

RELIGION AND THE RELIGION SCIENCES

The twentieth century which is now drawing to a close and the impending bimillennium of Christianity and of Christian culture give us occasion for a deeper reflection upon the situation and the perspective of man – of the human person, capable of conscious and free activity, of directing his own destiny and history.

The man of the nineteenth and twentieth century has, on a hitherto not encountered scale, undergone the ancient temptation “you shall be as gods”. The conviction of man’s perfection, his self-sufficiency and autocreations produced the well known mirage of divinity, joined with the view that God and religious values are a stumbling block in the road to man’s full development, and, above all, that they limit his freedom. It is from this that Promethean atheism has taken its rise in the name of bestowing upon man greater value; for this reason it was decided to “put God to death”, “to kill Jahwe”, so that man could be

- fully autonomous and mature (F. Nietzsche)
- absolutely free (S. Freud, J.-P. Sartre)
- that he might attain a paradise on earth, save himself by the revolutionary creation of new economic social structures (K. Marx, F. Engels, E. Bloch).

All the above mentioned philosophers and ideologists strove by various ways and means to eliminate God and religion from human life and human culture, and they did so on terrains where Christianity had been rooted for many centuries. They were able to delude many into thinking that a real God does not exist, that He is merely man’s construct, “a human illusion”, which hampers man, limits him. So in the name of the good of man it is necessary to reject God and to realize man’s striving for fullness and happiness on earth, if not immediately, then in the future.

Neither man nor human culture can long tolerate a vacuum in the domain of absolute aspirations. When the Transcendent God was eliminated and all links with Him were broken, there arose in His stead “new gods”, “new cults”, new “paradise myths” and new “religions”.

The most attractive myths, which, as they spread into ever wider circles, gained the most disciples, are:

- the myth of progress, which is associated with the belief that science and technology based on science can resolve all human problems and create a paradise on earth. Consumptionism and the attitude directed towards possession (the attitude “to have”) are the consequences following from the acceptance of the belief that science and technology have unbounded possibilities;

- the messianistic myth which makes up the basis of what are described as “political religions” which in turn are based upon the promise that, after he throws out God, man will be able to appropriate to himself those powers which hitherto were ascribed to God, and then he will be able to create a kingdom of freedom and happiness on earth. Man needs no saviour, he will save himself by effecting a change in the social economic structures and attain paradise on earth.

In both ideologies the role of “God” is taken over by a state, which is to come about in the future, in which reality will rise to the level of human Utopian desires. These are, as Bloch would say, “real Utopias”.

In face of the hopes held forth by the disciples and proclaimers of the “death of God”, which hopes were very much alive and attractive towards the end of the nineteenth century and still on into the first half of the twentieth century, we are now standing at the threshold of the twenty first century enriched even more by practical life experiences than by theoretical discussions. We have experienced and continue to experience how unreal and how feeble these promises have turned out to be, and at the same time how threatened and alone man has become when he has been put into the place of God. We are thus at the present time witnesses as man wakes up and rouses himself from his fascination with “being God”.

The experiences of the twentieth century – how painful and costly they have been – have shown that those “absolutes” man has created, the “lay religions”, the “political religions”, have not fulfilled man’s aspirations, they have not created paradise on earth, they have not eliminated all forms of alienation. On the contrary, they have brought forth enormous threats, new forms of alienation, and above all new forms of slavery for man.

We are aware of the “great drama of our times”, in which great achievements and great opportunities exist side by side with hitherto not encountered threats of the destruction of man or the total annihilation of humanity.

The lived experience of those real threats which arose after the “death of God” show even more clearly and in the perspective both of all humanity and of each man in particular why it is necessary to have the transcendent God as man’s source and exemplar, so that man may live as a man, and not like a slave of the structures which he himself has created, so that the culture which man himself has created may not turn against him, but that it be a “civilization of love and the freedom of man”.

It is a great paradox that this rejection of God which was to secure man complete freedom, has in reality led to a hitherto not encountered slavery and submission to human products. Today better than ever we understand that the freedom of the human person as dependence upon his own “I”, as well as his ability to decide and select from among various values, goods, is linked with the human person’s being open to the personal Transcendens. Without this perspective, which is opened by the personal God who is unlimited in his love, man becomes deformed, and even dies the most threatening sort of death, for it is a moral death.

Today better and more clearly than a century ago we know that God not only does not cramp human freedom, but also that He alone is the guarantee of this freedom.

”Man cannot be truly free or serve the cause of the development of true freedom, if he does not acknowledge and does not experience the transcendence of his existence in relation to the world, and his own connection with God” (John Paul II, address on the XIV World Day of Peace, Rome, Jan. 1, 1981, cf. “L’Osservatore Romano”, 1980, no. 11, p. 3).

So many things now argue for the necessity of bringing back the sacrum in culture, in order that man and human culture be saved. Religion, which shows man’s transcendent dimension and his transcendence in relation to the world of matter and all social groups stands in the center of interest. We can observe a renaissance of interest in religion and a renaissance of religiosity in areas where religion seemed to have been absolutely liquidated.

Since the myth of progress and an earthly paradise as well as ideologies as strong as Marxism have failed to eliminate religion from human life and human culture, there must exist a need for Him; the basis for affirming Him must be stronger and given in a more fundamental knowl-

edge than that, in which antireligious ideologies or those "religions" which sacralize matter and politics are based.

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I would like to indicate precisely those foundations of religion which reach to the roots of the existence and the essential dimensions of the human person. A neutral, realistically oriented philosophy will lay bare for us what was hidden in the stunted, abridged or warped twentieth century visions of man.

- In the section titled "On the understanding of Religion" I indicate religion's connection with man's existential (ontic) situation, with his very existence as a non-necessary, contingent person, and at the same time with his activity – knowledge, love, creativity – the activity of the person as being disposed towards absolute values: the good, the truth, the beautiful.

Religion is an answer to the questions which arise in such a situation, to those questions which come up in the life of every thinking man, regardless of his cultural, social, or political environment. These are questions about the sources and meaning of human life (why and to what end do they exist?), the meaning of love, of duty, and above all those questions which are brought up by the inevitable necessity of death. Religion is a response to the human lot, which neither science, nor the most highly developed technology, nor politics are in a position to change. Independently of these systems the human person is born, loves, creates, suffers, and dies.

It is only a religion which acknowledges the transcendent dimension of human existence and which accepts the transcendent God that can give meaning to the human person, and shed light upon this mysterious world and its incomprehensible history.

The considerations concerning the reasons for why there are many ways of understanding religion and in what way there can arise negations of and substitutes for religion complement the understanding of religion itself.

- "Religion in culture" (part two). In the face of what are today widespread sociological and pragmatic considerations concerning the problems of culture, I would like to indicate the philosophical foundations for those relations which obtain between religion and culture. What function does religion perform in human life, in human culture. A proper answer to this question will require a vision of man with his openness to truth,

good, beauty. A look at man and his "source" situation brings to light the bond of religion with other domains of culture – science, morality, creativity. Religion, itself a domain of culture, transcends it, it gives perspectives and meaning to the whole of human culture, for it gives these things to man. Now culture is nothing other than the manner of human existence, the road of his development, the bridge between life in time and life in eternity.

- "Religion and salvation" (part three). Since religion constitutes a cohesive group of responses to fundamental, existential human questions, before which each man and every society stands, and since it shows the paths for man's development, the means for acquiring fullness, the way of salvation – various religions joined with various cultural formations strive towards a mutual knowledge and understand each other, for they have arisen in response to problems which are common to all.

An openness to other cultures and other religions – good and in the present cultural situation simply necessary – gives rise at the same time to the obligation to seek and come to a deeper understanding of their own cultural and religion identity. In our cultural ambit this is a painful and difficult search, for in a large measure we have lost our identity, for Europe has departed from its Christian roots and has created "golden calves" and "political authorities".

In knowing other religions, born and cultivated in other cultural spheres, we come to know still more clearly the value and irrepeatability of Christianity, which leads to the conviction that man as a person, conscious of his subjectivity, can rely upon, and entrust his life to, no one except the personal God; it is only the personal Redeemer, who out of love for man himself became man and for him dies, who can fulfil the human desires for love without end, for love stronger than death.

So it is that to save man today, to build a personal culture, we must: "show the world Christ, help each man to find himself anew in Him, to help this generation, our brothers and sisters, peoples, nations, governments, humanity, countries which are just finding themselves on the road of development, and countries of 'abundance' – all – to know the 'profound richness of Christ', for this is for each man. This is the good of each man" (*Redemptor hominis*, 11).

- In the final section titled "The Problematics of Religion Sciences" I pay much attention to methodological reflection, in order to show that religion is an enormously complex and rich phenomenon and that there can be different ways of looking at religion. On this account there arise vari-

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ous kinds of knowledge about religion. Scientific knowledge, by which is meant, among others, such disciplines as history sociology, psychology (religiology) affords a great deal of information, but does not resolve all the problems connected with religion. There is also the need for the philosophy of religion, the theology of religion, and the theologies of particular religions.

The totality of researches in this work is intended for this purpose, that contemporary man might be able to recover his lost identity, to become a full man by taking into view all those factors without which human life becomes inhuman life.

A tranquil and profound philosophical reflection, complemented by the historical experience of the last century, shows that it is only religion which renders man's existence intelligible and opens up the full horizon of human hope. Religion penetrates all the domains of human life, of human culture, and so as well science, moral attitudes, creativity, by giving them inspiration and certain impulses, but also by constituting, from the human personal point of view, the justification for all the factors which make for full humanism.