

From the Individual to the Person: The Order of the World as System and as Mystery

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the dialectical tension between two fundamental logics of world order: on the one hand, the technical, instrumental, and rational logic of worldly management, as expressed in modern political and economic systems; and on the other, the theological and soteriological logic of Divine Economy, which endows the world with meaning as a mystery of relationship and gift. Within this framework, the transition from the individual to the person is explored—not merely as an anthropological shift, but as an interpretive turn in the way we understand and structure worldly order. While the instrumental logic is grounded in efficiency, calculability, and control, the person reveals an alternative normativity, founded on freedom, relationship, grace, and self-transcendence. Divine Economy is thus proposed as a critical paradigm for re-signifying political and economic praxis, offering an alternative vision of leadership, management, and resource distribution, one centered not on the interest-driven individual, but on the relational and responsible person. The approach is interdisciplinary, drawing from patristic theology, philosophy, political theory, and economic science, with the aim of shaping a dialogical space between divine and human economy. The goal is to articulate a new paradigm of worldly order, not as an impersonal and linear system, but as a community of persons who co-weave the world as a mystery of relationship and meaning.

KEYWORDS: Political Economy, Divine Economy, Personhood vs Individualism, Economic Anthropology, Post-secular Political Thought.

JEL Codes: A12, D63, Z12

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the concept of "management" -economic, political, technocratic- has become the dominant paradigm for organizing and interpreting all aspects of social life (Goodchild, 2007, 2022). Our era is characterized by an emphasis on efficiency, rational order, computational precision, and systemic control, where even religious communities operate as platforms competing for resources and influence, often compared to businesses (Seabright, 2024). However, this instrumental logic is not the only one available. Divine Economy, as understood within the Christian theological tradition, offers a radically different interpretive perspective on the world—an order shaped by economic justice and ecological responsibility, not derived from mechanical management, but from providence, grace, and the salvific dynamism of history (Yannaras, 1987; Zizioulas, 2021; Nass, 2022; Goodchild, 2022).

This article seeks to explore the dialectical relationship between two forms of "order": on the one hand, Divine Economy, as an existential and theological mystery that transcends pure reason; and on the other, Worldly Management, as a technical and functional response to the challenges of political and economic organization. The approach does not aim at a mere critical juxtaposition, but rather at a creative dialogue, in which the transrational logic of Divine Economy may serve as a critical and transformative paradigm for rethinking systemic rationalities, and conversely, where worldly management provides the conceptual and functional tools for understanding and articulating Divine Economy within historical becoming. Within this framework, the transition from the individual to the person emerges as a fundamental shift in the understanding of human subjectivity—one that is reflected in the way the order of the world is structured, no longer as an instrumental system, but as a community of relationship.

The approach is interdisciplinary, combining theological analysis, philosophical hermeneutics, and principles from political theory and political economy. Specifically, it draws inspiration from Eastern Orthodox theology, the philosophy of modernity (Hegel, Foucault, Agamben), and contemporary analyses of systemic functioning (Luhmann, Habermas).

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The central hypothesis under investigation is that Divine Economy—as a design of divine providence—and Worldly Management—as economic, political, social, administrative, cultural, technological, and digital planning—do not constitute incompatible poles, but can intersect within a space of critical confrontation and creative convergence. In this dynamic, the former offers existential and meaning-oriented guidance, while the latter provides technical and practical capacities for the realization of a more just and humane order of the world.

In this study, the term "order" does not refer merely to the organizational dimension of reality, but also to the deeper structure of the relationship between human beings, the world, and God. As a "system," order points to the instrumental organization of the world; as a "mystery," it reveals a fundamental otherness—a mode of existence grounded in gift, freedom, and personhood.

2. DIVINE ECONOMY AS THE FOUNDATION OF COSMIC AND SOTERIOLOGICAL ORDER

The concept of Divine Economy lies at the heart of Christian theological thought, constituting the structural relationship between God and the world. The term "*economy*", as Schumpeter notes, is "*the inheritance that has been left to us by our cultural ancestors, the Ancient Greeks... Oeconomicus (from oikos, house), and nomos (law or rule) meant only practical wisdom of household management*" (Schumpeter, 1954, pp. 53–54). In the ecclesiastical context, however, this concept assumes a deeper meaning, as it refers to the way in which God acts within history for the salvation of the world and the restoration of His relationship with fallen humanity (Zizioulas, 2023a; Lossky, 1974).

Divine Economy is not merely a theoretical scheme of soteriological interpretation, but the living and active manifestation of God within history (Zizioulas, 2023b). Its culmination is realized in the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, and it continues within the Church, through the Holy Spirit, as the historical and existential plan of divine love for the salvation of humankind (Behr, 2013; Daley, 2015).

The manifestation of God's will for the salvation of humanity is already recorded in the scriptural tradition, with particular emphasis in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. There, the theological significance of the "*fullness of time*" is brought to light, during which "*God sent forth His Son [...] so that we might receive adoption as sons*" (Gal. 4:4–5). This apocalyptic event is not exhausted in the Incarnation but extends throughout the entire economy of divine condescension, encompassing Christ's Passion, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension (Lossky, 1974).

In patristic theology, Divine Economy is defined as the philanthropic and soteriological action of God, through which humanity is called to emerge from the condition of fallenness and corruption, and to enter into a dynamic path of renewal and participation in divine life. As St. John of Damascus notes, "*The divine economy is the energy of God's love for humanity, through which the salvation of the human being is accomplished*" (PG 94, 1108).

The patristic tradition recognizes that Divine Economy is not merely a divine response to sin and the fall, but a revelation of God's eternal purpose for communion with the human person. The Incarnation of the Son is not a reaction to human apostasy, but rather part of the primordial plan of creation, in which humanity is called to partake in the uncreated divine life (Zizioulas, 2023a; Matsoukas, 2003). As St. Athanasius of Alexandria famously states: "*He became man, that we might be deified*" (PG 25, 192B).

Divine Economy also serves as a paradigm of relationality and the exercise of authority. Christ inaugurates an ethic of leadership that is not rooted in domination, but in sacrificial service: "*The Son of Man [...] came not to be served, but to serve*" (Mark 10:45). This principle lays the foundation for a new understanding of social and political responsibility. It is inseparably linked to Divine Providence, God's continual care for the existence and salvation of creation. God "*cares for all things*" (PG 29b, 3–208), not out of necessity, but out of love. Providence is not imposed but offered, and humanity is invited to respond freely (Romanides, 2004). The Church, as the "Body of Christ," is not merely an institution but a living community of salvation. The concept of "*by grace*" is not a theoretical construct but an existential experience. The Church embodies God's love within the world and is called to serve as a point of reference for the renewal of society (Behr, 2019; Angelou, 2020).

Christian theology places particular emphasis on the uniqueness of Divine Economy. God is not awaited by humanity, but comes forth Himself in order to save it. This mystery "*was made known by revelation... according to the economy of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God*" (Paul, Eph. 3:3–9); it is thus not the fruit of human searching, but of divine revelation. The Incarnation is the manifestation of this love (John of Damascus, PG 94, 1072C). In this context, the notion of Divine Economy is expressed as God's personal concern for the salvation of the world (Matsoukas, 2003; Lossky, Behr, 2021; Zizioulas, 2023b).

Although many religions, such as Hinduism with moksha (the doctrine of liberation), Buddhism with nirvana (the cessation of suffering and the cycle of rebirth), or Islam with its "expectation of post-mortem reward", develop teachings regarding human salvation or liberation (Michailidis, 2022, p.325; Papalexandropoulos, 2016, p.396; Marioras, 2019, p.420), none of them is grounded in a historical divine revelation with a personal Savior who enters into history. Only in Christianity does God become man, live, suffer, and save within history (Behr, 2021; Zizioulas, 2023b; Louth, 2012). The embodied entry of God into history is not merely a doctrinal point of reference; it constitutes a living model and an existential invitation to humanity (Papanikolaou, 2012), an invitation to participate in the life of God.

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Divine Economy extends beyond the historical event of the Incarnation and embraces the entire trajectory of divine condescension, from the Passion and Resurrection to the Church, which embodies the Economy within history (Edwards, 2016). God's Providence emerges as a model of moral and cosmic responsibility: the relationship between God and the world is founded on love, and this relationship invites humanity to a loving stewardship of creation (Triadari & Terezis, 2019).

In practical terms, Divine Economy is not confined to a purely spiritual or eschatological framework, but is offered as a moral and worldly paradigm—a point of reference for human economic action and responsibility. Human economy, as the historically shaped process of production, consumption, and distribution of goods, is called to be shaped with providence, justice, and care—transcending narrow individual self-interest (Gazetas & Aznaouridis, 2025).

3. COSMIC STEWARDSHIP: CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SYSTEMS

In the modern era, the management of social, political, and economic reality is increasingly carried out through systems and structures governed by regularities, self-regulation, and programmed response. This systemic approach arises from the modern emancipation of society from metaphysical and theological principles, accompanied by the reduction of cosmic order to a process of reproducing power, resources, redistribution, and information (Nielsen, 2024).

The system, as described by Niklas Luhmann (1995), is not a control mechanism, but a network of interrelated subsystems operating according to the logic of functional differentiation. In this context, domains such as economy, politics, science, and technology develop their own internal rules of operation, often independent of social or moral expectations. Modern cosmic management is defined by the notion of depersonalization: functionality tends to precede moral evaluation, and efficiency outweighs interpersonal responsibility.

Within this framework, the individual tends to be integrated into the system not as a person with uniqueness and will, but as a bearer of roles or a user of services. This logic is evident in the digitization of governance (*e-governance*), the automated decision-making enabled by algorithms, and the normative authority exercised through indicators, evaluations, and metrics (Merry, 2016). The order of the world ceases to be a mystery and is reduced to models of prediction and control.

However, dependence on systems gives rise to new forms of disorder. Thinkers such as Ulrich Beck (1992) have pointed out that the “risk society” develops mechanisms of control that often produce unforeseen side effects, ecological crises, and social deviations. The system, while theoretically oriented toward order, generates new inequalities and exclusions. This brings into question the very issue of the “center” of management, who decides, and on whose behalf?

Throughout the entire course of history, from prehistory to the present, we observe relationships of production, exchange, and consumption unfolding within diverse economic, political, and social contexts. These reveal the ways in which economic practices have shaped culture, power, morality, and progress.

Tracing the historical trajectory of economic and political life, we observe the gradual transition from collective forms of ownership to individual rights of property and wealth. Markets, trade, and money did not emerge instantaneously but were formed over time as institutions of exchange, valuation, and storage of value. Historical factors—such as wars, religions, and the formation of state entities—have decisively shaped the framework of economic organization, influencing the distribution of power, resources, and influence. At the same time, technological advancement and the establishment of institutions, such as labor, banking, and legal systems, have, at times, fostered development, and at other times contributed to social and economic decline.

Across this long historical journey, recurring patterns become evident: uneven development, unequal distribution of wealth, periodic crises, creative destructions, and cyclical bursts of innovation. Ultimately, it is through centuries of human creativity, disappointments, conflicts, and quests that the complex—and in many ways contradictory system of the contemporary globalized economy has been shaped.

Within this framework, a crucial question arises regarding the nature and role of contemporary “economic religions”, that is, ideologically charged and often dogmatic economic theories—and the extent to which they are genuinely capable of addressing the demand for human flourishing, which for many is synonymous with the very meaning of life (Nelson, 2019). This issue becomes particularly significant in light of the fundamental economic problem of resource scarcity. This challenge is not merely an abstract theoretical construct, but a universal and enduring condition that affects all forms of decision-making, both at the individual and collective level.

The limited availability of productive resources, combined with the diversity, variability, and at times boundless nature of human needs, necessitates the existence of mechanisms for rational, efficient, and equitable allocation. The fundamental triad: *what to produce, how to produce it, and for whom*, constitutes the core of every economic model, decisively influencing both efficiency and social justice (Samuelson, 1973; Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2010).

However, the inability of many contemporary systems to respond to the demand for justice and universal well-being is revealed in phenomena such as the persistent presence of poverty amidst material abundance (Gandhi, 2009). This contradiction cannot be attributed solely to scarcity, but is more deeply connected to institutional distortions, structural inequalities, and the ideological rigidity of dominant economic paradigms. When an economic theory becomes a closed, dogmatic framework, excluding the possibility of self-critique and adaptation, it ceases to function as a tool for the promotion of human flourishing. On the contrary, it

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contributes to the perpetuation of mechanisms of social exclusion and inequality, casting doubt not only on the effectiveness but also on the legitimacy of the system itself.

Contemporary cosmic management thus stands at a critical crossroads: between technical rationality and the need to rearticulate human responsibility. Unless a form of moral meaning is reintegrated into systems, one that acknowledges the value of the person, not merely as a user or a factor of production, then the “system” risks becoming an end in itself rather than a means, with unpredictable consequences for freedom and justice.

4. FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE PERSON: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL SHIFT

The concept of the person, as it emerges primarily within theological and partly within philosophical tradition, represents a radically different anthropological model than that of the modern individual. The *individual* is highlighted in Western thought as a self-sufficient and autonomous unit, bearer of rights and desires, morally and rationally self-contained, and often detached from any unified horizon of relationship or transcendence (Taylor, 1989). In contrast, the *person* (*prosopon* or *person*) is revealed within relationship; it is ontologically constituted through the other, not merely socially defined, but existentially relational (Zizioulas, 2021) and unique.

The word “*atomon*” which means *individual* (from the Greek *a-tomon*, meaning “not divisible”) denotes a being without reference to the other. Within this framework, identity is constructed through self-protection, the reinforcement of the *ego*, the consumption of experiences or goods, and ultimately, isolation. By contrast, Divine Economy reveals the human being as *person* (*prosopon*), a being oriented *toward* the other (*pros* + *ops*, “toward the face”) (Gazetas, 2023; Yannaras, 1987). Personal existence is not self-sufficient but relational; it is not defined by self-referentiality but by the freedom to relate, to love, and to offer oneself. As Zizioulas (1977, p. 287) affirms, “*the person, as both concept and experience, is the child and fruit of Patristic Theology,*” in radical contrast to the self-enclosed, egocentric individual of late modernity.

Modernity grounds its political and economic order upon the individual-as-unit: the *homo economicus*, the instrumentally rational calculator of interests, the citizen who participates in a system based on reciprocity, contractual logic, and competition (Foucault, 2008; Agamben, 1998). This conception shapes the world as a *system*, a network of functions, controls, and predictions, a flowchart in which mystery has no place.

In contrast, the understanding of the human being as *person* invites us to conceive the order of the world as relationship, not as machine. The person, as image and bearer of relationship, constitutes *community*, not merely society; and this community, in order to be sustainable, must be founded upon principles such as self-transcendence, gift, grace, and the hospitality of the other (Levinas, 1981; Yannaras, 1987). The secular logic of order seeks to manage society through general rules, techniques, control, and utilitarian goals. Divine Economy, by contrast, introduces an order through relationship, in which the uniqueness of the person is not erased but becomes the very site of shared meaning. Thus, the true therapeutic path is not individual “normality,” but the restoration of relationship: with the self, the other, the world, and ultimately, with God.

What emerges, therefore, is a broader vision of the relationship between person and world, in which, within this theological framework, the person is not merely understood as a subject of will; it is a metaphysical event of relationship, a *being-together* (*syn-hypostasis*) in Christ, which bridges ontology with ethics and links politics with eschatology (Zizioulas, 2021).

This anthropological transformation leads to a different cosmological perception. The world is no longer merely something to be controlled, calculated, or managed; it is, above all, something that precedes us and invites us into participation. When cosmic order is grounded in the logic of the person, it ceases to be a utilitarian system and becomes a community of relationship and mystery, something that calls not only for rational regulation but also for liturgical integration, dialogue, and grace.

This perspective does not exclude the need for rules, institutions, or organization; rather, it proposes an alternative mode of structuring and interpreting political and economic life, one in which functionality is subordinated to relational otherness, rather than to calculative performance.

5. DISCUSSION

The contemporary search for meaning and order in the social, political, and economic spheres highlights the need for dialogue between two often opposing logics: the Divine and the Secular. The former is grounded in existential and revelatory foundations, where the order of the world is understood as gift, mystery, and relationship; the latter is based on rational planning, systemic functionality, and programmed management. The dialectical relationship between the two expresses a process of synthesis and creativity, in which contradictions are not merely resolved but transcended—replaced by a higher level of truth centered on the event of Christ (Grigoriadou, 2019). The conflict -and the potential convergence- of these two logics is not limited to the metaphysical domain; it also extends to the ways in which prosperity, justice, and the human place in the world are interpreted and given meaning. Their constructive dialogue does not aim at identification or uniformity, but at a critical encounter that reveals blind spots and limitations, contributing to a holistic and person-centered reconsideration of the human condition.

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a. A Critique of the Economic Individual in Modernity

The dominant economic thought of modernity is grounded in an anthropological model that conceives the human being as a self-sufficient and autonomous subject, rooted in the principles of individualistic utilitarianism (Keane, 2019). This model—known as *homo economicus*—is characterized by functional self-containment, the exclusion of uncertainty, subjectivity expressed as a mathematical variable, and an ideologically self-interested bias. It describes a subject whose rationality and economic behavior are defined by the “*internal consistency of choice*,” the “*maximization of individual interest*,” and, more broadly, the “*optimization*” of economic outcomes (Sen, 2017, pp. 301–306). While human economic life is formed under the influence of values, moral frameworks, and metaphysical references, the normative imperatives related to the common good, human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, environmental ethics, and sustainable development often come into conflict with the utilitarian core of *homo economicus* (Enderle, 2018, pp. 7–13; Keane, 2019).

The instrumental logic of this model, with its emphasis on self-interested utility, fails to comprehend the human being as a bearer of relationship and love, as revealed in the Christian paradigm of Divine Economy. In the patristic tradition, the human being is not a unit but a *person*: a being-in-relation, a bearer of holiness, freedom, and the potential for participation in the uncreated (Zizioulas, 1985; Lossky, 2006; Ware, 1997). Human fulfillment is not exhausted in material or utilitarian interests, but is founded upon communion with God and with fellow human beings (Zizioulas, 1985).

This person-centered anthropology can serve as a radical alternative to modern individualism. It redefines the economic subject not as an isolated carrier of interests, but as a responsible bearer of relationships, capable of engaging in economic activity with a spirit of offering, unity, and selflessness. Divine Economy inscribes economic action within an ethos of social interdependence, reciprocity, and love, offering a value-based paradigm that transcends the mechanistic utilitarianism of the market.

On a practical level, this model is embodied by individuals who, inspired by the ethos of divine love, act within frameworks of collective responsibility, justice, and social closeness. Participation in forms of economic coexistence—such as the social and solidarity economy, cooperatives, fair trade, and exchange networks—constitutes applications of this perspective. In these arrangements, goods are not primarily regarded as objects of ownership, but as gifts to be managed with responsibility (Volf, 1997; Chryssavgis, 2019). Thus, a form of economic human emerges, animated by an ethos of selflessness, fair distribution, ecological responsibility, and ethical participation in the common good.

b. The Person-Centered Opposition to Utilitarianism

The ethical theory of utilitarianism, as initially formulated by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and further elaborated by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), establishes as the fundamental criterion for evaluating actions the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest possible number of people. Bentham, through his notion of ‘moral arithmetic,’ introduced the logic of quantifying utility, while Mill added qualitative nuances to the theory of utility by linking economic behavior with moral cultivation and freedom (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1863). As Mill points out, ‘Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure’ (Mill, 1863 Ch.2§2).

In stark contrast to utilitarian thought, Immanuel Kant (1785/1998) rejects the derivation of morality from the consequences of actions, upholding the categorical imperative and the autonomy of the person as fundamental criteria of universality and moral obligation. The conflict between these two approaches is not confined to the philosophical level, but reflects broader ideological implications within economic theory: utilitarianism initially developed as an economic doctrine (Smith, 1776), then as a political theory, and ultimately as a comprehensive moral paradigm, forming the philosophical foundation of Classical Liberalism. Along this trajectory, the utilitarian principle of marginal utility (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 2013), cost–benefit analysis (Boardman et al., 2018), and social welfare policies (Samuelson, 1973; Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2010; Barr, 2020; Stiglitz, 2012) were incorporated into the mainstream of modern economic science. As a result, today’s economic systems, which embrace the idea of perpetual abundance (Galbraith, 1999), elevate consumption, efficiency, productivity, growth, and expansion as the primary indicators of progress, while sidelining the importance of social justice, solidarity, and sustainability (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2012; Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2010; OECD, 2020).

The prevailing utilitarian logic often culminates in individual-centered moral frameworks, reducing the human person to a mere means for achieving economic ends. Divine Economy, by contrast, does not merely consist of a conventional ethical resistance but springs from values that fundamentally oppose the relativism and instrumental outlook of today’s economic system (Patriarch Bartholomew, 2008). Unlike the utilitarian approach, which values only outcomes, Divine Economy places the person at the center as a bearer of relationship and responsibility, and regards action as an expression of love, selfless offering, and unity (Zizioulas, 1985; Zizioulas, 2024).

This critique targets the very anthropological foundation of modern economic theory. Economy cannot function detached from continuous hierarchies of values; on the contrary, it must place at its center the person, the community, offering, and justice, not as mere afterthoughts, but as primary parameters of economic thought and action. Divine Economy transcends the logic of reciprocity or transactional ethics, embodying a model of selfless offering, as revealed in the Eucharistic life of the Church (Chryssavgis, 2019).

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This ethos opposes utilitarianism and the desacralization of the human being, as it rejects the identification of the person with their functionality or productivity, recognizing that their true essence flows from the image of God they bear within (Yannaras, 2004; Patriarch Bartholomew, 2008).

At the level of contemporary practice, Divine Economy is manifested through policies and actions that highlight the primacy of the person over instrumental utilitarian logic. Economic activity must be transformed into an act of social responsibility and selfless offering, recognizing the value of the human being as the image of God rather than as a resource to be exploited (Zizioulas, 1985). In social practice, this is expressed through communal forms of economic organization, cooperatives, social enterprises, and solidarity networks, which seek the common good rather than individual profit (Chrysavgis, 2019).

The Eucharistic experience, as the foundation of Divine Economy, calls for forms of offering that transcend reciprocity and reframe the meaning of benefit and well-being, not as the accumulation of goods, but as social participation (Patriarch Bartholomew, 2008). In contrast to “economic and political systems that impose their own truth” (Galbraith, 2004, p. 23), Divine Economy emerges as an anthropological and moral paradigm of resistance to utilitarianism, calling for a reorientation of the economy toward a society of persons. Within this framework, economic action must become a space for re-examining economic thought, rejecting injustice as an inevitable condition, restoring social relationships, and affirming the truth of the person, of community, and of justice (Yannaras, 2004).

c. Reconceptualizing Economic Teleology

Today’s economy and politics focus almost exclusively on material gain and technological efficiency, adopting a logic of “creative destruction,” whereby the collapse of structures and the dissolution of enterprises create the conditions for the emergence of new productive forces (Schumpeter, 1975). This ongoing wave of transformation—from the release of resources to the radical restructuring of industrial sectors—has spread across all economic systems, establishing dynamic adaptation as a core principle of survival. Within the modern capitalist framework, intense competitiveness, the promotion of individual self-interest, and the exploitation of natural and human resources drive the imperative of continuous growth and expansion (Smith, 1977; Bowles, Edwards & Roosevelt, 2005; Friedman, 2020).

In classical political economy, Karl Marx (1867) exposes the exploitative relationship between capital and labor, highlighting the role of social classes in the productive process (Marx, 2013). By contrast, Thomas Carlyle refers to economics as a “dismal science,” specifically criticizing the assumptions of equality and freedom promoted by utilitarian theories (Carlyle, 1849). In modern usage, the term “dismal science” is often employed to underscore the pessimistic dimension of economic discourse, particularly when it focuses on resource scarcity, crises, or recessions.

In contrast to this narrowly materialistic and mathematized perception, the teleological dimension of Divine Economy reveals a new axis for reframing every human-driven economic act, introducing the moral parameter as a central factor (Bulgakov, 2014). Through this lens, economic activity is not merely confined to the pursuit of prosperity or the satisfaction of basic needs; rather, it seeks to integrate the goal of existential fulfillment and the deification of the human being by grace (Kharlamov, 2011; Byrne, 2021). This constitutes a critical intervention within the field of economic sciences, one that reintroduces the dimension of the Final Purpose: the management of resources and the structure of markets must adhere to a broader orientation, beyond measurable profit maximization, cost minimization, or rigid cost–benefit analysis (Stephen Long, 2003).

At the level of practical application, the above theological–teleological reinterpretation is reflected in the promotion of intergenerational and intragenerational social cohesion and justice. Here, the “common good” prevails over narrow self-interest, highlighting economic activity as relationship and ministry. The goal is the formation of a moral economy, centered on the value of the human person—not merely as a factor of production, but as a bearer of sanctity and relationality. Consequently, principles such as efficiency, stock market competition, continuous wealth accumulation, and Darwinian-style “survival of the fittest” logic are contrasted with values of respect, responsibility, solidarity, service, Christian Eucharistic stewardship of resources, and sustainable development (Leonard, 2009).

Within this framework, examples of alternative models of economic organization include the social economy, cooperative enterprises, the circular economy, and other forms that promote mutual benefit, the distribution of gifts, and the integration of community purpose at the heart of economic decision-making logic. In this way, a coherent re-examination of the consumerist model is pursued, alongside a gradual shift away from utilitarian maximization, giving way to a human-centered paradigm of economic life.

d. The Ontology of Scarcity and the Economy of Relationship

The dominant view of human economy regards scarcity as its fundamental axiom, legitimizing all logic of competition and individual accumulation. Specifically, the imbalance between limited economic goods and unlimited human needs creates the necessity of choice and resource allocation aimed at maximizing utility (Schumpeter, 1954; Samuelson, 1973). As a result, decision-making is guided by criteria of efficiency, while instrumental reasoning and the concept of opportunity cost are reinforced (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2010; Stiglitz et al., 2010). This particular focus on scarcity extends market principles into every domain of social life, promoting the formation of individualistic and competitive frameworks (Stiglitz et al., 2010).

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Ethics, through this lens, is reduced to a process of calculative exchange of benefits, thereby reinforcing the utilitarian conception of value.

By contrast, Divine Economy introduces an ontology of abundance and gift, in which God's providence renders the world a field of fullness rather than lack. This paradigm challenges the ideologies of scarcity and greed, proposing an economic behavior grounded in eucharist and care for the common good (Zizioulas, 1985; Patriarch Bartholomew, 2008; Zizioulas, 2024).

At the level of social practices, Divine Economy takes tangible form through the Eucharistic logic of selfless offering and communal sharing (Chrysavgis, 2019). Examples of such practices include community grocery stores, “tables of love” (communal meals), and structures providing free medical and pharmaceutical care. These initiatives reject the logic of scarcity and redefine abundance as a product of relationship, providence, and solidarity.

By definition, within these frameworks, economy ceases to be conceived as a mechanical system and is instead revealed as a field of relationships between God, humanity, and creation. This approach questions the depersonalized character of modern economic institutions and cultivates the prospect of a dialogical, communal economic life. This model presents economy as relationship and inspires the creation of cooperative forms of organization, grounded in respect, trust, and shared responsibility (Zizioulas, 1985; Volf, 1997; Goodchild, 2007).

e. Authority and Leadership

Economic power, historically, has been rooted in the control of productive resources, money, investments, and labor. Through this control, it shapes social structures and significantly influences decision-making processes (Marx, 1867; Weber, 1922; Gramsci, 1971; Foucault, 2008; Piketty, 2017). This power has substantially contributed to the widening of inequalities and has undermined the fundamental principles of democracy (Stiglitz, 2012).

At the same time, political power, as a mechanism for making binding decisions and regulating social life, constitutes the force that organizes collective existence and enforces institutional arrangements -through legislation and coercion- either to maintain order or to promote specific political objectives (Hobbes, 1651; Rousseau, 1762; Foucault, 1995).

In the current context, these two forms of secular power appear more concentrated and interdependent than ever. The distinction between the economic and political spheres is becoming increasingly blurred, as economic power often shapes the political process, and conversely, political decisions define the boundaries and possibilities of economic activity (Piketty, 2014; Wolin, 2017).

In modern liberal democracies, there is a noticeable fusion of economic interests with political power, shaping a system of governance oriented toward serving the elites (Wolin, 2017). These elites are continuously focused on reproducing and perpetuating their power (Lasch, 1996). Within this context, the notion of leadership appears to have lost its original essence, drifting away from the values of responsibility, inspiration, and self-sacrifice for the common good. Instead, leadership is often reduced to a managerial function or a communication strategy, with the leader portrayed as a manager or investor of political capital, lacking moral orientation and genuine vision (Rosanvallon, 2008a; Galbraith, 1977, 1987, 2004).

Admittedly, there are examples of leaders who strive to preserve the moral dimension of leadership; however, their visibility is often limited by the nature of modern media and the logic of the political marketplace.

In the context of globalization, four key trends can be identified: (1) the privatization of politics, with large corporations and economic elites exerting decisive influence over the political agenda; (2) the multinationalization of power, as important decisions are increasingly transferred to supranational bodies beyond the nation-state (e.g., the EU, World Bank, etc.); (3) the rise of communicative power, whereby control over narrative becomes a source of political influence (media, social networks, etc.); and (4) the crisis of representation, with citizens feeling increasingly alienated from representative institutions (Hardt & Negri, 2001; Rosanvallon, 2008a; Castells, 2009; Piketty, 2017; Stiglitz, 2012).

This observation highlights the urgent need for a different kind of leadership—one that does not dominate or manipulate for personal gain, but rather serves the many with selflessness, integrity, and commitment to principles.

In radical contrast to the instrumental and abusive use of power, Divine Economy introduces a different understanding, that of *diakonia* (servanthood). Power is understood not as domination, but as sacrificial offering. Leadership is embodied in the image of Christ, who calls leaders to become servants of others (Matt. 20:25–28), without coercion, within the framework of salvation. The strong are called to become servants of the weak, offering themselves not in pursuit of self-interest, but for the sake of others (John 13:12–17). This model of sacrificial leadership is most fully expressed in the person of Jesus Christ (Zizioulas, 1985, 2024).

The redefinition of power through the lens of *diakonia* offers a powerful critique of the technocratic, instrumental, and individualistic logic of power. It brings back into focus the dimension of responsibility and service in the exercise of both political and economic hegemony.

In order to bring forth a form of leadership defined by a spirit of service rather than domination, several conditions are required: (1) the establishment of institutions grounded in transparency and accountability; (2) the strengthening of political and social education, oriented toward the cultivation of virtue, selflessness, and commitment to the common good; (3) the selection of leaders based on their moral integrity and social contribution; (4) the implementation of mechanisms to balance the power of multinationals and the

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influence of elites; (5) the liberation of public discourse from the influence of mass media and digital platforms; and (6) the revitalization of representative institutions through forms of direct and participatory democracy, utilizing the potential of modern technology.

f. From the Individual to the Person: The Politics of Relationship in Postmodern Technocracy

The concept of the *person*, in contrast to the individualistic model of modernity, does not refer to a self-sufficient, self-centered unit, but to a relational and responsible subject. The person is not constituted as sovereign over nature or the self, but emerges within communion with the other, in the acceptance of otherness and the freedom of being-in-relationship.

In contrast, the individual—according to the modern paradigm—is the product of an anthropology rooted in possession, contract, and the logic of self-interest: politics of representation, ethics of exchange, and an economy of appropriation. The *person* opposes this view: it is not content with “enlightened self-interest,” nor does it conform to “collective appropriation”; it is not the “owner” of itself, but responsible before the other. It is not an *ego* engaged in contractual relations with others, but an *otherness* that presupposes gift.

The shift from the individual to the person is not merely a philosophical or theological move; it is also a political act—especially within the postmodern condition. Postmodernity, with the deconstruction of stable identities, the collapse of grand narratives, and the dominance of relativism (Lyotard, 1979; Bauman, 2000), gives rise to a new form of individualization, where the individual—now disconnected from stable communities—becomes vulnerable to technocratic forms of power. Contemporary power is no longer primarily repressive but managerial; it is organized as a technical system—a mechanism of prediction, control, influence, and administration (Foucault, 2008). In place of political confrontation, we find economic evaluation; instead of dialogue, statistics; and instead of the citizen, the consumer.

The individual of postmodernity appears thus trapped in an individualism without authority and a freedom without responsibility. What emerges is a type of “private” human being, defined by consumption, preferences, and role performance, a person constantly under construction, treated by power structures as a unit of productivity and adaptability (Debord, 1967; Crouch, 2004). In response to this condition, the concept of the *person*, as shaped in the theological tradition (Zizioulas, 1985; Spaemann, 2006) and reinterpreted through the phenomenology of Levinas and Ricoeur, proposes an anthropological and political reorientation: from the logic of domination to the logic of responsibility; from contract to relationship; from the calculating *I* to the responsible *You* (De Leeuw, 2017; Erdur, 2022; Hung, 2023).

The implications of this shift are critical. In the field of leadership, the individual-centered approach results in a technocratic type of leader who operates according to risk management, polling, and image (Galbraith, 2004; Rosanvallon, 2008b). By contrast, person-centered leadership is grounded in authenticity, service (*diakonia*), and shared responsibility. The leader is not the one who dominates, but the one who invites—not the one who orchestrates consent, but the one who embodies community. In economics, the dominant figure of *homo economicus* promotes isolation, individual performance, and utility-based evaluation, resulting in structures of inequality and vulnerability (Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). Conversely, the logic of the *person* fosters an “economy of relationship”—not utilitarianism, but social reciprocity; not dominance over resources, but care and justice.

The contrast between *person* and *individual* thus lies at the heart of a broader philosophical and political question: what kind of human being do we recognize as the foundation of our civilization? This question is not theoretical; it touches the very core of power, democracy, leadership, and ethics. The politics of relationship proposed by the concept of the *person* can re-establish the public sphere—not as a battleground of individual interests, but as a shared space of truth, responsibility, and communion. A space where the *person* is neither measured nor compared, but encountered.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The modern conception of the human being as *homo economicus*, grounded in individual utility and instrumental rationality, fails to capture the fullness of human existence as a bearer of relationship, responsibility, and shared reference. In contrast, the anthropology of the *person* proposes an alternative anthropological and economic orientation, where economic activity is embedded in the ethos of social interdependence, selfless offering, and communal justice. The model of the *person* offers a radical critique of the utilitarian individualism of modernity, bringing back into focus the notion of responsible participation in the common good.

The logic of maximum utility has shaped a mechanistic and individual-centered model of economic thought, in which human existence is reduced to a factor in cost-benefit calculation. The person-centered perspective, as revealed in Divine Economy, proposes a radically different ethos, where the person is recognized as a bearer of relationship, responsibility, and selfless offering. By contrasting love with utility and community with individual interest, Divine Economy calls for a reform of economic practice, where the value of the human being is not exhausted in productivity but extends to the sanctity of existence. The application of this principle is expressed in alternative economic initiatives, which aim at common prosperity and justice, proposing an economy that serves the person, and not the other way around.

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Modern economy and politics, dominated by the principles of efficiency, competitiveness, and constant growth, tend to strip economic activity of any existential and moral dimension. The attribution of meaning to economic teleology within the framework of Divine Economy is not merely a spiritual alternative, but a creative counterpoint to modern technocratic rationalism. Introducing a social purpose beyond material benefit aligns with the most contemporary approaches to fair and sustainable development. Practices such as responsible entrepreneurship (ESG), socially resilient policies, circular economy, and just energy transition highlight the need to redefine economic goals in light of environmental sustainability and social well-being. Within this context, economic teleology does not reject the pursuit of efficiency; on the contrary, it incorporates it into a broader moral horizon, lending depth, direction, and accountability to modern economic and political practices.

The contrast between the dominant economic logic of scarcity and the theological perspective of abundance reveals a fundamental shift in the understanding of economic activity. The Ontology of Scarcity, prevailing in modern economic thought, legitimizes individualism, competitiveness, and the depersonalization of economic life. In opposition to this instrumental view, Economic Teleology and the Economy of Relationship introduce a different axiological foundation, rooted in abundance, gift, and the ethics of the person. Economy is thus conceived not as a technical system for managing shortages, but as a field of communal responsibility and existential purpose. Within this framework, resource management is linked to social cohesion, justice, and sustainable prosperity, favoring forms of economic organization that embody the notions of the common good, reciprocity, and service. In this way, economic action regains its character as an act of relationship, meaning, and freedom.

The modern intertwining of political and economic power constitutes a key factor in the reproduction of inequalities and the crisis of representation, undermining the moral legitimacy of leadership. The instrumental use of power reduces leadership to a form of technical management, stripped of any imperative of responsibility or orientation toward the common good. In contrast to this logic, Divine Economy proposes a model of servant leadership, where authority is grounded in selfless offering, sacrifice, and service to the many. Redefining power as a relationship of service highlights the need for institutions of transparency, an education in virtue, and leaders with social ethos, capable of restoring trust and re-signifying the economy as a shared field of responsibility.

The shift from the individual to the person constitutes a critical politico-philosophical imperative for redefining modern subjectivity and the institutions that shape it. In contrast to instrumental, technocratic, and individual-centered logic, the person-centered approach highlights the importance of relationship, responsibility, and authenticity in politics, leadership, economy, and society. Amid postmodern fluidity, the notion of the person offers an alternative anthropological horizon, capable of rethinking the public sphere not as a battleground of competition, but as a space of communion and gift. This is a stance of profound cultural reform, calling for a reflection on the fundamental question: what does it mean to be human under conditions of technocratic modernity.

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