

THEO-ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN THE THEORY OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

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In the authors' preface, profoundly titled *The Encounter*, to *The Theory of Physical Culture* monograph written by Zoran Milošević and Nenad Živanović (Novi Sad, 2020), physical activity has been defined as "God-given food" to human beings, the food needed by both man's body and soul that promotes their encounter. This is not for the first time that such a vivid definition has appeared in a book but in this edition, it is for the first time explicitly indicated that such a view of physical activity, to which the authors attribute universal human dimensions, was a starting point for creation and establishment of the new theo-anthropocentrism theory (Milošević, 2020, 6). The authors further develop the vivid expression by highlighting, though apparently pretentiously but, in fact, in the name of clear devotion, straightforwardness and, if you wish, confession, that this theory of physical culture inherits the marvelous string – Love, and sets it as the centre of gravity for all cultural and particularly pedagogical attempts to make the transfer of experience from previous generations to the future generations worthy to exist in the mankind (ibid., 6).

Writing about culture as a resource of physical culture in the introduction to the first part of the book on establishment of physical culture, the authors suggest (and emphasize with "as is known") that man is in the centre of their field of study, physical culture, and that man is "his own greatest secret" (ibid., 12). Man

takes bodily movement – exercise as *God-given food* needed not only by his body but also by his soul, and this is exactly where the phenomenology of physical culture emerges from. However, fast growing technology and its brilliant marketing support favour man's weaknesses stemming from his "sedentary society." The authors also add impacts of ideologies to this phenomenon of modern society, arguing that the "sedentary society" of the first half of the 20th century has evolved and turned into "culture of oblivion" grown from the cultural pattern that has been developed since the eighth decade of the last century through to the already third decade of the new millenium based on teaching neoliberalism, hegemony, individualism and those specific ones – hedonism and egocentrism (ibid., 13). In addition to policies and the very demands of physical activity, the ideologies served as an incentive to search for new objectives and, accordingly, aims of physical activity through centuries, particularly when it came to social relationships that characterized the 19. century and the 20. century. The social relationships and needs shaped development of physical activity as well as the necessary theory and practice. This clearly resulted in several different approaches to the development of physical culture such as biocentrism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism and (the approach suggested by the authors) theo-anthropocentrism (ibid., 31).

After providing a brief description of each of those approaches and their main representatives, Milošević and Živanović argue that the theory of theo-anthropocentrism is the youngest among the theories – the youngest not in terms of the time of its emergence but in terms of its presence in the field namely, the late 20th century and the early 21st century. The principal assumptions for this theory of the development of physical culture they provide include: man is approached by "due care", and physical exercise is holy food provided primarily for man's body (ibid.,73). It can be seen that both assumptions are described in figurative, metaphorical language unusual in academic writing in any discipline and also in the theory of physical culture, at least when deriving and explaining basic principles of an approach. This leads to an assumption that the authors have not chosen such style for that particular context by mistake, probably finding these images, quite clear and straightforward in their own, more suitable to describe the wanted content than any formal specialized terminology commonly used for that purpose. On the one hand, another assumption, which has already been discussed in the previous works and articles written by Nenad Živanović, refers to a general importance of physical activity and the structured activity – exercising in particular, comparing it to food in the given definition. Food association is related to the original etymological meaning of a Slavic term for "education", as feeding (nurturing) of man, which is familiar to and remembered by Nenad Živanović when he writes about physical education. On the other hand, an unusual term "God-given" is used to emphasize that physical activity – exercising should be understood as a gift to and a general welfare of man, whereas

the specific theological origin of the term may imply further consequences of theo-anthropocentrism. The first assumption of approaching man by "due care" is mostly found in lectures and works of Petar Pavlović, originating from the theological heritage of the archimandrite Justin Popović, to whom – as we shall see – representatives of the theory of theo-anthropocentrism still owe some of the framework concepts and terminology. Approaching man by "due care", a term invented in this context by father Justin and taken for the professional purposes by Pavlović, describes a specific approach to a human being required not only in the field of physical culture and communications related to physical education and sport but also in any education: the approach with prevailing love, tenderness, care and respect.

As the authors elaborate later in the text, theo-anthropocentrism is a theory that "offers a more humane *agon* within the orthodox anthropology, thus providing a god-man-focused approach with God and man in the centre, embraced by eternal love and association" (ibid., 74). Although these terms – humanity (of *agon*) and embrace – follow the similar free style as the previous assumptions, the basic direction of a new branch in the field becomes more obvious: disappointed with evident epochal humanity decline in the field of physical communications, the our doyens evaluate the existing state in a manner of responsible scholars and find a way out in a return to a broader context of recklessly and unreasonably neglected relationship – embraced people and God. They attempt to heal the unhealthy state of the filed baselines (*agon*, association) by restoring the ideals of eternal love and association, where the relation to God is taken into account. This has generated a critical shift from existing anthropocentrism to theo-anthropocentrism, which, in terms of values, represents a restoration that is, a step backwards to the basics or abandoned roots and in terms of the recent historical development – a step forwards, or new theoretical upgrade and enhancement in the field.

In further elaboration, the authors introduce theoretical determinants of personality, freedom and responsibility as prisms to be used for evaluation of the relationships within physical culture. Highlighting a student's personality (contrary to a person) in physical education represents an important feature of Christian ethical teaching that has been introduced in style to the field of physical culture by Zoran Milošević, thus establishing another column of theo-anthropocentrism. Freedom accompanies personality and there is no personality without it, and it also involves a duty of tailoring everything to man's welfare – here, the authors primarily refer to exercising duration and load considerations that is, exercise intensity. They remind of the definition of exercise as compared with food, concluding that man can be offered food with love only in optimum amounts. In addition, justified answers to the questions of why and how to exercise can only be found when searched for in personality that is, in man and his need of such food (ibid., 74). They add another core assumption of the theory: it

should not be forgotten that physical exercise is needed as food by everyone. To this end, contribution of another advocate of theo-anthropocentrism in physical culture, that of Nebojša Randelović, who has based and developed the entire system of theory and practice of physical recreation on this theory, is very important.

The philosophy of theo-anthropocentrism is rounded with a slogan on the primary value of man and a warning that any change both in the theory and practice must be justified before the one who exercises and the one who coaches. As the authors conclude, this does not mean that man himself is in the centre of theo-anthropocentrism – “god-man, the unique and incomparable, beyond and away of everything” (ibid. 74). Here, it can be seen again that theoretical assumptions of theo-anthropocentrism are inspired by and grounded in the teaching and the language of the most prominent Serbian theologian of the 20th century, the archimandrite Justin Popović. One of the main supports for his teaching was the concept of god-man and god-man’s culture, which he directly and clearly opposed to the isolated individual and his humanistic culture. Of course, this was not about refusal or denial but about re-establishment and repositioning of the ideal of man in the modern world; and this is the programme that the abovesaid representatives follow in physical culture. Their concept of theo-anthropocentrism is logically and contextually related to the concept of god-man’s culture of the archimandrite Justin Popović, and just as he opposed the concept of “god-man” (theohumanistic) to the widespread concept of “humanistic” in all the aspects of its application in social culture, the concept of “theo-anthropocentric” is opposed to and built on the concepts of “biocentric”, “egocentric” and “anthropocentric” in particular in physical culture in order to highlight a different, higher ideal of humanic – god-manhood as well as a different and more comprehensive aspect of manhood – god-manhood.

The main proponents of the theory of theo-anthropocentrism in physical culture together with their concise biographies and photos are represented in the same chapter. They are the two authors of this book: Nenad Živanović (1946-), professor at the University of Niš, and Zoran Milošević (1961-), professor at the University of Novi Sad, as well as Nebojša Randelović (1967-), professor at the University of Niš, and Petar D. Pavlović (1951-2019), who was a professor at the universities of Srpsko Sarajevo, Nikšić and Banja Luka.

The process of theohumanization of physical culture is discussed in a separate chapter in the part of the book on the establishment of physical culture. As with theoanthropocentrism, this term is used as a counterpart to the term of “humanization” (which is used almost axiomatically in human sciences to praise and liberate humans) in order to point out once abandoned support that this branch and other branches of European thought have in ethical values contained in Eastern Christianity. Theohumanization of physical culture can be understood as a specific view of man and his constant need of locomotion – exercising which,

from the angle of orthodox Christianity, approaches man as God's creation (a personality), and not as a tiny particle (an individual) lost in time and space of the modern world. "Thus, it should be noted", the authors write, "that man who is in the centre of physical culture must be approached with due care and love, and offered physical exercising – that god-given food so needed by his being through the knowledge grounded in moral principles. In this process, everyone engaged in providing physical exercising namely, teachers, coaches or instructors must possess sufficient love for other people, the kind of love that is neither disdainful nor envying, neither hollow nor dent" (ibid., p. 82).

Milošević and Živanović remind us that we live in time of rapid advance of technology, which is a challenge in any profession and field of study, also carrying advance of the course of social life that increasingly blurs the image of the real world where a person is becoming smaller and an individual getting promoted, with his autonomy pulled in a new virtual reality. Christian ethics and moral principles together with consciousness as the man's first gospel stand directly opposed to the leading global norms that allow man to do anything to accomplish his goals (ibid., 84). "We and our practice that we see as an integral part of general culture have to strive to nurture and praise Christian values in order to make them lighten our path, and see man as a personality – God's creation, and not an individual – a tiny particle lost in virtual reality" (ibid., ps. 84-85). In a separate chapter that addresses Christian ethics, at the end of the first part of the monograph with discussion on establishment of physical culture, the authors provide another elaboration on Christian understanding of freedom and responsibility of man. They do it by highlighting the view of god-man as a measure of all things as well as one of the main principles of freedom and responsibility, as father Justin expressed it, that intelligence, even the highest one, *in nothing* without love (ibid., ps. 86-87).

The main advantage of the theory of theanthropocentrism is in its understanding of "man as a personality" (ibid., p. 90). This can also partially apply to the theory of biocentrism, while other theories of physical culture see man only as an individual. The philosophy of anthropocentrism "steps in the foreground but only in another form, and pushes man into self-sufficiency" (ibid., p. 94). To these facts that many can find not enough articulated and justified, the authors add a key pool of evidence of their arguments, writing about cults that are being founded without any moral foundations. The most noticeable of all are the money cult of the owners of fitness centres and the body cult of their users. Both cults, equally fatal, have been very carefully promoted by using special marketing activities with a focus on man as an individual, not man as a personality, a creation of God. In the chapter on freedom of choice closing the part of the book on establishment of physical culture, the authors point out that all the knowledge on which the practice and its scholarship are built mean nothing if not supported by love and the resulting high ethical principles. Moreover, those who harm not only

their bodies but also their souls by either oblivious or conscious engagement in physical exercising because they follow money as the primary measure of all things, they are – nothing, regardless all the knowledge and valuables they have gained (ibid., p. 95). By extending the meaning of St. Paul the Apostle's verses on love and applying it to their theory, they argue that the love New Testament scholar writes about does not see an individual in man but this is the love that finds god-man, a personality in man – God's creation. In Europe, Christian ethics was replaced by fear of punishment and various legal norms, which led to a particular understanding of freedom implying that everything not opposed to the existing norms – was allowed for personal satisfaction. Contrary to this understanding, Milošević and Živanović quote one of the contemporary interpreters and witnesses of orthodox ethics, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who argued that freedom, to the contrary, includes self-restraint and self-limitation of the self for the sake of others. It can be concluded from this that the model and love are the basis of education and physical culture when it is complied with Christian ethics.

A detailed explanation and justification of the basic teaching is provided in the second part of the book that deals with physical education. This topic particularly stresses the importance of theo-anthropocentrism. In the introduction to the section on physical education, the authors write about the new age, emerged from rationalism and its derivative of the Enlightenment, which led to the rejection of God and glorification of man. Thus ratiocentrism became common instead of Christocentrism and has evolved into a prevailing ideology of this world. The results of this brutal prevalence can be found in any field of human activities which, of course, also applies to education and thus to school physical education (ibid., p. 100).

Milošević and Živanović recollect the original definition or etimological meaning of the terms of teaching and education, with the former referring to feeding in physical education with specific food – physical exercising, and the latter referring to one's face, an image of what he really is: a personality, unique and indivisible. But, of course – the authors point out – teaching and education can exist only in compliance with spirituality because without spirituality, they turn into worthless and waste skills. The same applies to the science, sports science: if it rejects spirituality as an inessential burden from the early ages relying on the reason as a support, it also turns into a waste skill that promotes building of "the world with no soul" (ibid., p. 100).

School physical education as a part of the education system has an incomparable role in the inevitable modern war against not only obesity, physical disabilities and depression of students but also in the struggle to return one to his or her self. In this struggle, agon that drives man toward physical exercising is not, and may not be, a determinant in physical education but only a motivating opportunity to make individual and group exercising more interesting. Therefore,

in the theory and practice of theo-anthropocentrism – the authors argue – physical exercising is *more than a game and less than a sport* (ibid., p. 102).

Probably the most inspiring chapter in the part on physical education is the one that is titled “A Teacher – the Beacon of the Profession.” Let us consider the advantages of theo-anthropocentrism in the preparation and professional training of teachers of physical education. This chapter also starts in a critical, somewhat obscure tone reminding that man as a being mysterious in his complexity and glory has made his greatest creation: sin, evil and death, which dominates the world (ibid. p. 104). However, there are also some millennial impediments to the strategy of the New world order creators to destroy personality. One of them is the church that represents not only a possibility for the faithful to advance to deification and transfiguration but also a community made up of various personalities. The other is the family that is in its sobornost like the church in a small scale but also a support for man on his way of spiritual rise. The third line of defence is the school as a place of learning and education but also enlightenment. Although it has witnessed its reform ups and downs, it has preserved the aim of helping young people not only with their education but also with spiritual development. If we return to the teaching of Saint Sava – the authors suggest – we shall restore the importance of the church, the family and the school (ibid., p. 105). On this way, the school and the teacher are the important link without which there is no advance. New programmes and new people are necessary, and together they can and have to emphasize the student as a personality and not an object that they will shape in the New Age spirit. This new personality built (also) in school will ensure an important support to our community – Milošević and Živanović assure (ibid., p. 106).

One of the retaining columns in school is a teacher. There would be no progress without the teacher and his or her efforts because the teacher is not only an expert and an educator but also a person who captivates and brings together, leads and raises. At this very right place, the authors, referring to the Serbian philosopher of religion Žarko Vidović, insist that a teacher can find a way to the personality of his or her student only through love and emotions, never through thinking (philosophy) because thinking includes grouping people by type and gender and ignoring man as an individual. Only when approaching with emotion, the teacher is capable of directing the student to proper physical exercising that will feed his or her body but also his or her soul (ibid. ps. 106-107). Physical exercising must be transformed from a rigorous drill to an activity appealing to the eye and soul. To achieve this, physical exercising may not be used for any other purposes than for the sake of our student, the personality we perceive through emotions (ibid., p. 107). It is very important that the authors write about the student’s personality in a language of mysterious philosophy, demanding the respect for its secret and not about an element of a pedagogical project or a new epochal ideological trend.

Later in the text, writing about what kind of teachers are needed, the authors slightly go beyond lyricism uncommon in academic discourse but this is the most effective way of illustrating solid guidelines that theo-anthropocentrism can offer to their field of interest. "It is about having intelligent and nice people who will help their students develop by supporting them with their kindness and wisdom. We do not need teachers who embarrass and humiliate their students just because of a single grade or their determination to act just they should not. We do not need teachers-coaches either, who are ready to fool and humiliate, harm students just because of a single sports victory. We do not need teachers-dictators, who will make new slaves and turn them faithless and perjurious. We need teachers who love their students and see new god-men in them. We need teachers who will teach with love and be a model, and feel the student's personality. We need teachers who will bring physical exercising closer to their students and use that particular food to raise and heighten their being. (Where using this emphasis at all three places in the text, the authors use bold lettering for the word "need" – I.Ž.)" (ibid. ps. 108-109).

Milošević and Živanović have no intention of following good wishes only but also want to study organizational potential for implementation of such a scenario. By doing this, they come to the idea of school reform, of higher education in this case, that would include not only updating of programmes but also their establishment on solid principles. "Just as we would like to have, and ask for, a new school, redesigned and grounded in the teaching of Saint Sava, we must want the same for universities. They need to be reformed, too and their programmes not only updated but also grounded in the same teaching of Saint Sava because without fresh god-men conceptions, there will be no universities, and without universities, there will be no teachers – the intelligent and nice people full of love for their students in whom they see new personalities" (ibid, p. 109). Then, sensing a danger of staying constrained within the boundaries of idealism, the authors once again provide a critical review of adverse present circumstances in their practice and beyond. This time they begin their review with an optimistic comment: "We are all lucky to have more and more of those who care about god-men principles of work and our roots deeply grounded in the teachings of Saint Sava and Orthodoxy. We are lucky to have more and more of those who realize that sports anthro-po-destruction provides support to those who welcome despair and the greatest human products: evil, sin and death. And, they fight them. They fight at universities, where they teach their students our new (old) tasks; they fight at schools, where they give physical exercising a new dimension that refines and rises their students' body and soul; they fight and spread their ideas among their friends and colleagues; their fight brings joy to them and to those who listen to them" (ibid, p. 109). They find another advantage in an opportunity to view the world as a unit that is, a unity of many diversities: geographic, climatic, cultural and societal, where they see a real possibility of constituting and promoting theo-anthropocentric approach. However, they recognize that globalization purposely ignore and tend to delete these diversities. "With the motto of the development of the civilization, everything is done to put everything and everyone under the control of the centre of power, establish a global government and a global ruler" (ibid, p. 110).

What about the teacher in such a world – the authors ask. This question, as they see it, looks simple from the angle of theo-anthropology or, more precisely – orthodox anthropology. “Teachers must be a part of the nation, its culture, customs. They should stand firmly on the ground in order to be ready to cope with challenges of the New Age. They must complement their intelligence with goodness because without it, they would harm themselves and others; and use emotions to understand their students’ personalities. They must make use of their knowledge in the best possible way, which means that physical exercising must be brought closer to their students so that they can use it as god-given food to their body and soul” (ibid., p. 111). The imperative these two authors pose to teachers of physical education does not originate from their ideological belligerence or an attempt to attract readers to one or another view of the world but it rather refers to a high-principled attitude of teachers who, never before and nowadays in particular, have been able to keep a safe, neutral position when coping with challenges of the New Age. In order to realize the noble goals of their work and treatment of their students, they must identify the impeding forces and consciously fight them. Teachers and their students would otherwise become victims of these forces.

The authors of *The Theory of Physical Culture* reviewed herein have not further elaborated the principles of theo-anthropocentrism and try to define them, for example, within the objectives of physical education they list. Thus, the following operational objectives, among others, are listed: to encourage growth and development of the student’s body and posture, to improve psychophysical capacities, to develop motor skills and establish motor habits, to provide knowledge for better understanding of the importance of physical education, to develop moral and voluntary personal characteristics, to train will, conscious discipline, proper relationship to their own assets and assets of others, as well as to encourage aesthetic, pleasing and benevolent feelings (ibid., ps. 112-117) however, it cannot be seen where the specifics of the theo-anthropocentric approach to these objectives are demonstrated. This means that in this book, theo-anthropocentrism is represented and defended in general, at the level of the fundamental theoretical background in physical culture, with its further application left to future authors for use in their works and books of different titles and structures.

Milošević and Živanović demonstrate that the concern that inspired them to take such a general methodological assignment does not come from within themselves, citing the achievements of the early generations of Serbian theoretists of the 19th century. Thus, in the chapter on special operational objectives, a 1842 doctoral thesis of Dimitrije Radulović, titled *Gimnastica Medica*, is mentioned, where this master of the profession presented a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between physical exercising and health. The importance of preserving and improving one’s health was also outlined by an eminent Serbian educator Đorđe Natošević, first in his work *The Rules of Health* and then in *The Ten Commandments of Diet* in 1860, and in later texts on the rules of preserving health (ibid., ps. 110-120). In the part dealing with the structure of teaching physical education, we find out that the term “physical education” was not introduced in our country until 1958, when it replaced the former term of gymnastics. The authors find closer connections with theo-anthropocentrism in the work of a young and well-educated hieromonk Georgie of Beckserek (Gregory Kircanski), who used the term of “physical education” in one of his translations published in Buda, Hungary, in

1807, the same year when this term first appeared in the world in a book of a famous educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.

A few teachers of physical culture, whose names are listed in the overview, nowadays inherit, conceptualize and adapt to the contemporary scientific and specialized language these long-lasting and recognizable traditions of theo-anthropocentrism. Among these teachers, Dr Nenad Živanović, a retired former head of the department of courses in theory and methodology at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education can probably be given the greatest credit for his contribution, with theo-anthropocentrism in the context of physical culture considered his life's work in its full meaning. The works of professor Živanović have been acknowledged in the whole world and he is the holder of the highest FIEP award FIEP Gold Cross of Honour on Physical Education, as the one of fifteen holders in the world and only five in Europe. It is the most valuable and the highest award for contributions and special results in the field of physical education. The theory of theo-anthropocentrism was more deeply founded in Serbia when professor Živanović identified two more top experts who follow certain principles in their works: Dr Petar Pavlović, a professor at the universities of Srpsko Sarajevo, Nikšić and Banja Luka, and the coauthor of this book, Dr Zoran Milošević, a professor at the University of Novi Sad, and also when he formed a group of followers at the University of Niš, with Dr Nebojša Randelović as the most prominent.

These professors are rather temperate in their use of the theological background of theo-anthropocentrism in their works, without any excessive elaboration that would probably ground this concept deeper into the traditional structure of orthodox teaching, which would pose a certain high risk for responsible scholars who have no knowledge in theology – trying to avoid provisional positioning of the given concept or potential deviation from the teaching. A specific assurance of legitimate theology and orthodoxy is the presence of the concept of theo-anthropocentrism in the thinking and teaching of archimandrite Justin Popović, probably the most prominent theological figure in Serbia in the 20th century, who provides it with initial inspiration and determination. Another branch of the theological background of this theory refers to the theology of personality, which is also one of the most widespread lines in the orthodox theology of the 20th century. It is interesting to note that the authors and particularly Zoran Milošević, who was the first to introduce the difference between a person and an individual in the theory of physical culture, do not go any further in the application of the known implications of this theological construct although the field of physical culture may seem very intriguing for problematization of the relationship between personality and nature. In this case, it is a favourable condition since exactly such implications have been recently subject to the most serious theological criticism. It can be said that the use of the term of personality in the theory of theo-anthropocentrism has emerged from a solid foundation of the orthodox teaching, in which proper understanding of the mystery of personality leads to the question about the existence of God and eternal value of soul, and then to the connection of personality with God-man Christ, which is the only way to solve the mystery, save it from subjugation and dismissal, and finally, to love for which man has been meant to be and which furnishes man's existence and education with a content. Elaboration of all these characteristics can be found in works of Justin Popović, who virtually introduced theology of personality into Serbian academic thinking. This is why the entire conception of theo-anthropocentrism can be viewed as a specific line of "justinology", the development of which is

very present in our generation of theologians, particularly in works of the two contemporary philosophers, Bogdan Lubardić and Vladimir Cvetković, who studied his heritage.

There is also a very specific theological and spiritual contribution of theo-anthropocentrism to physical culture, which includes pronounced sensitivity and painful empathy of all the authors to for the modern man and the young man as a student of physical education in particular. This sensitivity, as it were instructed by the old men of Mount Athos and other Orthodox spiritual teachers, explains and justifies motivation for frequent critical reviews that are apparently not aimed at ideological mind games or gaining a theoretical advantage with relation to some other concepts. The authors try to protect a child, a young man, and the entire mankind against fatal effects that they clearly see and sense from various directions. This is why they are predominantly focused on education but also use much of lyric expression uncommon in academic discourse and distinct in early works of Nenad Živanović with descriptions full of affection that the noble professor uses to explain the position of the child – a developing personality. This is supported by a kind of tribute to the welfare of teachers, which has been created by all these dedicated representatives and can be highlighted as the key feature of the present and already developed first stage of theo-anthropocentrism in physical culture.

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