

## SEMINAR ON ANTHROPOLOGY: GRACE AS DIVINIZING AND/OR HUMANIZING

### I. INTRODUCTION BY CHARLES MEYER

Man must humanize the divine in order to deal with it. In Christian theology grace has been viewed as the bridge linking God and man. Through it man is divinized, and (in a seeming paradox) more fully humanized. Judaeo-Christian tradition has proposed three models of grace to help man understand his relationship with God: (1) Husband (Yahweh)—wife (Israel); (2) Father (God)—child (Jesus and his followers); (3) Christ, the Lord (true Son of God)—believers mystically (ritually) identified with him.

### II. PRESENTATION BY JOHN FARRELLY, O.S.B.

To articulate the meaning of grace in our time we need a phenomenology of grace dependent upon our Christian experience, and an interpretation that shows the relation between grace and contemporary understandings of the human.

#### 1. *Phenomenology*

(a) We cannot develop a phenomenology of grace without depending on our own personal and communal experience of God's gift. We see this is the case for the great theologians of grace in the past—St. Paul and St. Augustine. Many of us, I suggest, experience God's gift as his presence, his guidance, his enablement and liberating influence on which we depend for our journey—individual and communal—through different stages of life and in differing environments.

(b) We see what grace is in the privileged experience of the primitive Christians, for example in that of Peter and the Christian community. Theologies of the New Testament are dependent upon such experiences. We see then that the grace of Christ gives us the Father's gift of himself and a personal relationship to him in Christ and the Spirit—and an effective acknowledgement, appreciation and desire for this gift above all other human values in our lives. The gift achieves its transforming (divinizing and humanizing) effect in the individual and community only gradually, and that only through men's response of faith, conversion and acceptance of the cross.

2. *How do we relate this to contemporary understandings of the human?*

(a) We must be in dialogue with differing contemporary conceptions of the human. For example, we should ask whether contemporary experiences on which current humanisms are based show in human beings a transcendence to an absolute value as this is expressed in St. Thomas, or how contemporary experiences call for a modification of Thomas' view of man's transcendence. To answer this we should reflect largely on the data of developmental psychology and the social sciences (particularly history) since human transcendence is a process that begins in infancy within a particular cultural context and that engages a person through definite stages of growth and interaction with an enlarging environment. In adolescence and adult stages humans are called to be more active and personal in orientating themselves toward others, and together with others in society to modify social structures to accord better with the changing needs of present-day societies. Through this we may be helped to show that persons are indeed orientated toward a religious relationship with God; we hope to do so in a way that overcomes the opposition from (and among) contemporary fragmentary views of what it means to be human.

(b) The gift God gives us through Christ and his Spirit actualizes the liberated persons individually and communally for their development through history and fulfills this process.

III. PRESENTATION BY WILLIAM MARTIN, F.S.C.

Mysticism, in its most general sense, connotes a form of spirituality that strives after (or experiences) an immediate contact with the deity in the deepest recesses of the human person. Pre-scinding from the on-going discussions about the nature of mysticism and whether St. Paul had such an experience, I will assume that he did, that it was specifically Christ-centered, and that it had a profound effect on his life.

It is true that Paul speaks mainly of his own relationship with the risen Christ, but he makes it clear that all Christians enjoy this union.

To describe this relationship with Christ, Paul uses various phrases and metaphorical expressions, which, though differing widely in form, can be reduced to two broad categories: those referring to Christ abiding in the Christian, and those referring to

the Christian being in Christ. In each case the meaning is the same: between the risen Lord and his followers there is a vital union.

On the divine side this union is characterized by the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on all those who accept Christ by faith ratified in sacramental baptism. From the human side this union is best described by the Apostle when he calls it a new life. This and similar expressions leave little doubt that for the Apostle this union is more than just an alignment of wills and a subjective feeling of closeness to Christ. It is a real, existing, permanent state in which the Christian is transformed by the grace of God.

#### IV. PRESENTATION BY PETRO BILANIUK

For the benefit of the Western Christian reader the central and specifically Eastern Christian point concerning the uncreated divine energies needs to be clarified. The *kenosis* of God the Son and the kenotic *epiclesis* of God the Holy Spirit is given from God the Father by the uncreated energies in which the triadic God is completely present. These uncreated energies are not something outside of or near God; they are not a gift of God for the human being; they are not parts of God; they are not emanations of God. These uncreated energies are God himself in his activity and his relation and condescension to his creatures. They are uncreated as is the essence of God, and yet distinct from his essence, for the divine essence and uncreated energies comprise the nature of God, who is simple, but beyond any concept, just as the Trinity of Persons in the unity of nature is beyond any concept (apophatic theology.)

Thus God in his essence is the *primus motor immobilis*, but in the uncreated energies he is the *primus motor mobilissimus*. Thus both the strict Thomists and the process theologians should certainly be aware of the danger of rigidity in their positions. For the former overstress the staticity of God and the latter overstress his dynamism and anthropomorphically subject him to change and development.

The uncreated energies belong to the three divine persons, who reveal themselves in an immediate and mediated revelation. They originate in the transcendent Trinity and are introduced and made immanent in the history and economy of salvation for the divinization and humanization of mankind and for the transfiguration and definitive fulfillment of the whole extradivine reality.

They are the means of contact between God as the Creator and the giver of grace and the human being as a creature and a recipient of grace. But this activity of God is trinitarian in nature, for every energy comes from God the Father and is given by the Son in the Holy Spirit. In this activity (which is called the economy of the most holy Trinity) the union of the human being with God is not essential or substantial, but interpersonal, "energetic" or "synergetic." Thus participation in the divine nature consists in the fact that the human being as the divine icon receives from grace (i.e., uncreated energies) everything that God has by his nature. Moreover, no natural or supernatural activity of a creature is possible in isolation from, outside of, or without the uncreated energies.

The Church (both universal and particular) is the place and event where the uncreated energies exhibit their highest degree of intensity. Thus in the Word of God, and in the Body of Christ, and in the activity of the Holy Spirit is rooted the sacramental activity of the Church, which is the primordial sacrament and means through which the uncreated energies operate in the human community of believers and in each faithful human being. Thus the Church is both the place and the dramatic event of the new creation, humanization, salvation, transfiguration, divinization and glorification of the human being, of the human community and of the whole visible and invisible cosmos.

#### V. PRESENTATION BY FRANCIS COLBORN

Our notion of humanization today has to include liberation: not only liberation from interior sin and psychological maladjustment, but also from oppressive social, economic and political structures. We might use other language for the same notion: redemption from social sin, empowerment of the powerless, the enabling of all people to participate in the institutions that affect their lives, and so forth.

Divinization meant, for the Eastern Fathers, assimilation to the immortal divine nature; St. Thomas would say, participation in the nature of God; theologians of various schools have emphasized the importance of faith, hope and love in our divinization. What does divinization mean in the horizon of critical social consciousness? In other words, what is the relationship between salvation and liberation? Between grace and empowerment? This question is among the most critical, if not the most critical, facing the

Church today—and therefore a primary concern for theology, especially the theology of grace.

Both divinization and humanization are seen in their fullness in the glory of the risen Christ. Our eschatological hope is that all of humanity may be united with God and with each other in the Body of Christ. We do not look forward to one kind of “merely human” fulfillment of our longing for freedom and justice, and also to some different sort of “divinization.” The power of God’s Spirit is moving humanity to a single destiny, unity in Christ.

The implications of divinization and humanization for this present world are seen in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We do not now live in the eschaton in its fullness. To be assimilated to Jesus Christ means to suffer for others. To be fully human means to take a stand with him and in solidarity with his suffering brothers and sisters against the powers of this world that cause suffering.

Yet we can share already in the life of the risen Lord, by the power of his Spirit. By faith which has come to critical social awareness, by hope within a social and historical horizon, by love which commits us to action for justice, we can begin now to live divinized and humanized lives.

To understand the meaning of these terms, we need to avoid a gnostic or superstitious or falsely “spiritual” understanding of divinization and transcendence. We need also to avoid a shallow or materialistic notion of “humanization.” Positively, we need to keep before our eyes the concrete models of men and women who sacrifice themselves for the liberation of others.

#### VI. PRESENTATION BY JOHN BURKHART

Baptism symbolizes identity with Christ. As such, it gives a new history and is the humanizing event *par excellence*.

One of the consequences of the growth of historical consciousness has been the recognition that to be human is to have a history. Our lives are defined by what we have come from and where we are going; and, strangely, to have a new future requires that we find a new past. Yet in the swim of events, to go back to the beginning and have a fresh start seems quite impossible. Like Nicodemus, we doubt the possibility even of being born anew.

Perhaps it is this doubt which vitiates our theologies of baptism. In Western Christianity, much of the stress since Tertullian has been upon baptism as a cleansing from sin. Not dying and rising or rebirth but purity has been the watchword, and the



rationale for using water has been its cleansing power. Consequently, no one would dream of using murky water for baptism. And yet Jesus' own baptism was in the dirty brown waters of the Jordan. Muddy waters at best, and surely impure ritually!

Perhaps we need to rethink baptism. What, after all, is its rationale? Is its secret to be found in nature or in history, in water in general or in particular waters? To answer such questions, it may prove fruitful to retrace our steps right back to the Jordan. Note that from the *Didache* liturgical preference has often been given to running water; and that in several Eastern liturgies, the font itself is called the Jordan.

The Jordan, of course, was the final barrier which separated the children of Israel from the promised land. Crossing it meant the beginning of freedom. No wonder Jewish proselyte baptism recapitulated a people's history in the person of the convert, thereby reforming all human relations, and that John the Baptizer and others sought to reconstitute Israel in the Jordan.

What is at stake in baptism is nothing less than a radical renovation of the people of God. Properly understood, baptism so grants a new past that it opens the baptized to an utterly new future.

#### VII. PRESENTATION BY EUGENE BEST

This paper assumes that for human beings to be "acceptable to" God (Acts 10:34-35), for the salvation of humankind, God's grace is effectively present. The paper argues that "it has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness" (*Lumen gentium*, #9) by giving grace to people through the culture proper to them. "For God, revealing himself to his people to the extent of a full manifestation of himself in his incarnate Son, has spoken *according to the culture proper* to different ages" (*Gaudium et spes*, #58, italics added).

The paper attempts to strike a wholesome balance between cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. To be avoided is the cultural relativism which claims that all cultures are equally good, and the ethnocentrism which assumes that our way of life is the only natural, good and true way. To be attempted is that cultural relativism which sees and understands other cultures in their own context. To be admitted in this paper is that ethnocentrism which

judges alien customs in terms of concepts and values which are a part of our own culture.

Vatican II has drawn our attention to the "fact bearing on the very person of man that he comes to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of *natural goods and values*" (*ibid.*, #53, italics added). However, if there be a helpful insight for us in cultural anthropology, it is that what peoples of one culture consider to be "natural goods and values," those of another culture may consider to be "unnatural." Our understanding of goods and values comes to us not as a part of our genetic endowment or biological heritage, but results from our enculturation in a particular group or tradition.

What, then, is culture? Innumerable definitions have been given. A trend among contemporary anthropologists is to define culture to mean "shared understandings." These shared understandings may be descriptive, valuative, and procedural. These three kinds of shared understandings correspond to what St. Thomas Aquinas claimed to be the "three things [which] are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe; to know what he ought to desire; and to know what he ought to do" (*Two Precepts of Charity*, 1273). More importantly, perhaps, these shared understandings generate ritual behavior and have a moral dimension, functioning in Clifford Geertz's terms as models of and for reality, telling what things should be like and how they ought to be done.

I suggest that divine grace, merited by and mediated to all humankind through the God-man Jesus Christ, has been communicated to most peoples through their shared understandings and related rituals which are their culture. These cultural rituals include quasi-sacraments. By these quasi-sacraments, the newborn are incorporated into the community; maturing adolescents are bound to it more intimately; spouses help each other to attain to holiness through the mystery of their unity and fruitful love, and by the rearing and education of their children; and religious leaders are consecrated for the service of the community (Cf., *Lumen gentium*, #11).

In conclusion, we know that God, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim 2:4) by his grace divinizes and/or humanizes both the Christian and the anonymous Christian. We should also recognize that Christian grace, which is channeled through the Church and its sacraments

as extraordinary means of salvation, is ordinarily communicated through anonymous Christian cultures.

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