

Review of *L'ORDINE DELL'AMORE. LE SOCIETÀ OCCIDENTALI E LA MEMORIA DI DIO*. By David L. Schindler. Torino: Lindau, 2011. Reviewed by *Alessandra Gerolin*

This book consists in a selection of ten chapters originally published in the collection of essays *Ordering Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). In the Italian edition the essays have been grouped in two sections: the first consists in a series of studies on topics related to economy and politics considered from a philosophical, theological and cultural perspective (chapters 1-5), the second is mainly focused on religion and culture (chapters 6-10). The volume is introduced by a foreword (pp. 5-15) by Jonah Lynch with the purpose of presenting David L. Schindler's work to the Italian public. The latter had a first taste of the book few months ago, when Schindler (Dean Emeritus and Edouard Cardinal Gagnon Professor of Fundamental Theology at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, Washington, D.C.) allowed an Italian on-line daily newspaper to publish an excerpt of the book as preview. That excerpt generated a passionate debate among Italian scholars which has been mainly focused on the first chapters of his book, dedicated to the crucial relationship between anthropology and economy. In this first chapter Schindler – addressing the question “does the free market produce free persons?” (pp. 35-51)–investigate the possibility of an anthropology of gift and gratitude. The perspective from which the Author considers the problem is original as it challenges the common academic perspectives that often tend to present a single-disciplinary analysis on a specific topic. By contrast, Schindler has been able to attract the broad attention of Italian readers – including academics, journalists of economy and finance–on account of his capacity to take simultaneously into consideration the fields of philosophy, theology, economy and politics through a wide and–at the same time–scientific approach. Considering the topic presented in the first chapter, Schindler argues that an adequate concept of wealth is not monolithic, but has to include the flourishing of human relationships, from God to the family, from civic society to the world of nature. In analysing Smith and his logic of “the personal interest rightly understood,” Schindler maintains that Smith's philosophy is undermined by a dualistic split between the self-love and the love for others: taking the example of the self-interested baker, Schindler argues that for Smith the quality of the bread and all the virtues involved in the process of production and selling are instruments of profit and–as such–are subordinated to the latter. The other human being is then reduced to an “instrument” of a selfish “happiness” and sin is transformed into a sort of virtue. Against any sort of dualism Schindler argues that every perspective in economy is expressive of a specific anthropological view: for this reason what is required is not first of all a new market system but a new anthropology able to transform the dominating perspective offered by the liberal market. The original aspect of Schindler's argument is to underline the fact that such a change is conditioned by a previous “inner transformation” (p. 45) within the most constitutive relationships of the human being, otherwise the same change would collapse in a new version of the *homo oeconomicus*, even if it reflects a different ideological standpoint.

The second essay of the book (pp. 53-130), focuses on the topic of market liberalism and the possibility of an economic culture of gift and gratitude, thus developing the

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thesis presented in the first essay. In particular Schindler argues against the view that describes the economic system as 'neutral' and subsequently looks for a philosophical perspective able to direct it from the outside. According to the Author, on the contrary, every economic system is *already* a form of theology, anthropology and culture. From this perspective Schindler describes the anthropology of the gift and gratitude as the most adequate form of anthropology. The life of the individual and that of the community, in fact, are not opposed to each other, but require reciprocal presence in order to flourish: this view is distinct from that kind of anthropology that would inspire an economic perspective rooted in the liberal tradition. The latter, according to the Author, is characterized by a "lack of home," that is the lack of a place in the cosmos. Such a place is a network of constitutive relationships which are given to the human being and where the human being becomes himself: the proper ontology of the human being, then, is that of the "being-as-gift," that generates the "being-as-gratitude" (p. 62). From this perspective, richness comes to consist in partaking in "reality-as-gift": all the aspects of economy (production, exchange, etc.) need to be intrinsically informed by this view and not simply "directed" from the outside by a certain philosophical or cultural perspective. Schindler – in order to explain his argument—proposes the effective example of a mother who cooks for her family: her love is not extrinsic from the food she prepares, as her love "takes shape" in the same food. The anthropology of the gift is the real alternative to the Cartesian dualism that, according to the Author, characterizes Smith's perspective. In this second essay Schindler's critique is above all directed towards the instrumental attitude of anthropology underlying Anglo-American liberalism (on which the Author wants to focus his attention): proposing an abstract view of the "self", liberalism tends to make human creativity and freedom ontologically indifferent towards the other human beings. Schindler's critique is especially focused on the attitude of liberal philosophy to consider the relationship with God, the other human beings and the word as a matter of option: these relationships—according to the Author—are originally given. This explains also the reason for which freedom, before being an act of choice, is an act of love. The same individualism characterizes capitalistic economy from the beginning, as the latter has been shaped within the same liberal tradition: Schindler's critique is also directed towards the economic and cultural instrumentalism which is present in the liberal economy supported also by Catholic authors such as Michael Novak.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting aspects of Schindler's critique in the last part of this essay is focused on an interpretation of liberalism considered as freedom of choice and not as a specific set of contents. Schindler argues that the same freedom of choice, as it has been proposed by liberalism, is in itself an anthropology that refuses to consider the implications of the created order as originally given (p. 103). Schindler's critique of liberalism, however, does not imply that we have to reject whatever good aspects liberalism may yield; rather his is an invitation to go to the metaphysical roots of liberalism in order to reconfigure it from a wider, more realist and indeed Christian metaphysical perspective.

The topic of the "home" and the modern condition in which human beings live is also at the centre of the third essay of this volume (pp. 131-149). Considering in particular the work of Wendell Berry, for whom the lack of an authentic community in the contemporary world has to be traced back to a dualism underlying theology and religion in general, Schindler argues for a "renewal of the home": we have to rediscover

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the primacy of those organic relationships typical of family as communion of people already given and extend them to the world.

The fourth chapter of the volume (pp. 151-178) is dedicated to the analysis of the anthropological view that characterizes the encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate* in comparison with the dominant anthropological perspectives on economy and culture in the United States. After having considered some of the most influential comments on the encyclical letter presented in the United States, Schindler maintains that the social doctrine of the Church is a social practice only because it has to do with the problem of truth. The field of economics (which has to be intrinsically informed by the principle of gratitude and by the logic of gift) and the public sphere, instead of being dominated by the temporal supremacy, should be understood as intrinsically related to the eternal order, and therefore, for this reason, cannot be relegated to a future life or to a private dimension of the worldly life. This is also the reason for which the economic and the public sphere have to pursue the common good rather than the public order, a common good informed by the idea of truth as order of love (p. 169). Schindler advocates also to an idea of human rights based on a view of the human being as intrinsically relational, a view able to overcome a "Cartesian subject" who is independent from constitutive relationships.

The analysis of crucial topics such as truth, freedom, relativism are developed by the Author in particular in the fifth essay of the volume (pp. 179-196), where he considers the book *Without Roots: Europe, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* by J. Ratzinger and M. Pera (1<sup>st</sup> edition: Milano: Mondadori, 2004). The reasonable separation between the state and the Church – Schindler argues following Ratzinger – cannot be translated into a separation of the state from the problem of the truth, as it happens in many democratic societies where the fundamental truths (necessary for constituting a genuine legal order) are considered the result of a subjective choice. The notion of freedom as primarily juridical is at the root of a democratic relativism that tends to become dogmatic, as in the public realm the truth is confined to a private and a subjective choice.

The second part of Schindler's volume considers in particular the topics of religion and culture: the sixth essay of the collection is a short chapter (pp. 199-208) dedicated to the teachings of Benedict XVI and to its relevance to American culture: among the various aspects considered by Schindler, a particularly interesting topic is the philosophical reading of conscience (to be intended not only as *synderesis*, but also as *anamnesis*) and the natural law (as a problem of desire and love and not of duty, as in the modern-Kantian tradition) proposed by Benedict XVI.

The seventh chapter of the book (pp. 209-237) is dedicated to the 'dramatic' nature of human life. Here the Author focuses on the relationship between liberal societies and the basis of human dignity: according to Schindler the limit of liberalism consists in its inability to recognize the human being as constitutively and structurally *capax Dei et alterius* (p. 219). Human life is 'dramatic' as far as it is recognized as ordered towards God and creation in a free and responsible way. For this reason, concerning human dignity, Schindler refuses to consider human rights as a mean to protect the individual from other human beings: rights are substantial to the human being, but – at the same time – the substantial identity of the human being is constituted as an answer to God, to others and to self, as these relationships are already given and constitute an essential part of the human being. Life, then, is both a gift and a task, and it is only within this perspective

that rights can be properly interpreted and understood. By contrast, rights as they have been interpreted by the liberal tradition are the sign and cause of the ontological isolation of the individual, isolated from God and other human beings (p. 221).

The eight chapter of the volume (pp. 239-270) is focused on religion and secularism in a culture of abstraction. Here Schindler criticizes the traditional view for which in America religion and secularism are considered two substantially independent phenomena: in his opinion, on the contrary, religion and secularism are comparable to two branches of the same tree. Following the arguments of Wendell Berry, according to Schindler the removal of the Creator from the creation has generated the removal of the sacred from the world: the desecration of nature would have been impossible without the desecration of work and vice-versa. In America it is thus the same religion to be blamed for having generated a secularizing dualism characterized by a moralized and 'voluntarized' religiosity: in this context issues related to will and to morality have been separated from issues concerning intelligence, cosmic and ontological order (p. 255). The kind of religiosity criticized by Schindler, in fact, is always accompanied by a view of the cosmic order as originally mechanistic; such a perspective, however, presupposes a positivistic understanding of religion. A similar dualism affects also the field of institutions, which are characterized by the same "Cartesian" attitude: the mechanistic order is juxtaposed with the anthropological or religious perspective that can be introduced within that order only in an arbitrary and voluntaristic manner. According to Schindler, the roots of this dualism is to be found in the detachment realized by certain Christian thinkers between the order of the world and its being a gift of God (p. 265).

In the ninth essay of the book (pp. 271-303) the Author analyses the meaning of the world and of culture for moral theology. Considering the encyclical letter *Veritatis splendor*, Schindler argues that freedom is an act of choice only as far as it is an order (for this reason the Author characterizes freedom as an ordered desire): the act of choice, in fact, brings out the presence of a shape and a purpose moulded by human beings' constitutive relationships with the body, with God and with the others (p. 288). The attitude typical of liberal tradition, however, is to be doubtful about the inclusion of cosmos and culture within morality: according to Schindler, on the contrary, the nature of the body, on one hand, is ordered towards the order of freedom and culture and, on the other hand, the acts of freedom and intelligence— because of the unity of the human being—take part to the purpose, the shape and the movement of human being's physical dimension: for this reason nature and culture are never neutral in front of each other.

The last essay of Schindler's volume (pp. 305-320) is dedicated to the philosophy of George Grant, in particular to his analysis of a "technology as ontology" typical of modernity. According to Grant the modern technological approach to the knowledge has transformed the world in something similar to what Heidegger described as *Bestand*, that is something that acquires its value in its being-used: such a view empties love from any inner relationship within the order and the intelligibility of reality (p. 306). The view of a "technology as ontology," moreover, considers technology as the mere sum of its products: these products are considered neutral as it is the human freedom that gives them a value according to the purpose for which they are used. In such a way, the same values and purposes, as well as the nature of morality and freedom, are changed by the fact that technology is placed outside ourselves. According to Schindler and Grant, therefore, if we do not start from the awareness of the being-as-gift, all the efforts to transform human actions and institutions will end in a re-ontologization of technology,

in which the intrinsic value of the human beings and the world is given by a human creation. Technology—Schindler argues considering also Alasdair MacIntyre's critique on a fragmented and manipulated rationality—even if it is characterized by indubitable positive outcomes, at the same time it is affected by an inner ambiguity, as its ontology presents cosmos and culture as instruments ready to be dominated and controlled by human beings. Such a critique, the Author explains, does not intend to ban technology, but to highlight that technological culture, far from being neutral, has become a real ontology.

Schindler's volume offers a significant contribution to the contemporary debate as it highlights a series of prejudices that philosophers, economists and politicians very often accept without questioning. The same prejudices, however, tend to reduce reality to an ideological perspective in which we think and act in a distorted way, even when we believe we are being "free." Such a challenge is particularly relevant in the fields of economics, politics, and within the public sphere in general, where a wide anthropological perspective based on gift and gratitude (love, far from being identified with a feeling or with a problem of 'good will,' is in fact the essential order of our lives and of reality) is called into question in order to re-define the purposes and the shape of those disciplines and spheres. Schindler's arguments demand long-term consideration and work, something which cannot be realized without a radical reconfiguration of the dominant anthropology and culture. This task, however, represents the only possible way to overcome the present narrowness that undermines the dignity of human beings.