

## A RESPONSE (II) TO FATHER FRANSEN

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Father Fransen's distinguished theological output has been his extraordinary ability to make the past speak to the present and to the future. In the first part of his paper today he has continued to apply his historical approach to perennial human-divine realities, showing, in masterly fashion, that some of the ideas which many Christians had thought were "traditional" really rested upon traditions just a few hundred years old, "traditions" which, when seen against the long backdrop of the Christian tradition, turn out to be not only innovations, but innovations peculiar to the Western mind.

In his paper Father Fransen does not lay claim to having given a complete historical picture of the development of Christian reflection on the relationship between divine grace and human existence. He does, however, refer us in his notes to other studies where we can find his historical argument worked out more fully. That is why, even though many of us would, no doubt, wish to add a stroke to, or soften one of the strokes on the historical portrait he has painted, we would not, I think, significantly alter his picture.

Our speaker has tried, as he said, "to explain our past" in regard to the understanding of the God-man relationship "so as to discover more easily how to prepare for our future." By way of preparation for that future, he has sketched out a way—in the final portion of his paper—to transcend the false and noxious dilemma of the Western mind: God *or* man. He traces the influence of such pioneers as Blondel, Rahner, de Lubac, Bouillard, von Balthasar, Schillebeeckx, Schoonenberg and Lonergan on the shaping of an "anthropological theology," namely "that kind of approach to revealed realities by which we look at them from and through their impact on human existence." This theology insists above all else on the experience of grace by the one doing theology and on the understanding of revelation as "the actual assumption within the intentional thrust of our human consciousness, expressed in language and life." (On this last point surely we can detect the influence of John Henry Newman).

It is at this point that Father Fransen begins to develop the community dimension of divine grace and Christian humanism. This dimension is regarded not as "the result of our common private sanctification" but as "the radical structure of grace itself," with grace being understood "primarily as God's loving and living presence to the whole world."

It is at this point, too, that I should like to carry the discussion of the personal and communal aspects of Christian humanization a bit further than Father Fransen has done. I see it as one of the major tasks of the theologian today in regard to the realities of God's grace and man's humanization to assist the Church, especially its ministers, to mediate more efficaciously the experience of grace by the members of the Christian community and to help them articulate this experience in such a way that they will perceive both the similarities and the differences between Christian humanism and all other humanisms, religious or secular. This means that they will be able to articulate it in such a way that they will be able to say with the confidence of Peter: Where else can we go to find such words and experiences of the eternal life which we have already begun to experience? Our creeds, dogmas, liturgies and our ordinary parish life should be and be experienced as a life which is "more abundant" than any other life that can be found in this world. The achievement of nothing less than this is the task of pastoral theology.

As far as the community dimension of grace and salvation is concerned I think an important distinction must be made. Even though the Christian community would be sinfully remiss, disfigured and literally incredible to the extent that it is not seen to be a community of service, not just to God but also to men, and a community of concern totally committed to justice and peace, in the Church as well as in the world—even though this is beyond dispute—we must not think of the community of Christian humanists as one united by a common vision *about* service—i.e. about the how, the where, and the how much of it, nor must we see this community as united by a common vision of *how to achieve* peace and justice in the Church and in the world. (The centuries old fact that some Christians go to war and some refuse to go to war in the name of the same Gospel is just one indication of this). Such a vision of the

Christian community betrays a false understanding of Christian unity and also involves the extrapolation of a falsely understood, triumphalistic idea of papal infallibility onto the Christian community as a whole. By the latter I mean a view of infallibility which sees the pope—or the Church—as having all the answers to any questions pertaining to individual, social or political-economic morality. Equally committed Christians have been and will continue to be divided many times in their answers to the question: "What should Christians—or human beings—do about this?"

In my judgment, the humanization of the Christian community will be realized in quite another direction, namely *when* the Christian community humbly learns to discern where there can be legitimate differences—even on matters as serious as life and death, not to mention dollars and cents—*when* that community is able to live with those serious differences because of its deeper unity in Christ, and *when* an equally deep fraternal love develops in that community in such a way that the Christian community is *seen* by other human beings as a singular light in this world. Then will this community of Christian human beings efficaciously become what Vatican II describes as the sign, sacrament and instrument not only of man's union with God, but of the unity of the whole human race—those two greatest graces that constitute the Kingdom of God and of the sons and daughters of God.

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