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## **Searching for growth, fulfillment, and freedom within modern secularized society A new perspective for Christianity**

*Abstract:* Charles Taylor's critical reflections on moral, political, and social philosophy, anthropology, secularism, and Christianity offer inspiring ideas about modernity that indicate two poles. On one hand, there is the extraordinary potential in the human search for growth, fullness and freedom, while on the other hand, there is the human self sufficiency and exclusiveness with regard to exploration of new paths to fulfillment. Given this perspective, Taylor describes modernity in terms of »exclusive humanism,« which reveals man's desire to explore new meaningful horizons and create a better world while remaining narrow and exclusive in his method of proceeding. Taylor characterizes modern moral philosophy as very motivating, promising for its neutrality, and based on a method that it considers normative. This philosophical approach is inadequate, according to Taylor, because the supposed neutrality is only apparent; the »neutrality« and »normative method« are essentially grounded on certain substantial norms, i.e., principles and values that provide the foundation for those normative aspects and their inspirational power. These principles and values are not, however, sufficiently taken into account by modern philosophical discourse.

Taylor's anthropological concern is revealed throughout his thinking about modernity: an honest search for what is good, which is based on an analysis of the searcher's openness/closedness for new opportunities for growth, fullness and freedom. Christianity, with its dynamic search for its place in modernity, remains a source of inspiration for Taylor's reasoning. Nonetheless, Taylor remains critical of this religious quest as well, especially when it avoids or excludes certain aspects of modernity. Taylor describes such religious quest as »exarnation«, as opposed to »incarnation«.

*Key words:* secularism, modernity, exclusive humanism, procedural ethics, incarnation, exarnation, Christianity.

*Povzetek:* **Iskanje rasti, polnosti in svobode v moderni sekularizirani družbi: nova obzorja za krščanstvo**

Kritično razmišljanje Charlesa Taylorja o moralni, politični in družbeni filozofiji, o antropologiji, o sekularizmu in o krščanstvu je navdihujoče razglabljanje o moderni, ki ima dva pola: na eni strani nam razkriva izredni potencial v človekovem iskanju rasti, polnosti in svobode, na drugi strani pa nam kaže zaprtost in ekskluzivnost v raziskovanju novih poti do polnosti. Gledano s tega vidika, opisuje Taylor moderno kot »ekskluzivni humanizem«, ki razodeva človekovo željo po odkrivanju novih obzorij smisla in po ustvarjanju boljšega sveta. To odkrivanje pa istočasno ostaja ozko in izključujoče v svojem napredovanju. Taylor opisuje moralno filozofijo moderne kot zelo motivirano, ki veliko obeta s svojo nepristranskostjo in je utemeljena normativno. Gledano s Taylorjevega zornega kota, pa takšen filozofski pristop ni ustrezen, saj je predpostavljena nepristranskost samo navidezna. Ta »nepristranskost« in »normativni« način v bistvu temeljita na nekih substancialnih normah oziroma principih in vrednotah, na katerih je postavljen sam normativni način razmišljanja in iz katerega izvira njegova privlačnost. Kakorkoli že, filozofija moderne posveča premalo pozornosti tem načelom in vrednotam.

Taylorjevo razmišljanje o moderni ves čas odseva njegovo skrb, ki je antropološke narave: iskreno iskanje tega, kar je dobro za človeka. To iskanje temelji na razčlenjevanju iskalčeve odprtosti/zaprtosti pred novimi možnostmi rasti, polnosti in svobode. Krščanstvo s svojim dinamičnim iskanjem mesta v moderni ostaja v Taylorjevem razmišljanju vir novih navdihov. Kljub temu pa je Taylor kritičen do tega religioznega iskanja, še posebno kadar se to iskanje izogiba kakim vidikom moderne ali pa jih izključuje. Takšno religiozno iskanje Taylor opisuje z izrazom »ekskarnacija« oziroma nasprotje »inkarnacije«.

*Ključne besede:* sekularizacija, moderna, ekskluzivni humanizem, proceduralna etika, inkarnacija, ekskarnacija, krščanstvo

The recent global economic troubles and the political struggles over how to resolve them reopen in many ways the question of the nature of justice in modern society and the changes necessary for the construction of a more just world. Even though this task is inevitable and complex, in agreement with Charles Taylor, I do not think that the question of the nature of justice should be taken as our starting point. Prior to dealing with that issue, we need to clarify the primordial ground of our reflection on moral issues: do we base our reflection on what is right and what we ought to do? or do we look first for what is good to be or what is good to love? The right answer is not an exclusive either-or position because both poles ultimately have to find their place. Nonetheless, the question of *good* should be placed before the question of *right*, because »good« determines what is »right« as well as »just« for human agency.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is based on Charles Taylor's critical and inspiring reflection about modernity, especially from the point of view of moral, political, and social philo-

<sup>1</sup> Following this line, liberalism, neoliberalism, libertarianism, and other similar schools of political philosophy offer insufficiently grounded solutions.

sophy, and of anthropology, secularism, and Christianity. His comprehension is intriguing, indicating the extraordinary potential in the human agent's search for flourishing, fullness, and freedom, i.e., on one side, the good, and on the other, the agent's narrowness and exclusiveness in his research, i.e. unawareness of and closedness to some alternative ways of fulfillment. In Taylor's terminology, these are the features of what he calls »exclusive humanism«, as we will see in the first part of this paper.

As an example of the agent's openness and closedness in her research, Taylor presents a procedural, or normative, ethics. Even though this ethics claims to be neutral and impartial with regard to the good and in its search for what is just, in reality it grounds its procedure on some substantial components, i.e. principles and values that constitute the foundation of that procedure and provide its inspirational power. These principles and values, however, remain insufficiently articulated.

Throughout his reflection, Taylor's primary philosophical concern remains anthropological and can be summarized as what is good for human agency or as how we can construct our identities as human beings.

Without drawing specific conclusions, in this paper I present Taylor's concern in terms of the openness/closedness of human agency to new possibilities of flourishing, fullness, and freedom in the context of exclusive humanism, normative ethics, and Christianity in modernity. Taylor's critique of the narrow-minded and exclusive aspects of modernity remains all the time an invitation to explore new fields of fulfillment, providing us more meaningful and inclusive answers. In this perspective, Christianity in its dynamic search for its place in modernity doubtlessly offers meaningful solutions, if it bases itself more on the principle of *incarnation* and less on the principle of *excarnation*, as we will see in the third part of this paper.

## 1. Exclusive Humanism

In *A Secular Age* (Taylor 2007), Taylor offers a complex description of modernity, based on comparison, contrast, and, finally, exposition of the differences the conditions of belief between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Taylor claims that the believer living in 1500 struggled to properly express his faith; in an analogous way, in 2000, not only the believer but also the unbeliever struggles to express and justify coherently his faith or lack of faith. Taylor demonstrates his thesis through a long reconstruction of the historical background of modernity, based on the following principle: if we want to grasp our present spiritual, social, and political predicaments (i.e. the way we moderns understand and reflect upon ourselves) we need to understand the previous conditions which we overcame (Taylor 2007, 29). Once we know our historical background and can see the contrasts between our past and our present, we will hopefully have a larger and more adequate view

of modernity and better understand the »negation« of God that has become so overwhelming in our secular age.<sup>2</sup>

Taylor describes the last five hundred years as an ongoing struggle to define anew what is important and meaningful in our life and what is good for human agency. This struggle expresses itself in the forms of disenchantment, deism, exclusive humanism and anti-humanism, immanent counter-Enlightenment, and of stories based on an immanent frame and closed world structures. While each of these forms shapes modernity, for the purpose of this article, I will focus on exclusive humanism because it allows us to better comprehend in a secular society the question of morality in general and of justice in particular.

Exclusive humanism represents one of the crucial steps toward modernity and its imbued secularism. Taylor claims neither that modernity equals exclusive humanism nor that this form of humanism is something completely new in our time: ancient Epicureanism belongs to the same family. What Taylor does claim is that this humanism has reached unprecedented dimensions in the last decades. The main characteristic of this humanism is the shift from a society in which belief in God was unchallenged and unproblematic and in which unbelief was virtually impossible to one in which faith is one possibility among many others, and frequently not the easiest one to embrace (18–20). Taylor goes on to state that this phenomenon ends the era of »naïve« religious faith so present in pre-modern times, opening new options for modernity, explaining how something other than God can become the »fullness« of human aspiration, and offering a substitute for *agape*, so crucial for the Christian religion.

To explain the appearance of exclusive humanism, Taylor creates a spiritual outlook, in which two conditions take place (234). The first condition is negative, the disappearance of the world as *en*-chanted. The human agent in pre-modern times viewed himself as existing in a cosmology based on God, or in a universe instantiated with normative patterns and symbols. In modernity, he perceives the world through his instrumental reason, with which humans do not admire the creator, his creation and his sovereignty, but view the world as a vast field of mutually affected parts. The search for the most efficient systems to reinforce the harmony of mutual interests, especially material benefits, replaces the previous normative patterns. These systems are created by the same power of the human will and not imposed on human life from outside. Thus human will, exercised through human reason, becomes the most important component of human dignity, which will realize a new order as far as possible. Through identification and realization of this new order, the acting subject feels energized and motivated on his path toward moral fullness and personal fulfillment. These two rewards, fullness and fulfillment, replace Christian *agape* and should be experienced within

<sup>2</sup> »... our understanding of ourselves as secular is defined by the (often terribly vague) historical sense that we have come to be that way through overcoming and rising out of earlier modes of belief. That is why God is still a reference point for even the most untroubled unbelievers, because he helps define the temptation you have to overcome and set aside to rise to the heights of rationality on which they dwell.« (Taylor 2007, 268)

the span of the agent's life. Even more, modern exclusive humanism not only replaces the religious tradition but also creates a powerful constitutive strand of modern western spirituality as a whole: affirming the value of life, succoring and sustaining life, and healing and feeding. Previously, one of the purposes of God was sustaining human life; now the same idea becomes evident in the contemporary concern to preserve life, to bring prosperity, to reduce suffering world-wide, to an extent that Taylor thinks is without historical precedent (370).

Taylor calls the second condition he sees as necessary for the appearance of exclusive humanism positive: »a viable conception of our highest spiritual and moral aspirations arises such that we could conceive of doing without God in acknowledging and pursuing them« (234). This condition allows us to experience moral/spiritual resources, and consequently moral fullness, as something purely immanent, within the range of purely intra-human powers, a capacity in »human nature«. The fulfillment and fullness of human life becomes »exclusive«, i.e. within the domain of human power, making no reference to something higher that humans should reverence, love, or acknowledge. In Taylor's narrative this move is the crucial part of his interpretation because it explains how in modernity »unbelief« became one option among other (244–245).

Correspondingly, these two conditions change the way the modern agent conceives of himself (27–39). In pre-modern times, the enchanted world and cosmic forces influenced and shaped the agent's life. Embedded within the larger frames of the cosmos, the self became porous, vulnerable, fuzzy, and capable of being penetrated by different sources. Completely opposite to the porous self is the buffered self, residing in the dis-enchanted world that is modernity. Here the self is buffered because the things do not come from the outside; all thoughts, feelings, and purposes reside in the mind, i.e. distinct from the »outer« world. The buffered self conceives of himself as invulnerable to external sources, self-controlling, fearless, master of the meaning of things, and separated from certain social practices, collective rites, devotions, traditions, and social bonds. The buffered self gives preference to individual desires over social structures or traditions. He feels empowered because he believes himself able to impose a new and better order and discipline on self and society. The same idea of re-ordering social structures and re-shaping human lives inspires and motivates him. Realization of this project is about much more than some external changes of society; it represents at the same time the agent's self-realization. The idea of a new order becomes his moral obligation, the success of which will benefit all people.

Taylor maintains that the agent's confidence in herself contributes to the appearance of exclusive humanism, as well as to her belief that she can create an effecting order in life and society, approximate to the ideal model of mutual benefit (247). To act for the good of human beings becomes the main motivation and principle of exclusive humanism. This motivation is based on the idea that human beings are endowed with a capacity for benevolence, altruism, sympathy, empowering us to act for the good of others in virtue of their being fellow humans. These ideas, once attributed to God, are now immanentized and attributed to humans.

Such a shift in the understanding of benevolence and altruism is basically seen as a fruit of escaping from narrow particular obligations. This benevolence, deeply rooted in human nature, constitutes at the same time the power necessary for creation of a new order marked by universal benevolence and justice. These two expressions, which find their historical background in Christian faith,<sup>3</sup> have become in modernity an active re-ordering in life and society that creates a harmonious social order that involves caring for all members of society. In other words, such benevolence and justice reach truly universal dimensions. The modern agent takes care of other members of her own society as well as those who farther away, and lives her life in terms of right conduct that makes her a decent person. Her acting with benevolence for the universal good represents the highest moral experience and ideal. In pre-modern times, the origin of this acting was linked with God or some religious principles; now the power to create a new order finds its place in each of us, in our human nature, independently of grace and God's help. The dis-engaged reason, freed from religion, and at the same time confused and perturbed with personal desires, cravings, and envy, creates a new view of the whole, which reinforces in itself the agent's desire to serve that whole.

Taylor does not pretend to give us a full explanation of the rise of exclusive humanism or to show its inevitability. Our modern period remains open to alternative interpretations. Taylor's intention is to identify the moving forces and motivations behind the birth and development of exclusive humanism, i.e. the ethics of freedom and mutual benefits, which have become the foundation for modern morality, as we will see in the second part of this paper. Having identified these moving forces, Taylor proposes a reading which makes sense to us moderns in our orientation to a secular age, which pulls us beyond the previous frameworks of humanist ethics, and of metaphysical and religious beliefs. Such a reading creates confidence in human power and its ability to create a new universal order and triggers in the human agent a new understanding of himself as a dis-engaged, disciplined agent, capable of remaking the self (257).

All these achievements of exclusive humanism did not just happen with modernity and will not necessarily continue to inspire and empower us to act for the good of human beings. Benevolence and altruism will not always remain unvaried, inspiring us with the same intensity; they demand of us training, insight, and frequently much work on ourselves. Benevolence, altruism, authenticity, and freedom are not simply given to us by birth; they [sometimes suffer from] a lack of understanding and result only from much struggle, and repeated attempts to actualize them. The same is true of the question of justice, as we will see below.

Despite the attractiveness and inspirational power of exclusive humanism,

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<sup>3</sup> Even though excluding every reference to the transcendent, Taylor states that exclusive humanism takes over the idea of universalism from its Christian background, which had been teaching that the good of everyone must be served in the process of re-ordering things. In this sense, Christian agape teaches its believers to go beyond the bounds of any already existing solidarity (e.g., the good Samaritan). The ultimate power to do that does not reside in a pre-existing community or the idea of solidarity, but is considered as a free gift of God, Taylor concludes in his *A Secular Age* (2007, 245–246).

Taylor remains critical of it. Exclusive humanism finds fertile grounds only within a »horizontally« imagined society that is based on a secular time-understanding, and unrelated to any »high points« or something higher what humans should reverence, love, or acknowledge (713). Being closed to any transcendence, exclusive humanism becomes very problematic, especially when it deals with questions of death, violence, and suffering, to which exclusive humanism provides insufficient answers. Taylor insists that the need of the human heart to open a door to the transcendent and to go beyond cannot be seen as a result of a mistake, an erroneous world-view, bad conditioning, or even worse, as a pathology. Human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life, to which exclusive humanism does not offer a sufficient answer (638).

## 2. Normative Ethics Lacks Sufficient Foundations for Morality and Agent's Fulfillment

Exclusive humanism shapes not only the agent's perception of the world and his self-awareness; it conditions certain forms of modern moral philosophy as well. From the beginning of *Sources of the Self* Taylor maintains that the modern notion of morality is often uncritically narrow-minded and lacking sufficient foundation. For this reason Taylor broadens the notion of morality. Next to issues such as justice, respect for other people's life, well-being, and dignity, we need to examine what »underlies our own dignity, or questions about what makes our lives meaningful or fulfilling« (Taylor 1989, 4). With such an extended definition of morality, Taylor clearly indicates the insufficiency of the prevailing mainstream of moral philosophy in the English-speaking world over the last two centuries. We cannot reduce morality to moral obligations or theories and principles of right conduct, telling us what we ought to do but excluding what is good to do or what may be good (Taylor 1995). What is ignored and missing is moral consciousness and beliefs, which tell us what is right or wrong, higher or lower, and which remain independently of our desires, inclinations, and choices, and offer standards by which those desires, inclinations, and choices can be judged.

Taylor similarly criticizes moral theories which favor »a conception of the world freed from anthropocentric conceptions« (Taylor 1989, 56). Such theories are based on naturalism and maintain that we ought to understand human beings in terms contiguous with the modern natural sciences. Consequently we should include the methods and ontology of the natural sciences as the most appropriate model for our self-understanding, and turn away from descriptions of things in terms of significance, value, and meaning. Naturalism and moral thinking based on it perceive morality simply as a *guide* to human *action*. This guidance indicates to us what it is right to do and what the contents of moral obligations are but leaves aside questions of what good means, what the nature of the good life is, what is valuable in itself, what we should admire or love, or what makes our life worthwhile or fulfilling. For example, everyone agrees that we have to follow some

social obligations like those forbidding killing, violence, lying, and the like, as the functional requirements of any human society. From the naturalist point of view, these rules, taken in themselves, should be sufficient; in Taylor's perspective, they are insufficient because we need to take these rules and terms as a part of the background against which we understand such terms as, for example, »murder«, »assault«, »honesty«. We can justify and explain [such terms] only after perceiving the good behind them (for example, the sanctity or dignity of human life, of bodily integrity, and of the human aspiration to the truth). In order to achieve this, we need to identify a framework or background of information, within which our lives take place and where we can find meaning. Taylor defines such a framework as a crucial set of qualitative distinctions, which makes some action or mode of life or mode of feelings incomparably higher, deeper, fuller, purer, more admirable, than others. Not to have such a framework is utterly impossible for us; we have to live within frameworks or horizons because they are the rational bases we sense making possible our identity as human agents.

Taylor therefore concludes that we should not consider right and good as two properties of the universe which are without any relation to human beings and their lives (56). For this reason a naturalistic approach or any moral code based on naturalism is unacceptable: it does not help us in our struggle to »make the best sense« of our lives nor establish what it means to »make sense« of our lives. Naturalistic descriptions of the good life in terms of right action do not articulate sufficiently the significance that certain actions or feelings have within our life. Such descriptions reduce human nature to its rationality and ignore the specificity of the moral subject as well as the relevance of human embodiment in space and time. Such a reductive approach to morality is typical, in Taylor's view, not only of the naturalist explanation of morality but also of modern utilitarianism and various derivations of Kant's moral philosophy when they claim to have found and to base all morality on one specific principle such as human pleasure or the greatest amount of human happiness or human reason, and from there derive further moral principles.

These kinds of moral theory have something in common: they share a *procedural conception* of ethics, which Taylor describes as the opposite of *substantive ethics* (85). By »procedural conception«, Taylor means ethics which considers the *way of thinking* of the human agent (i.e. the reasoning procedure) as more important than the *outcome* of her reasoning. Instead of prioritizing a] substantive *good*, procedural ethics sees its purpose to be in *substantive* terms the agent's rationality, thoughts and feelings. Taylor calls this the *ontologizing* of a rational procedure, meaning the reading of the ideal method into the very constitution of the mind. Consequently, good and correct thinking is not defined by the substantive truth or by a correct vision or by any reference to the good, but by a certain style, method, or process of thought that is considered to be correct and coherent in itself. According to this approach, moral action should be defined, not by what is good, but by the principles of action. Taylor summarizes this position succinctly: procedural ethics »demands that one proceed on the assumption that metaphysi-



cal questions can be decided independently of assumptions about the good« (Taylor 1993, 337–360).

The procedural conception of ethics and the theories of right action are unacceptable and internally contradictory for various reasons. They appear to claim that they do not refer to any kind of overarching good and do not construct morality in relation to the good, but in fact they are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, like freedom, altruism, and universalism, as we saw in the first chapter. These ideals are crucial in modernity, Taylor calling them »the central moral aspirations of modern culture, the overarching goods which are distinctive to it« (Taylor 1995, 132–55).

Let us assume with Taylor that there is general agreement in modernity on the importance of these moral aspirations. Taylor asserts that the advocates of procedural ethics simply deny any relevance to these supreme goods, ideals, preferring to ignore them rather than to struggle to explain the deeper sources of their own thinking. In the third chapter of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor describes this kind of moral philosophy as the »ethics of inarticulacy«. Such ethics involves inarticulateness about the good and avoidance of a deeper analysis. It promulgates as greatest good of our civilization a dis-engaged, free, rational agent, able to live in a completely disembodied way, out of concrete time and place. Taylor's position at this point is very clear: any theory that claims to be right has to prioritize locating itself in reality in relation to the notion of the good. The question of the good is unavoidable; otherwise the whole discussion collapses into incoherence (Taylor 1993, 349) or remains a delusion (358).

### 3. **Incarnation and Excarnation as Two Modes of Living Christianity**

Let us turn now the role of Christianity within the context of exclusive humanism with its extraordinary potential due to the agent's search for fulfillment and freedom, and within the context of the inarticulacy of normative ethics. In reflecting on Christianity and its role in modernity, Taylor remains critical on one hand, while on the other continuing to search for more meaningful answers from the point of view of Christianity. His reflection is much more than a historical overview and recognition of Christianity as one of the main sources of our Western identity; his reflection is primarily an evaluation of those modes which seem too rigid in their interpretation of the right way of living religious life, as well as those social regulations and religious institutions which are exclusively rooted on religious principles. Following Taylor in his critique of normative ethics, one could say that an overemphasis on the normative aspects of Christianity risks ignoring and missing the core message of Christianity and our task as Christians, i.e., spreading love, being hopeful, and having faith in our dialogue with modernity. A narrow-minded and rigid understanding of religious principles can easily lead us to overlook the modern agent's search for freedom and his struggle to find meaning

which are two crucial aspects in Taylor's narrative about modernity in terms of exclusive humanism.

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor develops two modes of living out our deepest religious convictions of Christianity: the way of *incarnation* and the way of *excarnation*. In both cases, Taylor develops definition of these terms that are more descriptive than dogmatic or normative and always tied to specific historical circumstances. These two ways are two complementary poles of the believer's struggle to express what she believes; therefore, they should not be viewed in isolation. They present two vectors shaping the religious and spiritual life of believing individuals and the functioning of religious institutions in modernity. It is true, however, that one of the two poles or vectors normally prevails over the other, and correspondingly marks more distinguishably the nature of religious life.

Without going into a deep theological discussion, Taylor concisely delineates the meaning of incarnation as the core notion of Christianity: God became a person in order to reestablish the communion of humans with God (Taylor 2007, 278). This communion also allows transformation of the human agent with his emotions, body, and history, and the integration of a person into his true identity. In this perspective, Taylor challenges exclusive humanism to accept the notion of incarnation as a possible meaningful answer to the human search for meaning and fulfillment. At the same time, Taylor challenges believers and religious institutions to find a new modern language through which the notion of incarnation can become a more attractive concept that includes every aspect of the agent's existence.<sup>4</sup>

At this point we do not need to develop further the relevance of this notion to shaping the faith of individuals, different traditions, ethical teachers, or the entire social structures. Taylor argues that, since the High Middle Ages, Western society has repeatedly attempted to integrate faith more fully into the agent's ordinary life. Inspired by the notion of incarnation, many believers have attempted to combine their faith in the incarnate God with their everyday life on the personal and social level. However, the same need to make God more fully present in everyday life paradoxically led to the confining of faith to a purely immanent world, characterized by unbelief and exclusive humanism and claiming to be superior to Christianity on the basis that (1) exclusive humanism rewards benevolence now and here, and not in the hereafter; Christianity seems sometimes to exclude heretics and unbelievers from its domain, while exclusive humanism seems to be more truly universal (144–5; 361).

This move from Christianity should not be seen necessarily as a negative one or as an explicit rejection of Christianity. Taylor sees something positive in it: the move toward a more ordinary life is at the same time the rehabilitation of the sensuous and the material and the expression of the personal search for meaning.

<sup>4</sup> »... [E]motions have their proper place in the love of God, where love describes the nature of the communion. But it also underlines all the other changes: communion has to integrate persons in their true identities, as bodily beings who establish their identities in their histories, in which contingency has a place. In this way, the central concept which makes sense of the whole is communion, or love, defining both the nature of God, and our relation to him.« (Taylor 2007, 279).

Consequently, such a move is less an attack on Christianity than a challenge for Christianity to provide newer and more meaningful answers to integrate into a more meaningful narrative the believer's daily life, especially her bodily experiences, such as human sexuality, suffering, pain, and death,. To do this, Taylor encourages us to stand back at the right distance, one that will allow us to see modernity not only in terms of what it has done away with (the destruction of traditional horizons, of belief, in the sacred, of old notion of hierarchy), but also of it contributes of what is truly essential and important (the affirmation of ordinary life, individuality, the new forms of inwardness, i.e. rediscovery of the agent's inner nature, authenticity, agent's search for fulfillment and realization, empowered and motivated by benevolence, altruism, and sympathy for fellow humans). By assuming such distance, which includes also liberation of the present from the constriction of a too narrow comparison with the past, we will also avoid the historical controversies and many other preconceptions, which hinder Christianity in its dialogue with modernity (Taylor 1999, 106–8).

In other words, Taylor formulates the challenge for Christianity in confrontation with exclusive humanism less in strictly religious terminology based on the notion of incarnation and more on the notions of, so valued in modernity, of fullness of life, human flourishing, and freedom. Taylor poses this as the maximal demand: »How to define our highest spiritual or moral aspiration for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn't crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity?« (Taylor 2007, 639–40). With this question, Taylor does not differ much from the first Christians when they tried to comprehend the meaning of God's intervention and incarnation in human history.

Taylor's reflections on incarnation is at the same time a warning against living Christianity in terms of what he calls *exarnation*: a closed or rigid way of living religion, in which religious principles hinder the human spirit on its way towards new horizons of deeper meaning by deterring the possibility of transcending the present situation. That is, such an understanding of religious principles closes off the believer in a position that impairs his struggle to find meaning and new horizons. Such a closed way of living religiosity leads the believer and religious institutions into becoming something that prevents them from being fully in touch with themselves, grasping at being something that makes less and less sense. The Latin meaning of the word *exarnation* is »out of flesh«. Taylor's position is clear: such actualization of the religious principles in modernity calls for the revision and integration of the principle of *incarnation*. This will allow us to open the door to better actualize the human agent's aspiration to wholeness.

I end and summarize this paper with Taylor's invitation to re-discover the original meaning of »catholicism« (*katholou*) in two related senses, comprising both universality and wholeness (Taylor 1999, 14). If the sense of universality appears to be self-evident, the wholeness results enigmatic and challenging, because modernity opposes oneness on one hand, and on the other, esteems diversity, differences, plurality, and irreducibility to oneness. Taylor's narrative about modernity can help us to integrate the positive and negative features of modernity into a

new »wholeness«. On the personal level, the »wholeness« can help the individual unite all past, present, and future levels of his existence into something more integrated and, at the same time, open to transcendental dimensions. On the institutional level, »wholeness« means accepting diversity and plurality of nations, religions, and cultures as the humanity that God created. The challenge for Catholicism in modernity is something similar to what Matteo Ricci experienced in China when facing Chinese culture. Why do not we look at exclusive humanism as another of those great cultural forms that have come and gone in human history, bearing an extraordinary potential for the human agent's search for flourishing, fullness, freedom, with a strong belief in the power of reason and with a determined will to create a better order.

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