

CONFERENCE ELEVEN

TRANSCENDENT AND TRANSFORMING UNION

The subject of this conference is the transcendent and transforming union. I will compare the divinity of human beings in a pantheistic universe with the deification of human beings according to Christian revelation. Connected with this subject, as we shall see, is the revival of pagan monism, that is, pantheism, and Gnosticism, a heresy of the early Church.

The human person is open to the transcendent. This is a dimension which cannot be successfully repressed forever. Man is by nature social, but he is also by nature religious, that is seeking something beyond, something ultimate, something that gives meaning to everything else.

The transcendent can be repressed, as it is by atheistic secular humanism, it can be misdirected to entities other than its proper object, the true God, or it may seek Him who is the ultimate source of all being, and the true transcendent.

While the restricting of one's worldview to the secular to the exclusion of the sacred and spiritual, seems triumphant in our culture, nevertheless a hunger for the transcendent is breaking through the hard crust of secular humanism.

Two great movements of the past help to explain some of the modern and postmodern attitudes that we find in society at the dawn of the new millennium. They are the Enlightenment, and the Romantic Movement. The Enlightenment looked to reason and science to explain the phenomena of the world, and fostered science and technology. But technology, and science as conceived by the Enlightenment and as practiced today, are value-free enterprises. This means that science can produce nuclear material, but as science it is indifferent to whether it is used to generate electricity or to produce bombs. I do not say that scientists are indifferent, because besides being scientists they are human, and human beings have values. But science itself is value-free. Science can produce animals, and perhaps human beings, by cloning, but as science it is indifferent to whether cloning produces animals or human beings.

The Enlightenment installed Reason as its goddess, as the highest form of knowledge, and rejected revelation, the supernatural, the Church, the sacraments, and the priesthood. This rejection was taken over by the Romantic Movement, which attempted to supply what was lacking in the Enlightenment, namely affectivity, emotions, the spirit, beauty, and joy, but stopped short of the supernatural. The Romantic Movement emphasized individual lived experience, the subjective, affectivity, and led to the linking of like-minded persons. The emphasis was on communality of race, language, culture, and in our time gender. This movement also looked to the pre-Christian religion of the peoples as natural to them. From this came the Nazi movement in Germany and other ethnic and communality-oriented movements such as have flared up in the former Soviet Union and in the Balkans, and in the gay movement. The Romantic Movement issued in the Sixties into the sexual revolution, which was a rejection of tradition, authority, institutions, and a movement for free heterosexual love. The Sixties turned into the Nineties in which revolution

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became the Establishment, and spawned the gay agenda and pantheism (pagan monism or non-dualism).

Pagan monism is a return to the primitive pagan pre-Christian religious roots, and is the religiosity of the New Age. The New Age is anti-Christian, but may have a Christian window-dressing. Its religion, monism, is the belief that everything is one, everything in the universe is related and one, but not homogeneous, and that this oneness is God. God is not outside the universe but *is* the universe. Therefore, we humans are part of the divinity and divine. Therefore, we are free to make our own norms for our behavior. Monism is pagan and it is in deadly opposition to the belief system of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, all of which believe in a personal transcendent God over and above the universe to whom we are subject. Pagan monism may adopt Christian terms or practices as the icing on its pantheistic cake. It lends force to the ecological movement, a movement that has merit when not pushed too far.

Monism, in the time of the hippies of the Sixties, who were on the fringes of society, came from India and the East. Hence its non-dualism. Coming to the West it acquired a Christian coating. It now occupies the seats of power in government, academia, and the media. Gnosticism was a second century heresy which is now rehabilitated and combines many strands including a Christian strand among its many faces. It also enters into the New Age pantheon.

In assessing the cultural tides from the viewpoint of Christ's teaching, we find the establishment of a new mind-set. There has been a shift in values and they affect behavior and account for the deterioration of Western society. In America this deterioration has accelerated but co-exists with a good deal of generosity and some solid values, hence we hear of a "cultural war."

Stephen Covey, the author of the best-selling book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leaders*, made a study of success literature of the last 200 years. He found that until the last fifty years leaders were sought who were men of character, who inspired trust. During the last fifty years leaders have been sought who have an image and use techniques to gain acceptance. He came to the conclusion that these techniques, not bad in themselves, were in the long run self-defeating unless the person using them had a basic goodness of character. Otherwise they were eventually seen as manipulative. What we need is a political leader of character. And we need a renewal of the priesthood to help in generating character, which is the theme of these conferences. The priesthood disinfected from the current mind-set, needs to preach the Gospel and provide the basis for a truly Christian mind-set.

The New Age now penetrates religious consciousness. It has tolerance for everything except Catholicism, which is Christianity in its pure form, in a form that is irreducibly opposed to non-dualism, since Christianity advocates a duality – a transcendent God outside the universe which He created and which is subject to Him and to His laws. The transcendent and religious dimension of the human personality has been derailed from its proper object, which is the transcendent God. While this presentation schematic and oversimplified, I think it explains many features of today's West, particularly of contemporary USA.

Rejecting Christ and His teaching, the movements we have described exclude what can provide a synthesis of the various values they seek. For Christ and His

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teaching includes the values of truth in science, philosophy, and revelation. It includes the value of the human dignity of the person, as well as that of society, affectivity as well as rationality. All these values are contained in Christ and with the certainty that comes from their being of divine origin, something that the goddess and other transcendental movements outside of traditional religion do not have. Christ brought us truth, goodness, beauty, and the abundance of life.

Now as opposed to the pantheistic-pagan monistic conception of a universe which is God, and of which we, as part, are divine, Christ has revealed to us His Father. According to the Judeo-Christian revelation God is not part of the universe but is its Creator. From all eternity the Father gave His divine nature to His Son and the Father and Son gave it to the Holy Spirit, three persons equal in majesty in one divine nature, dwelling within each other. Not being able to give the divine nature divinely again, the divine persons decided to create intelligent beings who they could introduce into their divine life making them partakers of their divinity if they accepted the divine invitation. The eastern churches call this process divinization.

We do not have the divine nature naturally, but by adoption. We do not have it of necessity, but as a free gift. Once given, it is ours so long as we remain in the state of grace with which this divine gift endows us. It is up to us to recognize the divine bounty which has brought us into existence and which invites us to share the divine life. We do so by returning love for love and living in accordance with the divine commandments. This preserves us in our humanity. The suffering and injustice in the world with which we are all afflicted does not have its source in God. Rather its source is in the rejection of God's will through disobedience, first of all in the sin of Adam and Eve, and then in our personal sins and those of others. Eternal life is offered us by divine mercy, restoring the balance of justice. Each is rewarded according to what he has lovingly suffered and done. Plato realized that there must be a life after death in which the injustice of this life finds its balance, and so it is.

It is this divine life which we priests must possess, teach, and make available to others, so that the laity value it above everything else and take the means of advancing in its possession. These means are the spiritual program which these conferences have discussed. They lead to life everlasting, which is the subject of the final conference.

In psychiatry the transcendental dimension of the human personality is taken into account by Carl Jung's opinion that adjustment problems are not finally successfully treated until the person's religious problem is resolved. It is taken into account by Viktor Frankl's logotherapy which considers the repression of the religious instinct in man to be harmful, and that the resolution of human problems requires finding the work for which God has destined one. It is accounted for in transcendental psychology which like Jungian analysis does not undeviatingly aim at true transcendence, the one true God.

In Western culture this hunger for spirituality has taken various forms, as has already been mentioned, namely the revival of second century Gnosticism and pagan monism. This is carefully documented in the book *Star Wars* by Peter Jones, a scripture scholar who has a Ph.D. from Princeton and a Master's degree in theology (Th.M.) from Harvard. Today there flourish witches, wiccans, earth and creation

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spirituality and Reiki, whose practitioners in their Reiki II formation connect with spirit guides, and whose results are completely out of proportion to the means used:

Moreover, this desire for the transcendent without formal religion is characteristic of feminist Catholic religious sisters institutes in which the Church's rituals, faith, morals, scripture are changed, discarded, or ignored. This situation is aptly described by feminist Sister Sandra Schneider, a professor of New Testament studies and spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. Sister Sandra lectures at seminaries. In a conference to the Leadership of Women Religious, reported in the *Review for Religious*, she said:

For many the God of Christianity seems too small, too violent, and too male; the focus to Jesus Christ seems narrow and exclusive; the Resurrection seems mythological, hopelessly if not incredible, and in any case irrelevant to a world in anguish; the institutional church seems medieval, sexist, and clerical; liturgy is alienating; morality is out of touch with reality; and church ministry is a continual battle with male hostility and power dynamics.

So what does Sister Sandra see as the result of this for religious institutes? She says, "It can no longer be taken for granted that the members share the same faith; a serious situation for a life form which is based not only on faith but specifically on Christian faith." She adds:

This 'God-quest' caused many to 'question whether Catholic Christianity offers an adequate, much less a preferable, access to Holy Mystery or compelling motivation for ministry.' This is the point at which the disjunctive between spirituality which is a matter of a passionate concern and religion which is a locus of struggles and alienation is apparent, and in my opinion, this may be the bifurcation point at which the choice between death and transformation [of religious life] is going to be made.

This is an eloquent statement of where the spiritual hunger and the search for the transcendent outside of an authentic tradition lead. It leads, Sister Sandra says, to a choice between death and transformation.

Actually, it is clear that the feminist religious institutes are dying for lack of vocations. The dissenting institutes do not attract the young, whereas the institutes are flourishing which are in full harmony with the Church, its teaching authority, and its tradition, and are up-dated according to the mind and documents of the Council. What is it that attracts young people who are seeking a religious or priestly vocation? The vocations are going to what are called conservative institutes. That is, ones which do not reject the scriptures, that do not worship the goddess or creation, but accept the doctrine and discipline of the Church. Likewise, bishops who are outstandingly and manifestly devoted to the teaching authority of the Church and its discipline have seminarians applying for the diocesan priesthood. In the North American College in Rome, as well as in the Catholic University of America, the seminarians are attracted to the teaching of John Paul II. These young seminarians accept the teaching authority of the Church, and find in the documents of Vatican Council II a rich treasure. They are pastoral and want to help the people with their current problems.

It seems that Catholic youth drawn to Christ do not have the problems that their older brothers and sisters have. No doubt, as the media like to declare, the

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enthusiasm of youth for John Paul II does not extend to his teachings in all cases. Yet those among the youth who are drawn to a religious or priestly vocation are attracted exactly by the Pope's teaching and example, as are many who convert to the Catholic Church.

The Pope influences even hardened non-Catholic journalists who attend the gatherings of youth at papal events. When John Paul II was in New York, one of the journalists said, "Who else is there?" Who else loves people, loves the truth as he sees it and has the courage to declare it without considering the polls. This can afford each of us matter for an examination of conscience.

From his vantage point, the Pope saw hope for the future in what he named "the new movements." He called for a meeting of members of these movements in Rome on Pentecost Sunday 1998. Five hundred thousand responded. So an element of hope in the contemporary situation is the influx of vocations to priestly and religious life of young convinced and committed Catholics who are loyal to the Church and its program. On the other hand, what is dying are the institutes and areas of the Church where this is not the case.

These "new movements" which extend the mighty influence of John Paul II are not necessarily born since Vatican II. They already embodied the spirit of Vatican II before it met. Such movements include the Legionaries of Christ, founded in 1948 which has two thousand seminarians, St. Peter's Fraternity and St. John the Evangelist, both receiving many priestly vocations, Opus Dei, Communion and Liberation, Focolare, and St. Egedius community in Rome which has mediated international conflicts. They are the seeds of the future, the promise of a new springtime in the winter of the Church.

Then there are the journals which support these movements, like *Communio*, founded by von Balthasar, *Crisis*, *30 Days*, *Inside the Vatican*, *The National Catholic Register* published by the Legionaries of Christ, and many others. Among publishing houses there is the Ignatius Press, Sophia, and several others. Among educational institutions there is Steubenville's Franciscan University, Christendom in Front Royal, Virginia, St. Thomas Aquinas in Santa Barbara, California and the University of Dallas in Texas staffed by the Cistercians of the Common Observance. Among movements for the laity are Legatus founded by Tom Gallagher, Cor Christi Trinitatis Institute, founded by Msgr. George E. Tracy, and the Catholic Alliance.

Seeds are not obvious. They are planted in the ground, and it is only when they have sprouted that they become visible. So I want to speak now, not of seeds, but what I have called the winter of the Church, the face the Church now presents to its members and to the world. I will put this in the context of the changes that society and the world are undergoing. It is in this setting that the present state of the Church can be best understood. Then I will recall how the Church has renewed itself in the past, as described by two of the greatest of non-Catholic historians. Finally I will relate the Church's development to the stages in the life of Christ, which it follows.

The flourishing of the Church in the Christendom of the Middle Ages was a time when the universities grew out of the Church, such as Oxford, Paris, Bologna, when drama started by the plays performed in Churches to dramatize the Gospel, when the languages of nations began to grow out of the universally spoken and written Latin of the educated classes, when faith flourished, and when, if not

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observed, at least the charity of Christ and the Ten Commandments formed the conscience of Europe. The brilliance of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, and their colleagues was eclipsed by a gradual deterioration of scholasticism, and the unity of Christendom was shattered by the rise of nation states. Finally, at the French revolution the apogee of Enlightenment swept the educated classes and filtered to the peoples, rejecting the Trinity, the Church, the supernatural, the priesthood, and the sacraments. This was the age of deism and of reason and of a belief in the goodness of humanity which through the development of science would bring mankind to a paradisaal state.

The world awoke from this dream with two world wars, several genocides, still in progress, of which the outstanding example was the Holocaust. And instead of a faith in reason and inevitable progress, reason is now dethroned by lived experience, relativism, deconstruction, and ideologies. A post-modern attitude, like Pilate, asks scornfully, What is Truth?

We have emerged from a period when the state was omnipotent: in Communist Soviet Union, in Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy to various special interests and ideologies: ecological, homosexual, feminist, New Age, and One World Order. Generosity and good will abound, side by side with increasing incivility, rudeness, selfishness, hedonism, violence and the autonomy of the individual conscience, subject not to a solid formation but to ideologies and emotions. The sexual revolution, single parent families, illegitimacy, teenage pregnancy, and epidemic venereal disease exist side by side with advances in health, technology and the search for the transcendent.

There is rapidity of change and of inventions. There is the deterioration of the family with the failure to properly provide for the nurture of infants and children, and zero population growth leading to the decrease in native populations in countries of the West, and the influx of immigrants from Asian and Moslem countries. This is resulting in a changing racial mixture which is less open to being absorbed to form a homogenous population. Ethics are deeply affected and scientific invention tends to escape humanitarian guidance.

Now this contemporary situation deeply affects the Church. Harmonious with it is the movement of dissent against the teaching of the Church and of the Pope. Just as the hippie revolutionaries of the Sixties are now the establishment, so this aberrant movement is now established in the Church, in the Catholic universities, and among the faithful. An experienced pastor said, no doubt with some exaggeration, "The bishops do not obey the Pope, the priests do not obey the bishops, and the laity do not obey the priests. We have a Church of disobedience." Now of course this dissent is not uniform throughout the Church. There are courageous bishops as well as courageous priests but they suffer persecution, persecution from within the Church and from the media which has an anti-Catholic and anti-Christian bias. The entertainment industry is an example of this bias. Meanwhile many Catholic universities invited abortion advocates, pornographic advocates (Larry Flynt at Georgetown) at their universities and at graduation services. The Cardinal Newman Society based in Falls Church, Virginia called on ten Catholic colleges and universities to cancel invitations to commencement speakers who have publicly disagreed with the Church's position on abortion. Paul VI already in his time said that

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the smoke of Satan had entered the Church. The smoke of Satan is disobedience. Hence, we might say that this is the winter of the Church.

About the survival of the Church which has shown an amazing capacity for renewal, the great English Protestant historian, Lord Macaulay, reviewing a work of a great German historian, von Ranke, wrote:

There is not, and there never was on earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world, and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveler from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on the broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's.

The Church follows the life of Christ. In his infancy Herod sought His life, and the holy family had to flee to Egypt. So in the early Church there were the bloody persecutions. As the Church advanced in age, in the high Middle Ages, there was a flourishing of the faith that corresponded to Christ's public life and His drawing of his disciples and of the crowds. Then came His Passion and the desertion of disciples and the crowds. That is where the Church is now. Catholics are leaving the Church in droves, and there is an internal hemorrhage. But when things were at their apparent worst for Jesus at His crucifixion, His Resurrection, undreamed of by His followers, was only three days away. So it is my belief that despite the winter of the Church, its spring is just around the corner and will come suddenly, confounding all the dire projections based on present trends. The ever-renewed vigor of the Church, seen by Lord Macaulay from the viewpoint of its history, belies the expectations of those who foresee an increasing decline of the Church.

The basis of the renewed springtime of the Church is laid in the documents of Vatican Council II, and in the new movements, and in the loyalty of those now entering the priesthood and religious life. The future will be characterized by dialogue and by the revitalized mission of the Church, the new evangelism, first of all to those in the household of the faith. Prominent in this movement will be the spiritual program which the Constitution of the Church of Vatican II has delineated.

In conclusion allow me to reiterate that the primary task of priests is to live and teach the divine life which is offered us in word and sacrament, and most particularly in the Eucharist. We must teach the laity to value, above everything, this divine life, into which they are incorporated by baptism, by faith and charity and by the sacraments, and which is sustained through prayer, fortified by spiritual reading, and exercised by good works. Both priests and laity need to take the means which God offers through His Church of advancing in the possession of eternal life. These means are the spiritual program, which these conferences have discussed, and they lead to life everlasting which is the subject of the final conference.

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