

## THE CHRISTIC FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHET'S VISION: A RESPONSE TO BARBARA HILKERT ANDOLSEN

In the name of all here present I would like to express to Doctor Barbara Andolsen our gratitude for her rich, multifaceted paper. I found it both insightful and nuanced; both compassionate and rigorous. Qualities, all the more appreciated, in a time of often supercharged rhetoric.

Without repeating her presentation, let me begin by offering brief comments, underscoring some aspects of her "Cryptanalysis of the Signs of the Times." Then I will raise four questions, or better "musements" (to use a word of C.S. Lewis), evoked by reflecting on her paper and the theme of the Convention. Finally, I will sketch a proposal regarding a way forward, not only for Catholic theology, but for Christian living in our promising and troubled times.

### REMARKS ON A "CRYPTANALYSIS OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES"

First, in a time when academic institutions increasingly rely on part-time faculty, Barbara rightly worries that the voices and potential gifts of discernment of younger colleagues in theology will be denied a hearing.

I was reminded, in this regard, of the wonderful injunction in the "Rule of St. Benedict," directing the abbot to listen to the voices of all in the monastery when faced with a decision that will affect all. And to pay particular heed to the voices of the young: "for it is often the way of the Lord to reveal what is better to the young" (*RB* III, 3: "*saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est*"); significantly cited in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*," 45).

But I also find myself wondering about some of the concrete implications here—difficult choices to be made regarding hiring goals and policies. For example, should our Theology Departments seek out established names, wooing them with endowed chairs; or are resources better put towards attracting and nurturing promising younger scholars/teachers? Further, Barbara refers explicitly to "the community of Catholic theologians working together to read the signs of the times for the sake of the church in 2022." How do we balance, do justice to, the twin goods of Catholic identity and ecumenical openness? I have been part of search committees (as I suspect you have) in which the procedures followed seemed indistinguishable from those used at non-Catholic institutions. Is this how it should be, or does commitment to Catholic identity entail consequences for hiring, as seems to be the case in some Jesuit institutions where Jesuit affirmative action is practiced?

Second, in a time of heightened immigration, especially from Mexico, one consequence the paper draws is that "we need to make it a priority to learn how the world seems from the perspective of those of Mexican origin." It seems to me that Barbara's injunction represents a concrete application to our own time and place of Pope John Paul's call, in "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*," his marvelous setting forth of a pastoral vision for the new millennium, for the development of "a spirituality of communion." Thus the Holy Father writes that a spirituality of communion implies "the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a 'gift for me' " (*NMI*, par 43).

Doctor Andolsen cites studies indicating the importance of parochial schools for the new Hispanic immigrants. But this recognition confronts us with serious questions regarding the support and staffing of inner-city schools (such as—to take one example out of many—St. Jerome's in my home borough of the Bronx, New York). Catholics, not in general distinguished for their financial support of their churches and institutions, may, as a result of the current crisis of confidence, show themselves even less generous. And the consequences for these always struggling schools can be catastrophic.

Third, in a time of "fundamental economic change," Doctor Andolsen maintains that Catholic social thought needs to address the issue of "intellectual property." Here the traditional appeal to "goods of creation" seems inadequate and must be developed by a more explicit understanding of the "social mortgage" on property. This must be further complemented by extending the insight regarding the special claim of the poor (already articulated by Leo XIII) beyond the nation to global economic institutions.

I found this section of the paper particularly challenging. My relative lack of competence here only permits me to suggest a further resource for the development of Barbara's insights. I refer to the importance which Pope John Paul II has accorded to the virtue of "solidarity"—(see the considerations in his neglected encyclical, "*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*," paragraphs 38-40)—precisely in its implications for extending the growing interdependence of peoples beyond the nation state to the global economic and political order.

The final two "signs of the times" that Dr. Andolsen discusses focus upon the tragedy of September 11th: the reality of the terrorism that perpetrated it and a consideration of some moral principles that must guide the efforts to combat terrorism; and, finally, the current crisis of trust and credibility in the Church stemming from the revelations concerning sexual abuse of minors.

It is sobering to think that no one of us, at last year's convention, would have imagined the prominent place these issues would assume less than one year later. In her discussion Barbara again joins passionate insight with discriminating balance.

In reading the signs of the times post 9/11 she begins by acknowledging the need "to confront squarely the presence of immensely destructive evil in our world," and she finds that the terrorist acts committed that infamous day

exemplify what *Veritatis Splendor* terms "kinds of behavior . . . that are intrinsically evil" and that "do not allow for any legitimate exception."

Nonetheless, in reflecting upon the aftermath of the attacks and the response of the United States, she considers the issue of the use of cluster bombs, especially the threat posed by unexploded devices and their toll upon civilians and children in particular. Drawing upon the "just war tradition," which she reads as "deeply infused by a profound reluctance to sanction military violence," she raises pertinent moral questions based upon the "key criteria . . . of noncombatant immunity and proportionality." Concluding her reflection, she does not flinch from the paradox articulated in the U. S. Bishops' "Peace Pastoral:" "we must continue to articulate our belief that love is possible and the only real hope for all human relations, and yet accept that force, even deadly force, is sometimes justified and that nations must provide for their defense."

This quote from the bishops leads, paradoxically and sadly, into the last issue Barbara addresses in her paper: the actual loss of trust and credibility of the bishops in the face of the still-unfolding scandal of clergy sexual abuse of minors.

Barbara speaks forthrightly of "grave moral evil" in these incidents of sexual abuse. At the same time, with appeal to Peter Steinfels' careful article in the April 19, 2002 issue of *Commonweal*, she recognizes the need for a fuller understanding and clearer discernment of the extent and implications of the tragic situation in which we find ourselves, as individuals and as Church.

Aside from the immediate needs of policies and procedures to minimize, if not eliminate, abuse, Barbara states: "This crisis suggests to me that we need radically to reassess our ecclesiology with particular attention to our theologies of the priesthood and of the laity. I would stress that it is urgent that the role and moral responsibilities of the laity in the Catholic Church be considered from a fresh viewpoint." And she adds in a footnote a pertinent reference to *Lumen Gentium*, par 37.

May I presume to venture into the thickets of Canon Law to refer also to Canon 212, par 3: "In accord with the knowledge, competence and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals and the reverence due their pastors, always attentive to the common benefit and the dignity of persons."

Dr. Andolsen concludes with an appeal that I both second and to which I will return. She writes: "This is the time to take with utter seriousness the vision of church found in the second chapter of Ephesians . . . All of us—clergy and laity alike—need to work diligently together to undo the serious damage that we have inflicted on the church as 'the dwelling place for God in the Spirit' (Eph 2:22)."

## SOME MUSEMENTS ON READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Let me turn now to raise four questions that I found myself pondering upon concluding the paper. I offer them as possible issues for further conversation. Indeed, in great measure, they apply as much to the overall theme of the Convention as to the specific presentation we heard this morning.

First, how do we understand this category, "signs of the times"? *Vis-à-vis* the particular issues Barbara raises, are they all signs of the times in the same sense? Is the category a univocal or an analogous one? Do the various issues identified share some common trait? In Wittgenstein's phrase, do they manifest a "family resemblance"? How do events, developments, circumstances become "signs," susceptible to "cryptanalysis," whether theological or social-ethical. I think Michael Himes raised some of what I am getting at here in his plenary address last evening; but I would be helped by pressing the question further. For example, our discernment might be sharpened by retrieving (carefully and prudently, but courageously) the contrast term to the symbol, "Kingdom of God," namely, the "Kingdom of Satan," the accuser and adversary of the human; and then formulating a postmodern meditation on "the two standards."

Second, what lenses do we in fact use to read the signs of the times? Or, using Dr. Andolsen's more suggestive word, how do we engage in "cryptanalysis?" What tools do we employ to decipher the code? Concretely, on what does her own reading/analysis depend? I applaud her decision not to spend an hour on methodological prolegomena. But I also would want to raise to more explicit attention the criteria employed in the discernment of the signs and their source. Do the criteria derive from revelation? Natural law? A moral *sensus communis*? If all of the above (and more), how do they cohere?

Third, pondering the issues Barbara has set before us, I also wonder regarding the moral claims of each. Does each lay a like imperative upon us? Common sense would suggest that much depends upon our concrete circumstances (I almost said "situation"), but would it be possible/desirable to assign a moral rank according to some hierarchy of moral concern? Or am I just lusting after the bygone days of "theological notes"?

Fourth and finally, I loved Barbara's title, taken from Habakkuk: "The Vision Still Has Its Time." But at the end of the reading I also find myself wondering: what, then, *is* the vision? I certainly could glean from what she said various elements or dimensions of the vision. Perhaps the shortest formulation would be: it is the vision of the "inbreaking of the Spirit's kingdom" (as she says on the very first page). Or again, on the last page, Ephesians' vision of the Church as "the dwelling place for God in the Spirit." And I would say a wholehearted "Amen" to that.

### THEOLOGY FROM A CHRISTOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

But (and this is the third and last section of my response) I want to propose that the pneumatological form of the vision needs to be more explicitly complemented by a Christological content. I can do no more here than offer some indications of what I intend in the hope that they may prove suggestive.

Let me begin with this reflection. Dr. Andolsen has shared with us this morning the rich fruit of her discernment. My further question may be framed in the fashion of transcendental theology and philosophy. What are the conditions for the possibility of authentic discernment? If you will, I propose a turn to the discerning subject.

Interestingly, Barbara herself provides some indications of a response. In her very first paragraph she contends that "the signs of the times must be read by persons with multiple perspectives in order to produce a reading that is capable of recognizing and proclaiming where the Spirit is at work in the world today." And she claims that readers of the signs of the times must place "those whom the world marginalizes or ignores" at the center of their vision.

My question, then, is: who are the readers/discerners *capax* of such a commitment, of so courageous and heartfelt a *lectio*? And whence comes their responsibility to do so? I turn to Ephesians for guidance.

Now I find Ephesians permeated with what we might call "noetic concern": concern for discerning and understanding the mystery of God's "oikonomia" realized in Christ and the implications for the common life in the body of Christ. Thus Ephesians pleads for "a spirit of wisdom and revelation," for the enlightenment of "the eyes of the heart" (1:17-18). It laments the way of life of those who wander in the "futility of their minds," "darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God" (4:17-18). It reminds believers that they too "were once darkness, but now are light in the Lord." And the imperative follows upon the indicative: "live as children of light" (5:8). This entails "discerning what is pleasing to the Lord" (5:10) and "understanding what is the will of the Lord" (5:17).

The capstone of Ephesians' noetic pastoral and theological concern is surely the stirring prayer in chapter 3: "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, that, being rooted and grounded in love, you may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (3:17-19). One can almost hear Pascal's exclamation that "the heart has its reasons" as exegesis of this text.

The new understanding and apprehension which Ephesians praises and promotes is the noetic fruit of the new being, the new self that it proclaims: the

self liberated, empowered, and perfected in Christ.<sup>1</sup> To return to the question that I posed: who are those capable of a generous and courageous reading of the signs of the times of the sort Barbara proposes? And my response, in the light of Ephesians is: those who have been capacitated by the capacious love of Jesus Christ! Those whose minds have been enlightened and whose hearts have been widened by the experience of God's superabundant love in Jesus Christ. Those who, through Jesus Christ, are being transformed (to use categories of our colleague, Robert Barron) from being *pusillae animae* to becoming *magnae animae*: from mean-spirited to large-spirited existence.<sup>2</sup>

Thus my proposal is that Barbara's cogent appeal to the ecclesiology of Ephesians be complemented and completed by appeal to its Christology. To your evident relief I will not attempt at the end of this session to elaborate fully an Ephesians-inspired Christology. But please allow me to headline three features that I believe are crucial for Christology today. For I think that one of the signs of our theological times is a Christological reductionism, a loss of the Christic center of the faith.<sup>3</sup>

First, it is a Christology that does not marginalize either the Jewishness of Jesus or the true *novum* of his (not Constantine's) cross. "In Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end" (2:13-16).

Second, it is a Christology that does not relegate Jesus to a hard-earned sabbatical in some exotic, far-off place, ceding his activity to an anonymous Spirit. For Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone of the new temple; and "through him the whole living structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (2:21). This growth is accomplished precisely through the outpouring of spiritual gifts by the ascended Christ<sup>4</sup> who is the head of the body, the life-giving principle of its growth to fulness (see 4:7-16). As the eminent commentator on Ephesians, Heinrich Schlier, has written: "There is no life-giving

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<sup>1</sup>For rich reflections on Ephesians's vision of the new self, see David Ford, *Self and Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): chap. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Barron, *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

<sup>3</sup>One need not agree in every particular with the declaration *Dominus Iesus* to find its Christological discernment persuasive. See my "The Reaffirmation of the Christic Center," in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, ed. Stephen Pope and Charles Hefling (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2002) 96-106.

<sup>4</sup>For a stimulating theological investigation of the too-neglected doctrine of the Ascension, see Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

movement of the Church which does not have its source in Christ . . . which is not directed by Christ and does not tend towards him."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the growth of the Church into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, into that new humanity into which both Jews and Gentiles are incorporated, is measured "by the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Christ the measure is not heteronomous norm, but personal principle of filial existence. He governs, as Lord, not the autonomous individual, but the new communal self. He inspires not a private piety, but a spirituality of communion, whose end is "to recapitulate all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). For such, according to Ephesians, is God's own "cryptanalysis" of the fulness of time.

In this sketch of a proposal, I join hands and hearts with those who seek a new integration of theology and spirituality, of Christian liturgy and Christian living. I heartily endorse the view of Kenneth Himes in his "Presidential Address" to this Society last year. Himes wrote: "It is important for us to demonstrate that our social activism is an expression of our faith. We need to root our social teaching and activity in our theology."<sup>6</sup>

With obvious reference and in contrast to James Gustafson's monumental work, I advocate doing theology and ethics from a Christocentric and eucharistic perspective. Perhaps the theologian who, to my mind, provides most resources for the ongoing realization of this task is Henri de Lubac whose *Catholicism* both anticipated Vatican II and can continue to inspire our fuller reception of the Council.<sup>7</sup> Recall that the subtitle of the original French edition was: "the Social Aspects of Dogma."

Let me end by returning to the first section of Dr. Andolsen's paper and her plea to promote and draw upon the insights of our younger colleagues in theology. Our young colleague, Christopher Ruddy, began his recent article in *America* magazine with these words: "The clerical sexual abuse scandals in Boston and elsewhere have brought home how far the Catholic Church still has to go in receiving into its life the Second Vatican Council, nearly forty years

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<sup>5</sup>Heinrich Schlier, "L'Église d'après l'Épître aux Éphésiens," in *Le Temps de l'Église* (Tournai: Casterman, 1961) 184. For the ascended Lord's continuing mediation of life to his body, the Church, see Jean-Marie Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth R. Himes, "The Challenge of Peace and Economic Justice for All," *CTSA Proceedings* 56 (2001): 77-96, at 93. For the intrinsically "public" nature of the Church's kerygma, its core practices, and its teaching, see Reinhard Hütter, "The Knowledge of the Triune God: Practices, Doctrine, Theology," in *Knowing the Triune God*, ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 23-47.

<sup>7</sup>For a fine introduction to de Lubac, see Susan Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Two articles in the Winter 2001 issue of *Communio* are also most helpful: Rudolf Voderholzer, "Dogma and History: Henri de Lubac and the Retrieval of Historicity," and Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, "Henri de Lubac: Reader of *Dei Verbum*."

after that council's close." And he ends with these words: "In this time of self-inflicted darkness for the American church, the light of Vatican II—Christ—is needed more than ever."<sup>8</sup>

And to Ruddy's dual discernment I can only respond, "Amen. Amen."

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<sup>8</sup>Christopher Ruddy, "The American Church's Sexual Abuse Crisis," *America* 186 (3-10 June 2002): 7, 11.