

SLAVERY OF POWER AND POWER OF FREEDOM

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UDK 316.462:2

123.1

232:241.5

Introduction

This presentation is divided into three main parts. The first part revolves around power and its ambiguity. Power should not be demonized. In itself power is neither good nor bad, it is just power, although it could qualify as being positive rather than negative. Its understanding is always the crucial part. Power should be used wisely and must in no case be misused. Misuse of power is enslaving. The second part looks at a completely different vision of power, that of Jesus Christ, which is also scandalous and paradoxical for this world. The last chapter focuses on freedom which is both a result and a reward of living in the way of Jesus: by rejecting dominion and serving one another through love. Such a lifestyle and such use of power releases and revives, they resurrect.

1. *Ambiguity of power*

How to understand power and, more importantly, how to deal with it? The very notion of power is powerful. It intrigues at first sight. Everyone wants to be powerful, as powerful as possible. What does this mean for the individual, for society, for a Christian? In a philosophical sense, power is the capacity to produce or to prevent certain changes¹. Power is the deliberate and effective impact, the expression of existence. In general, power is an attribute of good. In the ontological sense, every being is powerful in a certain way. Every being has a certain power of essence. Moreover, the powers differ in the degree of power, since the measure (ratio) can be determined only

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1 Cf. Šimo Šokčević, »Filozofija moći Romana Guardinija«, *Diacovensia* 23 (2015) 3, 260

in the encounter with other beings. Power is primarily a relational category and it has a dynamic nature². Plants and animals also have a certain degree of power, and humans especially as they are creatures of freedom and in possession of consciousness. Furthermore, only in freedom does the power of essence reach its climax³. Mankind is certainly powerful in a sense, even more powerful than plants or animals, but God is the most powerful ... omnipotent. God Himself is power, because not only does he have the essence, but he is Essence as such. According to Thomas Aquinas, knowledge and will of God are the cause of all and the element of creation (*principium effectivum*) which we perceive as power. When considering creatures, power is the element of activity and that of impact. God is pure actuality (*actus purus*), and He is perfect. The very essence of God and His activity constitute His power, His omnipotence. Ambiguity of power is therefore overcome only and solely in God. Being God means to be omnipotent, to possess perfection of all essence. This omnipotence does not apply only to the created nature, but also to what transcends the created nature. The primordial foundation of all goods belongs to God's omnipotence. His omnipotence is perhaps best reflected in forgiveness and mercy because the one who forgives sins has supreme authority⁴. Mankind is called to recognize the omnipotence of their Creator, since otherwise they could hardly reach themselves. God's love is a given and determined power. Not recognizing this bestowal is negating one's own essence. Bacon and Hobbes are most responsible for the change of the power paradigm, by which knowledge and science became the basic principles of power and the omnipotence of God became marginalized. Marx, Nietzsche and many others faithfully followed.

Power belongs to the sphere of interest as well as the social sphere. It is associated with every social structure. The struggle for power is quite inseparable from human nature, since it is a means of obtaining a future good⁵. Ontologically grounded, power is not a problem by itself. However, in society it is transformed into authority, dominion. Authority is an organized and institutionalized power. Problems caused by ambiguity of power arise from authority, dominion and they are often manifested through coercion and violence as a negative expression of power. Therefore, the problem lies in authority and its misuse, since authority is not ontologically grounded as is power. Depravity occurs when one does not recognize the right and freedom of another, as they recognize their own greatness. A different *you* must be the border of my *I*. Power has to be treated with responsibility. A

2 Cf. Ivan Koprak, »Moć moći«, *Obnovljeni život* (49) 1 (1994), 74

3 Cf. *ibid.*, 75

4 Cf. Toma Akvinski, *Izabrano djelo* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 2005), 361–369

5 Cf. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), chapter one

biblical report testifies that mankind was given dominion over nature and its own lives. This power includes the right, but also the obligation of reasonable management and the obedience to God. The art of having control over oneself and others implies that the person knows how to command, but also how to listen and to cultivate a responsible discipline⁶. Nietzsche, among others, tried to separate power from the person and reduce all to a natural process where the individual becomes nature. The individual is a person, and power without responsibility dissolves all that is human. In this way, man becomes a victim of his own power. Power provides a feeling of satisfaction, security and self-confidence, but it may manifest itself through vanity and superiority as well. The desire to strengthen and self-preserve turns into appropriation, the desire for control and dominion over others⁷. That is the reason why God had to die — in order for man to freely step into the place of the ultimate ruler. In place of *homo religiosus* comes a self-aware man of power who overcomes himself — *the superman*, **the overman** (*Übermensch*). The *overman* was once a historical abstraction, but with regard to the development of science and technology, the modern man seems to become indeed more and more **over-powering**. The secular and atheist atmosphere is favorable to the radical self-establishment and arrogance. Unfortunately, by increasing the (super)power of modern mankind, the ethos of using power weakens. The arrogant man is not satisfied by what he already possesses, but he wants more and becomes greedier. He wishes to dominate autonomously, independently and absolutely; over nature, others and even God himself, if he even acknowledges Him and His existence. By giving into sin, man distorts the relationship between himself and the actual Giver (Grantor) of power. When the moral order in society is disturbed, it is very likely for any use of power to be turned into its misuse. The greatest challenge of our time is to know how to control power so that it does not control us. This requires efforts of asceticism, in order for man to be able to resist evil, being supported by the good within. The stated is impossible without constant practice and self-purification. Only then shall man have power over his power, otherwise he shall become its slave.

2. *Jesus Christ — the other face of power*

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10, 45). Jesus Christ radically changed the concept of power in his time and of all times. He translated

6 Cf. Šimo Šokčević, »Filozofija moći Romana Guardinija«, *Diacovensia* 23 (2015) 3, 271

7 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Volja za moć*, (Zagreb: Mladost), 331

power into humility. The power of love was expressed in the powerlessness of the cross. He did not nullify the power of this world, but exposed and surrendered himself to it while the power-wielders of this world ridiculed and mocked him. Mocking the weak gives an illusion of power. The power of the evil over the weak is only illusive because in fact the evil are the ones who are weak and powerless, powerless to do good which we all are invited to do. Jesus' seeming weakness was stronger than the strongest power as it was the source of power which did not oppress or mock another, but it elevated and saved them with the power of love. Joseph Ratzinger phrased this nicely: "Either love is stronger than death, or it is not love at all. If it has proved to be stronger than death in Christ, it was because it has been love for others"⁸. Jesus introduced a new paradigm of power, dominion and authority. He relativized both the Roman and Jewish authority because he essentially promoted only the dominion of God. Jesus indirectly announced to the world his relational and positional inclusion in the person of YHVH, being His representative on the earth and actually God Himself — incarnated. Jesus pointed out his power and authority through his actions, yet unobtrusively and humbly. He did not want to show off. He didn't look for recognition and did not boast, which made observers examine the very nature of power and then also Jesus' identity and origin. This is an expression of a humble and obedient power of God's Kingdom⁹. The secret of the Kingdom of God was brought by Messiah who expressed his power in his revolutionary obedience to eventually destroy the cosmic forces of evil by his crucifixion¹⁰. He exercised power only to help others (e.g., to heal people, to feed them, to master nature, to exorcise demons). Compassion and piety motivated him. He expected similar from his disciples, both from Christians then, and the ones today. Longing for power and its sweet taste should not be the main focus of Jesus' disciples and Christians. Christians are called to renounce themselves and imitate Christ — by serving others through love. That is a healthy and potential power of each Jesus' disciple, a power which frees from slavery to selfishness and arrogance, to the forces of evil and sin which reduce power. Only Christ provides the ability to use power in purpose of charity. Such power is true power which removes the shackles of darkness, turns slaves into free men, and ultimately — overcomes death.

8 Joseph Ratzinger, *Uvod u kršćanstvo* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1998), 281

9 Cf. Daniel Herron, »Moć kršćanina: Razlučivanje improvizacijske etike moći iz Evanđelja po Marku«, *Kairos — Evandeoski teološki časopis* IX (2015) 1, 91

10 Cf. *ibid.* 92

3. *Power of Jesus' freedom*

Man is the image of God, and that, among other, means that he was created as a free being. Freedom is a gift, but also a call to responsible behavior. To be free is to have the power to choose. Mankind often misuses this power. The consequence of such misuse is slavery. Jesus Christ was truly a free man, free FROM sin and from any susceptibility to evil, and free FOR God and man, for love, service and self-giving. God is interested in mankind and their freedom, their happiness. Jesus paid dearly for our freedom, freely agreeing to death. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal 5, 1). By becoming a servant, he reached the highest positions of power in the eyes of God. Sacrificial offering out of love for others is an important good deed with God. God wholeheartedly accepts and rewards such a sacrifice. Furthermore, Jesus' disciples also have a certain power of authority which Jesus himself had and has, and the nature of that power releases from the bondage of sin and the inner aspirations to further susceptibility to sin. In other words, Jesus restored the relationship of mankind with the Creator, restored lost grace, freedom of the children of God; life, but also gave us the power to continue his program of service to God and loved ones, personally sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and righteousness. The choice to disobey and do evil is a misuse of freedom and leads to the slavery of sin"¹¹. The source of freedom is in the human heart, which is why it is important to purify it continually. God himself guarantees freedom and constitutes its foundation. Jesus has done 90% of the work, and the remaining 10% is up to us to cooperate with this bestowed grace of Christ and the Holy Spirit on our way to holiness. This requires moral efforts of asceticism and shaping life according to the Spirit of Christ. We can achieve complete freedom only with God and in God. Ultimately, man depends on God's power, and each power he possesses comes from God. One should be aware of that. Humble service is a virtue and must be a part of a Christian character. Christ set his disciples free for the wonderful transformation of the world where a Christian has the power to add salt to what is bland and shed light where there is darkness (cf. Mt 5, 13–14).

11 Hrvatska biskupska konferencija, *Katekizam Katoličke Crkve* (Zagreb: Glas Koncila, 1994), 1733

Conclusion

On the one hand, there is nothing wrong with power. Everyone aspires to power and shies away from weakness. Power gives confidence, security ... The very existence of a being gives it a certain power, which is natural and good. However, power has its seductive character due to which it is often seen as captivating for the person in power, and it brings a taste of sweetness due to the high position and dominion. This is where many stumble because not everyone knows how to rule justly and responsibly. Power and authority were too often misused for personal gain out of pure egoism and greed. A man without virtuousness, not trained in self-sacrifice, who has no control over himself, may easily be seduced and deceived by his own character and passions, which eventually enslave him. On the other hand, there is a paradox of power which can be found in the person of Jesus Christ, God-man, the incarnate Logos. The only true "Power-Wielder" and Ruler, the Almighty God sheds a completely new light on the concept and the reality of power. He alters the meaning of power beyond recognition. He rejects the worldly power and demonstrates an immense power of love through an unprecedented and incomprehensible humility resulting in freedom and life. Christ offers such a promising freedom to anyone who wants to be His disciple. To renounce oneself and to give oneself for others; to serve and not to rule carries true power and freedom. Such freedom can be given only by God, Jesus Christ. For a Christian, there is no other way.

Sažetak

ROPSTVO MOĆI I MOĆ SLOBODE

Moć je poželjna, ona mami i privlači gotovo svakoga. Je li to prirodno? Je li kršćanski? Smisao svega što je Isus Krist naučavao je upravo suprotno od moći: služenje, poniznost, nesebična ljubav. Moć sama po sebi nije ni dobra ni loša, ali čežnja za moći i užitak koji dolazi s moći ne bi trebali biti glavna orijentacija Isusovih učenika. Moć može zarobiti čovjeka. Kršćani su pozvani nasljedovati Krista — služeći drugima. To je zdrava i potencijalna moć svakog kršćanina, moć koja oslobađa od ropstva egoizma i oholosti — sila zla i grijeha. Tada možemo postati iznimno moćni, postojani, neslomivi iznutra i ... slobodni.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Isus Krist, moć, ropstvo, sloboda

Abstract

SLAVERY OF POWER AND POWER OF FREEDOM

Power is desirable, it lures and attracts almost everyone. Is this natural? Is it Christian? The meaning of everything that Jesus Christ was teaching is just the opposite of power: serving, humbleness, unselfish love. Power in itself is neither good nor bad, but desirability for power and delight which power brings should not be the main orientation of Jesus' disciples. Power could enslave a man. Christians are called to imitate Christ — by serving others. That is a healthy and potential power of every Christian, the power that liberates from slavery of egoism and arrogance — forces of evil and sin. Then we can become extremely powerful, firm, unbreakable from the inside and ... free.

KEY WORDS: freedom, Jesus Christ, power, slavery