), the person, unlike the isolated *cogito* of philosophers, relentlessly declares "Adsum. Present!" (Mounier 1961, 738-41). The person cannot be considered as separation, escape or alienation from the world, but always as presence, responsibility and commitment in the concrete context of his life. That is why this personalism is the complete opposite of spiritualism, which neglects the biological and economic servitudes of mankind.

But what exactly is commitment? What is its mission, its ultimate goal? As anticipated above, the person cannot escape the material, but it cannot dissolve in it either. His destiny is to *transfigure* the sensible world, and that is the meaning of commitment. Only man, amongst all creatures, has a dual ability to break apart from nature by his *knowledge* and *love* which makes him "God's co-operator" for the transformation of the world (Mounier 2010, 26). Intimately intertwined with the body of the human

person, the world becomes a “vast body”, hence its association with the destiny of the person: “It is not only my body which I entail in the activity of my person, but the whole universe which, as appendix of my body, I prompt to cooperate in the work of the Redemption or I use against it” (Mounier 1961, 774). In other words, commitment ultimately aims to bring the entirety of nature into the *personalisation movement*; its ultimate goal is the “personalisation of nature” (Mounier 2010, 32-5). Yet, this personalisation is correlative to *divinisation*: “the supreme vocation of the person is to deify himself by deifying the world, to personalise himself by personalising the world” (Mounier 1961, 766). As such it is the ultimate meaning of the human person's commitment.

2.2. The communitarian dimension of person

Discussing personalisation implies to emphasise that its fulfilment fundamentally depends on *communion*. I will now analyse this second assertion following the apophatic presentation of the person in 1934: “The person is only realised in the community: it does not mean that he has any chance of doing so by getting confounded in the *masses* [in the object's world]. A true community is a community of persons” (Mounier 1961, 182). The communitarian dimension of the person also occupies a very special place in Mounier's personalism, whose first anthropological assertions advocate a “rehabilitation of the community” as an antidote to the “metaphysics of loneliness” proclaimed in modern individualism (Mounier 1961, 158). This is why one of the particularities of Mounier's thinking is precisely the communitarian revolution. Undoubtedly, the *person* and the *communion* are the two pillars of his “communitarian personalism” (Domenach 1972, 63-92). Unlike individualism, concerned with “centring the individual on oneself”, this type of personalism affirms the person as a reality “to others and even in others, to the world and in the world, before being in oneself” (Mounier 1962, 209).

Here we notice the famous antagonism between the *individual* and the *person*: the individual is part of the “world of masses”, i.e. the world of the solitary self, while the person is part of the “communitarian we” (Mounier 1961, 190-1). The first is the world of irresponsibility, indifference and escape, whereas the communitarian we arises only from the person's fulfilment, and is the world of “affirmation, responsibility, presence, effort, fullness” (Mounier 1962, 209). The first is the world where men, stripped of their personal being, are seen as objects (Mounier 1961, 764), while the second is the communitarian world where everyone sees the other as his *neighbour*, as his own *you* (Mounier 1961, 539). We have to note, however, that man is more or less situated in both worlds at the same time, in the sense that the person, synonymous with openness, and the individual, synonymous with isolation and selfishness, coexist in him to a certain extent: “‘Individual’ and ‘person’ can nowhere be distinguished separately, but in ourselves is superimposed a degrading

process of individuation, which is a defeat, and an enriching process of personalisation, which responds to a call for transcendence" (Mounier 1961, 749).

Concerning the specific fields of practice of the three dimensions of the person, apart from incarnation which supposes engagement in society, communion implies for its part a *dispossession*, a constant effort of surpassing and renunciation. Mounier is here consistent with his metaphysics according to which "we possess only what we give or what we give ourselves" (Mounier 2010, 41). This is more specifically a revival and application of the biblical principle "*nihil habentes et omnia possidentes*" (2 Cor. 6, 10), impelling our author to declare: "I exist only to the extent that I exist for others" (Mounier 2010, 40). It is no longer the *cogito* validating the existence of the I, but its altruistic *relationship* to others. Yet, this dispossession in view of communion rests on a dual foundation: a) on the love lodged in the "heart" of the person (Mounier 1961, 236) and which only targets the person, never the individual; b) on the *unity of human nature*, according to which the "fundamental experience" or the "primitive fact" of the person is *communication* (Mounier 2010, 37), a movement towards others, and not solitary affirmation or separation. We should note that Mounier distances himself from the contemporary tendencies of rejection of all human essence or nature, and manifests himself in favour of a common background or a "one and indivisible" humanity, capable of explaining the history of humanity and the interpersonal community: "Personalism counts among its key ideas the affirmation of the unity of humanity in space and time, foreseen by something at the end of Antiquity and proclaimed by the Judeo-Christian tradition" (Mounier 2010, 49-50). It is this aspect that convinces Ricœur to position Mounier "in the line of an essential Thomism" (Ricœur 1950, 868-9).

2.3. The vocational dimension of person

We finally arrived at the third affirmation of Mounier about the person, namely the dimension of his vocation: "My person is in me the presence and unity of a timeless vocation, which calls on to surpass myself indefinitely" (Mounier 1961, 178). Wright considers that it is by means of the vocation that Mounier recovers the Christian meaning of the person, insofar as vocation is not to be confused with "professional vocation" (Wright 2017, 46). As an appeal to surpassing and transcendence, vocation is in Mounier's work a "unique and transcendent word that Christ tries to intimately slip to me down into the heart of the community of the faithful" (Mounier 1961, 750). It is a "silent call", uttered in a "language that would take a lifetime to translate" (Mounier 2010, 61), and every person has the duty to discover it, because no one else can do this in his place. That is to say that vocation expresses the third relation of human being, i.e. the relation with God.

The field of practice of vocation is *meditation*: understood as a movement of contemplation, in the sense of an “active conquest”, meditation has nothing to do with a withdrawal movement, in the sense of a “morbid rumination or introspection” (Mounier 2010, 54). It is more precisely a “movement of interiorisation”, complementary to the “movement of exteriorisation” carried out in engagement. This allows us to say that the person, by virtue of his vocation and incorporation, is “an inside that needs the outside” (Mounier 2010, 62-3), or a *meditation* that articulates with an *openness* (Mounier 1961, 752). As an ability to break with the environment, without separation, and to lead towards the profound, without shying away from its struggles in the world, vocation brings the person closer to the *intimus intimo meo*, to the inaccessible heart of his heart, where God reveals himself (Gal. 1, 15-16). It is the “secret of the soul” which enjoys “eminent dignity” by its constitution in the image and likeness of God and by his communion with the “intimate life of the Trinity” (Mounier 1961, 752). Thanks to this dignity, every person enjoys a “magisterial greatness” that makes their place in the world of persons “irreplaceable” (Mounier 2010, 61).

But what is precisely the role of vocation? In Mounier's philosophy, this role has two aspects: on the one hand, vocation *singles out or particularises* the person in relation to another, insofar as the call is for him unique and unrepeatable, and on the other hand, it *connects* the person to the community of people and inserts him into the common destiny of persons. In other words, the paradox of vocation is that it is both *singular* and *universal*: “[Vocation] does not have the primary value of being singular, because, while characterising it in a unique way, it brings man closer to the humanity of all the men. But at the same time as unifying, it is *singular in supplementation*” (Mounier 1961, 528). This aspect becomes obvious insofar as we take into account the Christian sense of the vocation as *appeal to holiness*: “Any vocation is inimitable. [...] Each saint differs infinitely from all others, and yet all tried only to imitate a single model: the Christ” (Mounier 1961, 751). All men are called to holiness, all have the same vocation, but everyone follows his own path in his own way, thus everyone has his own vocation.

To sum up our development, Mounier's approach manifests the influence of Christian mysticism, whose method consists in alternating the *negative* path with the *positive* one. In this way, by its resistance to any definition, the person has an *apophatic* dimension, expressed in both negative terms: the person is neither the individual nor the character; and in positive terms: the person is beyond, supratemporal, supra-conscious, etc. (Mounier 1961, 178). But the person also has a *cataphatic* dimension, centred on his relational or communitarian being: a) his relation to the material realm is based on his *incarnation*, whose field of practice is *commitment*; b) his relation to the society of men rests on *communion*, whose field of practice is *dispossession* on the basis of *love* and *unity of*

nature; c) his relation to God is a matter of *vocation*, whose field of practice is *meditation* and involves the contemplation and the building of an “inner life” (Mounier 2010, 53). I will now briefly discuss Mounier's legacy herewith analysed with contemporary orthodox theology.

3. Towards a rapprochement between Mounier and the orthodox theology

To illustrate this rapprochement, I will rely on three orthodox theologians of the twentieth century: the Russian theologian V. Lossky (1903-1958), the Greek metropolitan I. Zizioulas (born in 1931) and the Rumanian theologian D. Staniloae (1903-1993). Inevitably, there are singularities, and even divergences, between these authors, which cannot be mentioned here in view of the limited framework of this article. Far from proposing an exhaustive approach, our methodology will consist in privileging the relationship between Mounier and the orthodox theology of the person, which does not mean denying, or ignoring its differences and distances.

a) A first convergence between the two is based on the *method* underlying them, as partly discussed in the previous section. Like orthodox theology, Mounier takes as starting point the *apophatic* or enigmatic character of the person, that is to say his firm resistance to any location, definition or conceptual delimitation. However, neither Mounier nor the orthodox theology confine themselves to this observation: both then articulate, in an antinomic manner, a *cataphatic* character. By perceiving the person as total presence of the human being, Mounier confides at first his incapacity to deliver a “real definition” and declares that “the person is the protest of the mystery” against the “world without depths of the rationalisms” (Mounier 1961, 531). However, as this presence not only hides itself, but also *reveals* itself through a life experience, Mounier furthermore expresses himself in favour of a “designation” of the person, in favour of a breakthrough of the personal universe (Mounier 1961, 523).

Similarly, Lossky, aiming to reveal and defend apophatism as a “fundamental trait” of orthodox theology (Lossky 1944, 24), perceives the person above all as a mysterious and non-conceptual reality: “The mystery of a human person, which makes him absolutely unique, irreplaceable, cannot be grasped in a rational concept, defined by words” (Lossky 2006, 105). For lack of a definable property that would belong exclusively to the person and be alien to his nature (body and soul), which would distinguish the person from its nature, Lossky puts forward the only thing that can be said about the person: “his irreducibility to nature” (Lossky 2006, 118). But it does not mean that this mystery remains absolutely closed to others. Like Mounier, Lossky also asserts that “this irreducibility to any nature

cannot be defined but designated" because it can be grasped in a "personal relationship" that requires openness and reciprocity (Lossky 1964, 97). In this respect, Stăniloae is probably closer to Mounier, because of his perception of the person as a "mystery", but as a mystery from which a *meaning* or a *light* springs forth incessantly: "The experience of the person as a mystery allows us to recognise it as an inexhaustible source of the senses" (Stăniloae 2013, 94), since it is in itself a "light, but also a mystery" (Stăniloae 1991, 5). Indeed, this light is not perceptible only by means of reason or bodily senses, but "mainly through a spiritual sense", by love in communion (Stăniloae 1990, 91).

b) A second convergence between Mounier and orthodox theology lies in the distinction between the *person* and the *individual*. At the beginning of the personalist movement, Mounier puts forward this distinction which he later develops in the sense of an inner tension between two opposing movements, one of concentration, the other of dispersion: "Dispersion, avarice, these are the two marks of individuality. The person is mastery and choice, he is generosity. He is in his intimate orientation polarised at the opposite of the individual" (Mounier 1961, 525). However, this distinction, which can be found in many twentieth-century philosophers, is also reflected in the approaches of orthodox theologians. Borrowing most probably from Russian religious philosophy, Lossky perceives the individual as an isolated being who selfishly possesses a "part of the common nature", and the person as a being who is not limited to his fragment of human nature, who is not a part of the whole, but "contains virtually the whole", i.e. the entire human nature (Lossky 2006, 104-5, 116, 135). Thus, to return to the state of a person implies that the individual renounces his own, his content, his part of nature, to give it to others and thus to participate in the "unique nature of all" (Lossky 1944, 118-9). It is a similar meaning that Stăniloae confers to this distinction: "The person became an individual [...] because he wants to keep the nature that he possesses away from the whole of nature" (Stăniloae 2010, 424). In other words, compared to the individual, the person lives in communion with other persons (Stăniloae 1993, 45). Primal sin first, and every personal sin afterwards, only weaken the personal character, defined as opening to the relationship of love, and increase the individual character, designated as closure and hostility towards the neighbour (Stăniloae 1957, 16). Indeed, the same distinction, with particular nuances, is reiterated in Zizioulas: "Being a person is fundamentally different from being an individual [...], because the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static entity, but only insofar as it is *in relation*" (Zizioulas 2013, 331). The individual is synonymous with confinement and withdrawal, while the person is a reality in communion.

c) A third convergence between Mounier and orthodox theology lays in the fundamental *communitarian structure* of the person. From the beginning of his career, Mounier asserts the constitutive correlation

between the person and the communion, an aspect he largely exploited later: "We find, he says, the communion inserted in the very heart of the person, integral to his very existence" (Mounier 1961, 535). He is in that most likely influenced by Berdyaev, the author who also inspired Staniloae in his early career. Appropriating this thesis in his theology, Staniloae advances assertions very close to Mounier: "The man is a plenary person only to the extent that he stays in communion" (Stăniloae 1956, 331). In fact, all of Staniloae's thinking is, according to his testimony in 1993, focused on this problematic: "Person and communion are the two notions by which I have tried to develop what I consider to be the orthodox theology in its core; these two values are in a mutual dependency" (Stăniloae 1994, 12). However, it is the theologian Zizioulas who analyses more systematically this subject in his book *Being as Communion*, where he perceives the person as synonymous with relationality: "A person cannot be imagined in himself, but only in relationship" (Zizioulas 1985, 105), as long as "outside the communion of love, the person loses his uniqueness and becomes a being like others, a 'thing' without 'identity' and without 'name', without a face" (Zizioulas 1985, 49). In short, communion is for Zizioulas the expression of the *ekstatic* character of the person, by virtue of which his being opens and reveals itself (Zizioulas 2013, 331).

4. Conclusion

At the end of this article, and to provide an answer to my opening question, I can ascertain without hesitation some compatibility between Mounier and contemporary orthodox theology. Apart from his undeniable relation to Catholic theology – Mounier draws inspiration from this theology and stimulates it in return – we can also draw a parallel with Orthodox theology, although in an indirect way. I have brought to light three aspects: their analytical method conjugating the negative way with the positive one; the distinction between the person and the individual; and the communitarian structure of the person. This does not mean, however, that Mounier's thought is in its entirety comparable to this theology, because divergences do exist.

Firstly, Mounier does not present himself as theologian and therefore his discourse about the person does not have a theological basis, does not require God as inalienable foundation of the person. The paradigm of his thinking is not a theological one. Even though he makes sporadic affirmations about God, Christ, or the Church, they are only adjacent and betray sequentially the Christian background of his reflection. Moreover, I have the feeling that Mounier often censures himself, in order not to damage the sensibilities of a potential non-Christian reader. It is no secret he wants to be accessible to a wider audience, regardless of confession or religion, hence the ecumenical environment around the *Esprit* review.

Conversely, Orthodox theology fundamentally bases its personalistic reflection on the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas as formulated at the Ecumenical Councils: any statement about human person relies on God in Persons, given the constitution of man as *image* of God. The personal existence becomes therefore the expression of the iconic constitution of man.

Secondly, Mounier insists predominantly on the relational or communitarian dimension of the person and overlooks its ontological dimension. Although he distances himself from modern theories hostile to the concept of human *essence* or *nature*, Mounier never develops his own position in this regard. Indeed, insisting on the incarnational dimension of the person, he somehow moves away from the existentialist approaches of his age and develops a certain type of ontology, but these one is unable to identify the common ground for all persons. Instead, Orthodox theology, faithful to its Byzantine heritage, always articulates to the relational pole an ontological one, as it was crystallized in the age of dogmatic debates. The person is not only a factor in relationship, but also the concrete and real way of *subsistence* of a spiritual essence. In this way, Orthodox theology constantly likens the person to the Greek concept of *hypostasis*, which gives it a firmness and ontological consistency.

But beyond these divergences, I believe it is important to identify and evaluate the rapprochements between Mounier, the representative of 20th century personalist philosophy, and the Orthodox theology. Only in this way can we better understand the evolution and particularities of Orthodox theology, given the fact that the theology and philosophy have always been searched for one another and met often over the centuries. It is not a hazard that Orthodox theology rediscovers and re-evaluates the person in the 20th century, when the personalist, dialogical and existentialist philosophies were born. All these, each according to its method, propose new reflections on the concept of person. And the theologians, whether Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, have not hesitated to inspire and contribute to deepening this issue. In their turn, the philosophers have not detached themselves from the background of Christian thought and have not hesitated to appropriate theological ideas in order to enrich their systems. Finally, even though many of these Orthodox theologians have not reported directly to Mounier, yet they wrote in an age profoundly penetrated by his personalist ideas, hence the similarities observed here.

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