

# MELITA THEOLOGICA

The Review of the  
Faculty of Theology  
and the  
Theology Students' Association  
Malta

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# ANALYTICAL INDEX

of

## MELITA THEOLOGICA

1947 – 85

compiled by **John Azzopardi, S.J.**

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JOHN AZZOPARDI was born at Xaghra, Gozo in 1939. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1957. He was sent to the University of Malta in 1960 from where he graduated B.A.(Hons.) in 1964, and M.A. two years later with a thesis on Shakespeare: *The Inter-Relationship of Fate and Free Will in Shakespearean Tragedy*. He did one year philosophy at Chantilly, near Paris. He subsequently read philosophy and theology at the University of Malta. He now writes articles and poems on various topics.

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# ETICA, CULTURA E RELIGIONE

**Battista Mondin**

La società contemporanea, sia quella orientale che occidentale, sia quella borghese che comunista, è stata colpita da una crisi di valori, soprattutto morali, che non conosce precedenti nella storia. Nessuna altra epoca storica ha sperimentato una così radicale esplosione di immoralità e di amoralità come la nostra. L'epoca in cui viviamo, come ha ben intuito Nietzsche, è caratterizzata dal completo nichilismo. Nichilismo significa che la morale cristiana è tramontata e che una nuova morale non è ancora sorta. "Che cosa significa nichilismo? Che i valori supremi sono svalorizzati. Manca lo scopo. Manca la risposta alla domanda: 'Perché?'"<sup>(1)</sup>

Ciò che per Nietzsche era ancora un tetro auspicio, nel nostro secolo è diventata tremenda realtà. "Il mondo in cui viviamo – scrive Gabriel Marcel – è in preda ad una confusione di cui non si trova alcunchè di analogo dai tempi dei barbari, e investe non solo le categorie del bene e del male, ma più profondamente ancora ciò che si deve chiamare vita e ciò che si deve chiamare morte".<sup>(2)</sup>

L'uomo moderno è disorientato ed insicuro e non riesce più a trovare parametri validi su cui fondare i propri giudizi e le proprie decisioni. Non sa più distinguere tra il bene e il male, tra il vero e il falso, tra il bello e il brutto, tra il giusto e il disonesto, tra l'utile e il dannoso, tra il lecito e l'illecito, tra il decente e lo sconcio, ecc. Non è più sicuro di nulla; non ha nessun solido appoggio; vive come sospeso nel vuoto. Le antiche certezze metafisiche e morali sono crollate; i valori su cui era fondata la nostra cultura e la nostra civiltà si sono come sbriciolati e dissolti; i punti di riferimento per il progresso e per l'azione hanno perduto la loro consistenza.<sup>(3)</sup>

Da qualche tempo il disorientamento ha investito anche i credenti: "Ci viene spesso detto – scrive il vescovo anglicano Robinson – che per quanto concerne la fede, la morale, la preghiera privata, il culto pubblico, la disciplina ecclesiastica, il senso della missione, la gente 'non sa più che

BATTISTA MONDIN, dei missionari Saveriani. Nato in provincia di Vicenza nel 1926, ha compiuto gli studi in Italia e negli U.S.A., conseguendo la laurea (Ph.D.) in storia e filosofia della religione presso l'Università di Harvard. È libero docente di storia della filosofia medioevale all'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milano); decano della facoltà di filosofia della Pontificia Università (Roma); vice-presidente dell'Associazione dei Docenti Italiani di Filosofia (ADIF); consultore della Sacra Congregazione per il Clero.

1. F. Nietzsche, *La volontà di potenza*, Milano 1927, p. 33.
2. G. Marcel, *Les hommes*, Paris 1951, p. 109.
3. Cfr. E. Coreth, *Antropologia filosofica*, Brescia 1978, pp. 173 – 174.

cosa pensare'. Si lamenta di essere disperatamente confusa, che tutto è estremamente vago (. . .) La gente è veramente sbalordita. Ha la sensazione d'aver perso ogni punto d'appoggio e di riferimento — e che anche quell'unica sfera dell'esistenza che sperava restasse un'isola di sicurezza è anch'essa diventata un mare di cambiamenti".<sup>(4)</sup>

Dopo il Concilio Vaticano II il morbo della confusione e del disorientamento ha contagiato anche i cattolici. Lo riconosceva con amarezza Paolo VI in un discorso tenuto alla Commissione teologica internazionale su "I criteri della conoscenza morale cristiana": 'Oggi — diceva il Papa — sono contestati gli stessi principi dell'ordine morale obiettivo. Ne deriva che l'uomo contemporaneo è sconcertato. Non sa più dove sia il bene e dove il male, nè a quali criteri egli possa affidarsi; e un certo numero di cristiani partecipa a tale dubbio, avendo perduto la fiducia sia in un concetto di morale naturale, sia negli insegnamenti positivi della Rivelazione e del Magistero. Si è abbandonata una filosofia pragmatista per ascoltare le tesi del relativismo".<sup>(5)</sup>

Il giudizio degli esperti in umanità è unanime: in tutte le sue strutture portanti la nostra è società senza morale e senza religione, ed è colpita da una tremenda crisi di valori.

Ma è possibile trovare un rimedio per una situazione tanto grave e pericolosa?

Quando si vuole curare una malattia occorre anzitutto diagnosticare con certezza le cause. Ciò vale anche per le malattie sociali, comprese quelle di ordine morale e spirituale. È un compito difficile e forse presuntuoso; eppure è quanto mi propongo di fare in questo mio breve intervento: analizzare le cause della crisi morale che attraversa l'umanità e suggerire alcuni rimedi.

Nel titolo del mio studio figurano tre termini: etica, cultura, religione e non semplicemente due, etica e religione, come mi era stato suggerito, perchè per la soluzione del nostro problema sono indispensabili tutti e tre. Etica, cultura e religione sono infatti unite da un vincolo strettissimo, che le assoggetta ad un comune destino.

La pista che seguirò per scoprire le cause che hanno fatto cadere la società moderna eticamente e religiosamente così in basso è quella della cultura. Studiando la cultura in sè stessa, nei suoi elementi costitutivi e nei rapporti con l'etica e con la religione riusciremo forse a scoprire le cause del declino etico e religioso della società attuale e potremo anche individuare i necessari rimedi per avviare l'umanità verso un futuro migliore.

Al fine che il mio ragionamento risulti a tutti limpido e senza equivoci mi permetto di richiamare le definizioni dei tre termini-chiave del mio discorso: *etica, cultura e religione*.

4. J.A.T. Robinson, *The Difference in Being a Christian Today*, London 1972, pp. 15 – 16.

5. In *L'Osservatore Romano* 18 dic. 1974, p. 2.

## 1. Definizione di etica, cultura, religione e dei loro rapporti

Per *etica* intendo quella disciplina che studia il fine ultimo dell'uomo ed i mezzi per conseguirlo.<sup>6</sup> Questi possono essere sia soggettivi (le virtù) che oggettivi (le norme morali, le leggi).

Per religione intendo la sfera del sacro; essa comprende sia i simboli sia i riti con cui l'uomo si mette in comunicazione con Dio.

Per cultura intendo non tanto la *coltivatio hominis* (la *paideia* dei greci), quanto la forma specifica di un gruppo sociale, e, pertanto, ciò che distingue un gruppo sociale da un altro gruppo sociale: gli italiani dai tedeschi, dai francesi, dagli spagnoli ecc.

Per giustificare la scelta della pista della cultura per risolvere il nostro problema devo spendere ancora qualche parola per illustrare l'importanza che ha per l'uomo la dimensione culturale, e devo inoltre spiegare brevemente quali sono gli elementi costitutivi fondamentali della cultura.

Lo sviluppo di quella scienza umana che si chiama antropologia culturale durante il nostro secolo ha rivelato l'importanza che riveste la cultura per la stessa definizione dell'uomo. Definire l'uomo significa dire ciò che lo caratterizza maggiormente e lo distingue essenzialmente dagli animali. Aristotele e con lui un'infinità di altri filosofi hanno assegnato questo ruolo al pensiero, alla ragione e hanno definito l'uomo come "animale ragionevole". In tempi più moderni molti pensatori hanno individuato la differenza specifica dell'uomo nella libertà, nel linguaggio, nella tecnica, nell'utopia, nell'angoscia, nella storicità ecc. Sono tutte definizioni legittime in quanto corrispondono a tratti caratteristici che non esistono negli animali e si incontrano soltanto nell'uomo. Ma una demarcazione altrettanto netta e profonda tra l'uomo e gli animali la segna anche la cultura: anch'essa è proprietà esclusiva dell'uomo, sia nel senso soggettivo di *coltivatio hominis* (educazione) sia nel senso oggettivo di forma della società.

L'animale possiede un essere praticamente già completo, con tutto ciò che gli occorre per la sua esistenza, sin dalla nascita, e lo riceve direttamente in dono dalla natura. L'uomo no. Ovviamente anch'egli è in parte prodotto dalla natura, ma solo in germe: più come un progetto che come un'opera finita. Sia la realizzazione piena del proprio essere sia la "creazione dell'ambiente" in cui vive, sono frutto della sua inventiva ed operosità, sono cioè effetto della cultura (della coltivazione di sè stesso e della natura). La cultura è dunque per l'uomo una seconda natura, anzi, ad essere esatti, la sua natura specifica, la sua vera essenza: l'essenza, la forma sia del singolo individuo sia del gruppo sociale.

Ora ci domandiamo: quali sono gli elementi costitutivi fondamentali della cultura, intesa come forma della società?

Da un accurato esame del fenomeno culturale e anche dalle definizioni

6. È questa l'impostazione che Aristotele dà all'*Etica nicomachea* che è il primo trattato scientifico di morale della nostra società occidentale.

che i migliori specialisti hanno elaborato della cultura<sup>(7)</sup> risulta che i suoi elementi costitutivi fondamentali sono quattro: lingua, costumi, tecniche e valori.

La lingua è senza dubbio l'elemento fondamentale, primario della cultura. Dove non c'è lingua non ci può essere una società, non ci può essere un popolo, una nazione e pertanto non si può sviluppare nessuna cultura. La lingua è il primo elemento che fa uscire il singolo da se stesso e lo mette in comunicazione con gli altri. E il raggruppamento sociale avviene anzitutto e soprattutto sulla base di una lingua: i francesi si sono costituiti in nazione sulla base del francese, i tedeschi del tedesco, gli inglesi dell'inglese, gli spagnoli dello spagnolo ecc.

Ma la lingua da sola non basta a dare origine ad una determinata cultura. Ci sono tanti popoli e nazioni che parlano la stessa lingua (per es. l'inglese è parlato dagli inglesi, dagli scozzesi, dagli irlandesi, dai canadesi, dagli americani ecc; il portoghese è parlato dai portoghesi, dai brasiliani, dagli angolani ecc.) ma posseggono una cultura distinta. Occorrono perciò altri elementi per formare una cultura. Un secondo elemento sono i costumi, le abitudini. Queste possono riguardare tutto; il cibo, il vestito, il gioco, il lavoro, la religione, l'educazione dei bambini, l'assistenza agli anziani ecc. Soprattutto nelle abitudini si incarna e si esprime lo stile di vita di un popolo, il suo modo di concepire e di affrontare l'esistenza, la visione e l'atteggiamento peculiare che assume di fronte alla realtà totale. Le abitudini, i costumi riguardano il comportamento in generale e quindi solo in minima parte cadono sotto l'ordine morale.

Oltre che abitudini comportamentali, ogni gruppo umano che possiede una cultura propria sviluppa delle tecniche (in particolare tecniche di lavoro). Queste corrispondono alle esigenze dell'ambiente, alla capacità, alla creatività e al livello di civiltà d'un popolo. Così gli stessi popoli cacciatori, pescatori, agricoltori, industriali ecc. inventano tecniche diverse per pescare, per cacciare, per arare i campi, per lavorare i metalli ecc. Altrettanto fanno i sarti, i cuochi, i falegnami, i giocatori, i maestri ecc. Ogni cultura porta con sé tutta una serie di stili di ordine tecnico e gli individui che ne sono in possesso, mostrano chiaramente di far parte di un determinato gruppo sociale, di appartenere ad un certo popolo. Così dal modo di giocare, di cantare, di dipingere, di cucinare ecc. si può facilmente arguire se uno è italiano, francese, brasiliano, cileno, indiano ecc.

Altro elemento costitutivo fondamentale d'ogni cultura sono i valori. Ogni cultura si caratterizza per apprezzamenti speciali in ordine a determinate azioni, costumi, tecniche, cose. Si tratta di azioni, abitudini, tecniche, cose che contano moltissimo per un gruppo sociale, e perciò le assume come criteri, come ideali. Ogni popolo possiede una propria coscienza dei valori, e corrisponde a ciò che si chiama "sapienza d'un popolo". Mediante tale "sapienza" ogni popolo conosce più o meno intuitivamente qual è il suo

7. Cfr. C. Kluckhohn - A.L. Kroeber, *Il concetto di cultura*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1972.

ruolo nella storia, come pure lo scopo della vita umana e ciò che occorre per conseguirlo.

## 2. Rapporti tra etica, cultura e religione

Lingua, abitudini, tecniche e valori sono pertanto gli elementi costitutivi fondamentali d'ogni cultura. Sulla base di tali elementi ogni popolo sviluppa tutti gli altri aspetti che contribuiscono a conferirgli una forma specifica: l'arte, la filosofia, la religione, la scienza, la letteratura, la musica, la politica e, naturalmente, anche l'etica.

Dei quattro fattori suddetti il più importante e decisivo per la caratterizzazione di una cultura sono i valori: sono essi a conferire unità e consistenza ad una cultura. Questa, infatti, non è un'entità amorfa, un aggregato di svariati prodotti ma un tutto organico. Tutte le espressioni culturali d'un popolo (politica, arte, religione, morale, educazione ecc.) fanno capo ad un unico principio, che è il valore fondamentale, primario che una cultura intende incarnare e coltivare. I membri del gruppo sociale cercano di assimilarlo nel migliore dei modi e contribuiscono, generazione su generazione, a formarlo e a tramandarlo.<sup>(8)</sup> Ed è naturale che sia così, perchè ciò che fa dell'uomo un vero uomo e di un gruppo sociale una vera società è la cultura, e se ciò che dà vita ad una cultura è un valore, allora ne consegue che la piena assimilazione d'un autentico valore dà origine ad un vero uomo e ad una solida società.

Questa verità (della centralità d'un valore) giustifica gli sforzi di quegli storici (Burkhardt, Huizinga, Marrou, Toymbee, dello stesso Vico e più recentemente del Foucault) di cogliere il senso delle varie epoche della storia, dell'ascesa e della decadenza di certe nazioni, alla luce di quel valore primario, fondamentale, che hanno cercato di promuovere e di realizzare più di qualsiasi altro (il valore del sacro, il valore della bellezza, della giustizia, della potenza, della scienza ecc.).

Stando così le cose in che rapporto si trovano l'etica e la religione con la cultura?

Anzitutto è chiaro che sia l'etica sia la religione sono espressioni culturali, ossia sono dimensioni specifiche dell'uomo, il quale come abbiamo visto è essenzialmente un essere culturale (in senso attivo e passivo). Di fatto etica e religione non si trovano presso gli animali, che non sono esseri culturali. Con ciò non intendiamo affatto dire che etica e religione sono epifenomeni della cultura. Tutt'altro. Come risulta dalle indagini degli antropologi culturali non c'è mai stata nessuna cultura senza etica e senza religione. E la ragione c'è: sia l'etica sia la religione hanno un rapporto vitale con quel pilastro principale della cultura che sono i valori.

L'etica esplicita in concetti chiari il valore primario e l'ideale umano

8. Questa tesi è stata provata con dovizie di argomenti da Ruth Benedict in un volume divenuto un classico dell'antropologia culturale, *Patterns of Culture*, New York 1934.



d'una società e fissa in norme precise ciò che si deve fare per realizzarlo. Per esempio, se per una cultura il valore massimo è l'eroismo, allora l'uomo ideale è il guerriero e l'etica è quella cavalleresca; se il valore principale è la verità, allora l'uomo ideale è il sapiente, e l'etica è quella della contemplazione; se il valore primario è il piacere, l'uomo ideale è il gaudente (Dioniso) e l'etica è quella epicurea; se il valore supremo è il sacro, l'uomo ideale è il santo, e l'etica appropriata è quella fatta di mortificazione e di preghiera ecc. Anche dallo studio comparato delle culture risulta che questo è il ruolo che viene affidato all'etica dai singoli gruppi sociali.

Quanto alla religione la sua funzione è di assicurare un valido fondamento ai valori e, di conseguenza, anche all'etica. I valori, l'abbiamo visto, sono ideali, sono mete che assicurano un orientamento alla vita umana. Pertanto stanno essenzialmente sopra all'uomo. Sono trascendenti. Perciò per procurare alla cultura e all'etica quel sostegno di cui hanno di bisogno, i valori devono trarre origine da quell'unica realtà trascendente che è Dio. I valori non sono invenzioni arbitrarie della mente umana ma doni di Dio. Questo è l'insegnamento comune di tutte le religioni come risulta dalle indagini degli antropologi.

\* \* \*

Ciò ha indotto molti studiosi a sostenere la tesi che la religione non è per nulla una sovrastruttura accidentale della società (come pretendeva Marx) o un epifenomeno culturale, bensì una dimensione essenziale perché non si può dare né etica né cultura senza religione. Max Weber mette la religione al centro della sua teoria della cultura e della società. Per lui la religione fornisce l'ampia prospettiva nella quale un gruppo sociale considera il mondo, la propria attività, la terra a cui appartiene, il tempo che regola la sua vita e il suo futuro, compresa la morte. La religione costituisce la matrice del significato ed il sostegno dei valori e della morale. Christopher Dawson vede nella religione la struttura primaria e portante, la componente principale d'ogni cultura. La religione non è prodotta dalla cultura (tanto meno da una cultura primitiva per ottenere una spiegazione ingenua, fantastica, mitica della realtà), ma entra a far parte della cultura come principio vitale essenziale. "Attraverso la parte più illustre della storia dell'umanità, in tutti i secoli e in qualsiasi stadio della società – scrive Dawson – la religione è stata la forza centrale unificatrice della cultura (. . .) Non possiamo comprendere le strutture intime d'una società se non conosciamo bene la sua religione. Non possiamo capire le sue conquiste culturali, se non comprendiamo le credenze religiose che stanno dietro di essa".<sup>(9)</sup>

9. Ch. Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, London 1984, pp. 49 – 50. Nelle culture tradizionali l'origine religiosa dei valori e della coscienza morale è un fatto universalmente ammesso: nella lingua sanscrita dei Veda è il rita ossia l'ordinamento sacro del mondo; nella cultura cinese è il tao, che significa tanto 'ordine' quanto 'via'; per gli egiziani è la maat dea della giustizia e della

### 3. Etica cristiana e cultura moderna

L'analisi dei concetti di etica, cultura e religione e dei loro rapporti ci consente di individuare finalmente la causa principale della crisi profonda che sta attraversando la cultura contemporanea, una crisi che, come s'è visto, è anzitutto e soprattutto crisi di valori, crisi morale: la causa sta nella eliminazione del cristianesimo dalla cultura moderna.

Il cristianesimo ebbe il merito non solo di portare l'umanità ad una cultura superiore, ma, proponendo un nuovo ideale di umanità, anche di gettare le basi di una nuova etica. Il cristianesimo insegna che l'uomo è *imago Dei*, anzi, addirittura figlio di Dio. L'uomo ideale non è Prometeo o Socrate o Epicuro, ma Gesù, il Figlio di Dio in carne e ossa. Da questo ideale discende una nuova etica, che detta norme (le beatitudini) e virtù (fede, speranza e carità), intese a forgiare dei figli di Dio.

Man mano che la società greco-romana e la società barbarica si convertono al cristianesimo si crea anche una nuova etica, in cui diventano norme elementari: il rispetto della persona, della parola, della proprietà privata; la castità, la sacralità della vita del concepito, l'amore per il prossimo, il perdono delle offese, l'indissolubilità del matrimonio ecc.

I valori cristiani sono stati, durante tutto il medioevo fino all'inizio dell'epoca moderna, i fari che hanno illuminato, ispirato, guidato tutte le espressioni culturali della società, che portava il nome di *respublica christiana*: l'arte, il diritto, la filosofia, la politica e, ovviamente, la morale.

Senonchè a partire dal Rinascimento, "l'ipotesi religiosa", come amava chiamarla Bonhoeffer, comincia ad essere disattesa, mentre prende sempre più piede la secolarizzazione. Così, ad un certo punto, si pretende di costruire anche l'etica su basi esclusivamente umanistiche ("etsi Deus non daretur"). È quanto tentano di fare i vari Hume, Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Comte, Mill ecc. Nei loro codici etici, è vero, il peso dell'eredità cristiana si fa ancora sentire e vi si incontrano valori, norme e virtù squisitamente cristiani, come il rispetto per la persona, la sacralità della vita, il diritto alla libertà ecc. ma si tratta di *icebergs* vaganti destinati presto o tardi ad essere ingoiati e dissolti dalle acque dell'oceano di un mondo senza Dio.

Alla fine dell'Ottocento, riconosciuta la morte di Dio nella cultura moderna, F. Nietzsche invoca la creazione di una nuova etica, il cui ideale supremo è il super-uomo e l'imperativo categorico è la "volontà di potenza". Se Dio è morto – argomenta l'autore di *Così parlò Zarathustra* e di *Al di là del bene e del male* – occorre operare un capovolgimento totale dei valori. Il super-uomo è forte, autonomo, legislatore di sè stesso,

verità; per l'antica religione persiana (Avesta) è *asha*, principio dialettico del bene, cioè dell'ordine e della verità. In ogni caso, c'è morale perchè c'è un principio divino dell'ordine. Si veda al riguardo W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion. Lectures in Phenomenology of Religion*, Nijhoff 1971, soprattutto pp. 267 ss. e G. Morra, "Esperienza religiosa e morale", in *Proteus*, n. 10 (aprile 1973), pp. 17 – 34.

padrone assoluto dei propri atti e non è tenuto a render conto delle proprie azioni nè a Dio nè alla società, ma solo a sè stesso. Le virtù del super-uomo sono il coraggio (non l'umiltà), l'audacia (non la rassegnazione), l'insensibilità (non la compassione), il piacere (non il sacrificio).

Analoghe conclusioni aveva formulato già prima di Nietzsche, Feodor Dostoevskij in una notissima pagina del romanzo *I fratelli Karamazov*: "Dal momento che l'uomo rinnegherà Dio – scrive Dostoevskij – (e credo che quell'epoca, allo stesso modo delle epoche geologiche, dovrà pur venire quando che sia la sua ora), tutte le vecchie concezioni e specialmente la vecchia morale cadranno da sè, senza l'intervento della antropofagia, e nascerà una vita nuova. Gli uomini si uniranno per attingere dalla vita tutto ciò che essa può dare di gioia e di felicità, ma soltanto in questo mondo. Lo spirito dell'uomo si innalzerà in un divino e titanico orgoglio, e apparirà l'uomo-Dio. Vincendo la natura in ogni ora e senza alcun limite, per mezzo della propria volontà e della scienza, l'uomo proverà per ciò solo ad ogni istante, un godimento talmente sublime, che gli terrà posto di tutte le antiche speranze di godimenti celesti".

Anche un lucido e profondo pensatore italiano, Antonio Rosmini, aveva ammonito che attribuire all'uomo l'origine della norma etica significa rendere impossibile la morale: affermata l'inesistenza della realtà Trascendente non è più possibile una definizione del lecito e dell'illecito. Ogni azione è o non è lecita a seconda degli interessi della classe dominante.

L'invocazione pazzesca di Nietzsche e le terribili previsioni di Dostoevskij e Rosmini si sono avverate puntualmente nel nostro secolo, nel quale da una società senza Dio si è caduti in una cultura senza Dio e, logicamente, in un'etica senza Dio, che è l'etica dell'egoismo, della violenza, dell'oppressione, dell'edonismo, dell'erotismo, del terrorismo ecc. Nè poteva essere altrimenti, perchè "entro la logica del dominio, tipica del 'sapere-potere' di Bacone e della scienza quantitativa di Cartesio-Galileo, del geometrismo di Spinoza e del formalismo di Kant, dell'*esprit polytechnique* e del marxismo, dell'empirismo logico e del pragmatismo, non vi può essere spazio alcuno per la morale. Se una civiltà innalza e assolutizza i valori della razionalità strumentale, della efficienza e della competizione, il sadismo è l'esito necessario. E la morale è morta"<sup>(10)</sup>

La gravissima crisi dell'etica e dei valori che sta soffrendo la società contemporanea dipende quindi dalla dissoluzione della religione e della metafisica in una cultura "sensistica", che privilegia e assolutizza il sapere scientifico e il potere tecnologico. P.A. Sorokin di questa crisi morale, ha calcolato attentamente i "progressi" e ne ha individuato cinque caratteri essenziali: la tendenza sensistica, l'edonismo generalizzato e pianificato, il primato del denaro, la leadership plutocratica, l'atomismo morale e il nichilismo.<sup>(11)</sup>

10. G. Morra, *La cultura cattolica e il nichilismo contemporaneo*, Milano 1979, p. 149.

11. P.A. Sorokin, *La dinamica sociale e culturale*, trad. ital., UTET, Torino 1975, in particolare pp. 648 – 652.

È chiaro che una cultura di questo tipo non è in grado di proporre una morale valida. D'altra parte la crisi morale e la condotta distruttiva degli uomini d'oggi è il riflesso immediato della crisi di una cultura che dal rifiuto del cristianesimo è passata al rifiuto di Dio e dal rifiuto di Dio al rifiuto dell'uomo. Questa cultura, con la pretesa di sopprimere Dio per diventare più umana, ha finito per diventare semplicemente bestiale. Tale cultura, privilegiando l'aver sull'essere ha imposto categorie (quali la produttività, il dominio, la competizione, il progresso ecc.) che non possono consentire un'etica, ma soltanto la disgregazione di ogni etica. "Un mondo che assolutizza quei disvalori condanna i rapporti umani ad un tragico *aut-aut* tra la strumentalizzazione e l'eliminazione dell'altro. Come la natura, così anche il prossimo è un oggetto da utilizzare (il cosiddetto 'altruismo') o un ostacolo da eliminare (il sincero e crudele 'egoismo' di Nietzsche e Stirner)".<sup>(12)</sup>

Svelata e riconosciuta la vera causa della crisi dei valori e della morale nel mondo contemporaneo, i rimedi da prendere appaiono abbastanza ovvii.

– Occorre certamente promuovere una coraggiosa ecologia per salvare la natura dalla devastazione selvaggia e autolesiva a cui la sottopone la tecnica moderna.

– Bisogna garantire a tutti gli esseri umani il pane, il lavoro, la cultura (nel senso di *paideia*), un moderato livello di benessere.

– È necessario assicurare ad ogni persona quegli spazi di libertà e di tempo libero, di cui ha bisogno per il proprio sviluppo.

– Ma occorre anzitutto e soprattutto restituire alla religione il posto e la funzione che le competono all'interno di una cultura che voglia essere veramente civile. Una cultura civile si dà solamente quando essa eleva i membri d'una società verso un ideale veramente civile e gli fornisce norme etiche a realizzarlo. Ma ciò è possibile solo se sia la cultura sia la struttura etica che le è confacente, poggiano su solide basi religiose.

Il futuro dell'umanità dipende ovviamente dal futuro della sua cultura, il quale dipende a sua volta dall'etica e dalla religione che vorrà scegliersi per il domani.

Per un paio di secoli l'umanità ha inseguito il miraggio di messianismi senza Dio. Con essi ha compiuto progressi tecnici ed economici sbalorditivi, che presentano giorno dopo giorno molta affinità con i progressi della Torre di Babele. C'è stato un grande aumento di benessere materiale ed economico. L'uomo è cresciuto a dismisura nella sfera dell'aver. Ma il suo essere interiore, spirituale, morale è rimasto soffocato.

È del mondo dell'essere, della sfera spirituale dell'uomo che noi siamo profondamente preoccupati. È per la sua difesa e salvaguardia che dobbiamo lavorare seriamente, con grande impegno. Al posto di una cultura che ha privilegiato indebitamente ed erroneamente la scienza e la

tecnologia, senza rinnegare scienza e tecnologia, dobbiamo promuovere una nuova cultura che restituisca all'etica e alla religione il primato che loro compete.

Il traguardo finale dell'umanità non è semplicemente quello di una "società senza classi", bensì di una comunità di figli di Dio (la *communio sanctorum*). Questo è l'unico messianismo capace di salvare l'umanità e di renderla pienamente felice.

# THE CONSTITUTION AND RELIGION IN MALTA BETWEEN 1921 AND 1974

George Grima

Malta had eight Constitutions between 1921 and 1974.<sup>(1)</sup> Of these, the most important, in so far as religious matters are concerned, are the Self-Government (1921), the Independence (1964) and the Republic Constitution (1974). What these three Constitutions have in common is that they all recognize the right to freedom of conscience and worship. In fact, the formulation which the Constitution of 1921 gives of this right is retained in subsequent Constitutions. For this reason, it may sound somewhat strange to speak of the constitutional history of this right in Malta. Yet, it is possible to see this right in a historical perspective, because the *context* varies from one Constitution to the other. The 1921 Constitution contains only one section on religion which, in the first place, affirms everyone's right to freedom of conscience and worship and, secondly, prohibits religious discrimination in any public career. While declaring the Roman Catholic religion as the religion of Malta and guaranteeing freedom and independence to the Roman Catholic Church, the 1964 Constitution includes freedom of conscience and worship as well as equality of treatment, prohibiting religious (and other forms of) discrimination, among the fundamental human rights. The 1974 Constitution does substantially the same except that it practically abolishes the special guarantee which the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed under the previous Constitution.

Although freedom of conscience and worship has been forming part of Maltese Constitutions since 1921, it has been only very recently that it acquired the importance which it deserves. Ironically enough, the Catholic Church, which initially had so many reservations to and even objections against this basic right, has been the first one since Malta became independent to appeal to it in order to defend its freedom.<sup>(2)</sup> In 1983 it sued

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1. For an analysis of the Constitutions of Malta between 1813 and 1961 see J.J. Cremona, *An Outline of the Constitutional Development of Malta under British Rule*, Malta, 1963.

2. An earlier case, involving the right to freedom of conscience and worship, was that instituted by the late Dr Anton Buttigieg as editor of *The Voice of Malta* over the circular of April 25, 1962 by which the Chief Government Medical Officer on behalf of the Minister of

the Government, alleging that the *Devolution of Certain Church Property Act (1983)* violates a number of fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of conscience and worship.<sup>(3)</sup> A year later, it challenged the constitutionality of the *Education (Amendment) Act (1984)*, alleging that it violates freedom of conscience and worship as well as other fundamental rights.<sup>(4)</sup>

There is, in my opinion, a historical reason which explains why the political community and the Church in Malta have taken so long to realize the significance and value of the Constitutional right to freedom of conscience and worship. The main religious *issue* seems to have centred always on the fate of the Roman Catholic religion and the Roman Catholic Church. This was already clear enough at the beginning of British rule in Malta when His Majesty the King was requested by the Maltese to uphold and protect their religion.<sup>(5)</sup> Preoccupation with the local religion made the right to freedom of conscience and worship appear as something either to be opposed, because it was harmful or to be ignored, because it was harmless. In 1921 such a right was seen mostly as a form of unpalatable foreign interference in the Maltese religious way of life. In 1964 and 1974 it was accepted without much ado more or less as a legacy which could give the Church hardly any protection and the Government scarcely any trouble.<sup>(6)</sup> The real issues on both occasions was not religious freedom but the freedom of the Church.

Responsible for the sudden discovery of the importance of the constitutional right to freedom of conscience and worship for the proper safeguarding of the liberty of the Church (and other religious bodies) has been the change of political circumstances taking place in recent years. Having managed to weaken considerably the guarantee with which the Independence Constitution provided the Church to ensure its freedom, the Malta Labour Party, which has been in government since 1971, thought that the door was then open for it to enact a series of legislation in order to diminish the Church's social influence. On its part, the Church, realizing that it could only depend on the protection provided by the Constitution to human rights, relied on the right to freedom of conscience and worship and other relevant human rights to restrain the State from interfering unduly in

Health prohibited the entry in the various hospitals and branches of the medical department of newspapers which were condemned by Church authorities. The decision of the Privy Council on the case is included in *Ghaqda Studenti tal-Liġi, Deċiżjonijiet Kostituzzjonali 1964 - 1978*, pp. 138 - 163.

3. The claim of the Church had been upheld by the Civil Court, acting as a Constitutional Court. The case is now before the Court of Appeal.

4. Court proceedings in this case were interrupted in November, 1984 after the presiding judge decreed that in the circumstances he could no longer continue to hear the case.

5. Cf. *Declaration of Rights of the Inhabitants of the Islands of Malta and Gozo*, reproduced in Cremona, *op.cit.*, pp. 77 - 79.

6. Note, however, the amendments which the Nationalist Party proposed to the Draft Independence Constitution to the section on the interpretation of Human Rights. Cf. below p. 31.

its own religious sphere. How far will this course of action help the Church has yet to be seen, for the matter is still pending before the local Court.

In the meantime, however, it is useful to try to trace the main stages in the development of the constitutional right to freedom of conscience and worship in Malta. The significance of this right emerges, in my opinion, if it is seen in the context of what the various Constitutions actually say on religion and in the light of the socio-historical background of the time.

### **The Self-Government Constitution: Freedom of Conscience and Worship as Religious Toleration**

The 1921 Constitution gave the Maltese people the power to govern their purely local affairs. Among the limitations imposed by the British through this Constitution on the Maltese legislative assembly was one relating to religious toleration. Section 56 laid down the following two provisions:

- (1) All persons in Malta shall have the full liberty of conscience and the free exercise of their respective modes of religious worship.
- (2) No person shall be subject to any disability or excluded from holding any office by reason of his religious profession.

The first affirms the right to freedom of conscience and worship, while the second prohibits religious discrimination. Before examining the meaning of these two clauses on religion, it is important to bring out the Maltese reaction to them.

In the Draft Constitution which the National Assembly, a body set up to defend and work for the right of the Maltese people to self-government, had originally submitted to the British Government in 1919 there was only one reference to religion in the form of a declaration, made at the very beginning, that the religion of Malta and its Dependencies is the Roman Catholic religion.<sup>(7)</sup> In making this proposal, it had no intention whatsoever to impose Catholicism on anyone. It had earlier rejected the request made by representatives of the Cathedral Chapter<sup>(8)</sup> to lay down in the Constitution that the Roman Catholic religion is the religion of the Government of

7. Cf. *L'Assemblea Nazionale di Malta: 25 Febbraio 1919 – 27 Maggio 1921*, published in 1923 by order of the Maltese Parliament, 46–49, p. 46. This publication will be referred to as *L'Assemblea Nazionale*.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 137. The Cathedral Chapter was not in any way representing the official view of the hierarchy on the issue. In their joint Pastoral Letter of May 8, 1921, the Bishops of Malta and Gozo did not seem to have made any difference between “the religion of Malta” and “the religion of the Government of Malta” (*Ibid.*, pp. 104–106). Besides, members of the clergy taking part in the debate did not take a unanimous stand in favour of the Cathedral Chapter’s proposal. It was, in fact, Mgr. Panzavecchia who first proposed, in his second Draft Constitution, that the Constitution should begin with a declaration that the religion of Malta and its Dependencies is the Roman Catholic Religion (*Ibid.*, 143–148, p. 143).



Malta, precisely because that would prejudice unnecessarily the Maltese position *vis-à-vis* the Colonial Office by creating the false impression that such a clause was being proposed with a view to allow a future Government to engage in religious persecution.<sup>(9)</sup>

The amendment which the Cathedral Chapter submitted raised a crucial point which, unfortunately, had not been discussed fully at the time. Why was it acceptable for the Constitution to declare what is the religion of *Malta* but not what is the religion of the *Government*? Where exactly did the difference lie? In fact, there was quite an important difference, since Malta stood for *Maltese society*, while Government stood for *civil authority*, the former being a wider concept than the latter. Society includes the political dimension, that is, the exercise of power on behalf of society as a whole, but it embraces other dimensions as well, including the religious dimension which the Government is bound to respect as an essential feature of human life and, at the same time, to recognize as a sphere in which it is not competent to interfere. In choosing to include in the Constitution simply that the religion of *Malta*, rather than the religion of the *Government* of Malta, is the Roman Catholic religion, the local political community wanted to make a factual rather than a normative statement, to say what *is* rather than what *is to be* the religion of Malta.<sup>(10)</sup>

Surely, the Cathedral Chapter had no intention whatsoever of making Catholicism compulsory for anyone in Malta. Citing a manual of moral theology, its representative in a sub-commission of the National Assembly commission explained that the purpose behind the proposal was to affirm constitutionally that in framing its laws the local Government should be inspired by the religious feelings shared by the entire people of Malta.<sup>(11)</sup> Catholic social teaching itself had been insisting on the duty of the State to profess the true religion (i.e. Catholicism) and to govern in accordance with natural and divine law.<sup>(12)</sup> State confessionality in the Catholic social tradition presupposed the desacralization of political power. It was the confession that power should never assume an absolute character and elevate itself to a place which actually belongs to God.<sup>(13)</sup>

In spite of its positive intentions, Catholic teaching on the confessional State, however, encountered a serious problem in explaining how a Catholic State was to deal with people professing a different religion or no religion at

9. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

10. In its observations on the Draft Constitution proposed by the British Government in June 1920, the Chamber of Advocates noted that the purpose of a constitutional statement declaring that the religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic religion is *to state a fact*. *Ibid.*, 55 – 65, pp. 61 – 62.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 161 – 162. The manual quoted is Petro Scavini, *Theologia Moralis*, Vol. IV.

12. Cf. Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei* (1885).

13. Cf. John Courtney Murray, "Leo XIII on Church and State: The General Structure of the Controversy", *Theological Studies*, Vol. XIV (1953), pp. 1 – 30; "Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State", Vol. XIV (1953), pp. 145 – 214.

all. Although this teaching affirmed unambiguously the voluntary character of the act of faith and so excluded categorically the imposition of the faith, it maintained that Catholicism alone, being the true religion, had in principle the right to exist in society, that is, to have public recognition; other religions should be tolerated out of deference to the people professing them but their social manifestation and public exercise should be regulated according to the principle that truth alone has rights, while error has no rights.

The option of the local political community to ask for the constitutional identification of the religion of Malta rather than that of the Government marked a notable achievement in the history of religious freedom in Malta. In identifying the particular religious character of the Maltese way of life (as a socio-historical reality), the Constitution would not interfere in any way in the legitimate autonomy of the political order. Civil authority would certainly be expected to take into account in its legislation the fact that Maltese society is a Catholic society. But this would follow from a purely political principle, namely, that the State is meant to serve the people. Besides, a non-confessional State in a constitutionally declared Catholic country would enjoy the necessary freedom to legislate in such a way that the rights of non-Catholics would be duly and fully respected.

The National Assembly left out from its Draft Constitution any provision guaranteeing specifically the freedom of the Church. This was not an oversight. In fact, the Assembly discussed a motion, which seems to have had a fairly wide backing among the clergy, exactly on this matter.<sup>14</sup> The motion said that Parliament should have no power to enact legislation which was harmful to the interests and freedom of the Church. This motion was defeated. But the reason was not that the freedom of the Church was a controversial issue at the time. On the contrary, those who spoke against the motion held that a constitutional provision of that kind reflected badly on the individual members of Parliament, since it presumed that they were not already so well-disposed toward the Church that they would defend spontaneously its interests and freedom. Besides, they held, members of Parliament, being actually Catholic (though they did not need to be so), would be much more effectively deterred from passing legislation hostile to the Church by means of the provisions of Canon Law than those of the Constitution. Such an argument was plausible in the socio-historical circumstances of the time. For the time being, a specific clause in the Constitution guaranteeing the freedom of the Church was judged to be

14. The motion read: "Nessuna legge si potrà avanzare per la discussione nelle due Camere, tendente a ledere gli interessi e il culto della Chiesa Cattolica Apostolica Romana, dovendo detti interessi e libertà di culto godere il privilegio riconosciuto agli interessi imperiali". For the debate on this motion in the National Assembly cf. *L'Assemblea Nazionale*, pp. 45 – 46. The proposal was originally made by the (Malta) Cathedral Chapter (*ibid.*, p. 137) and the College of Parish Priests of Gozo (*ibid.*, p. 150). The motion was presented in the National Assembly by Mgr. Panzavecchia (*ibid.*, p. 45).

superfluous in view of the fact that Maltese society, including the political community, took such freedom for granted.

But there is another point to consider. In my opinion, the National Assembly had given the declaration which it wanted to include in the Constitution, namely, that the Roman Catholic religion is the religion of Malta, so much weight that it did not see any reason why the Constitution should explicitate that the Church would be free to exercise its mission. This emerged, indirectly at least, at a later stage when the Assembly met to submit its own observations on the British Draft Constitution. The latter contained only one clause on religion (a) asserting everyone's right to freedom of conscience and worship and (b) prohibiting religious discrimination in any public career.<sup>(15)</sup> In 1906 the British Government had already proclaimed its intention of regulating the exercise of religion on the basis of the principle it was enunciating in its Draft Constitution.<sup>(16)</sup>

The National Assembly, having proposed once more to include in the Constitution (this time heading the section on religion) a declaratory statement saying that the Roman Catholic religion is the religion of Malta, agreed to propose a reformulation of the right both to freedom of conscience and worship and to equality of treatment.

In place of the categorical affirmation of everyone's right to full freedom of conscience and worship, as stated in the British Draft Constitution, the National Assembly proposed:

*“Either* ‘Every person professing a religion other than the Roman Catholic Religion shall be tolerated in the exercise of this religion’.

*Or* ‘No person professing a religion other than the Roman Catholic Religion shall be molested because of his religious convictions or in any way hindered from the exercise of his worship’.”<sup>(17)</sup>

The way in which the National Assembly was proposing to reformulate the right to freedom of conscience and worship showed that the Roman Catholic Religion was not being placed on the same level of other religions. The right of Catholics to exercise their religion, individually and collectively, in private and in public, was taken as self-evident or, one may say, as a corollary of the constitutional declaration that the Roman Catholic religion is the religion of Malta. Others would also be allowed to practice their religion, because Maltese society would be constitutionally bound to tolerate the practice of a religion other than Roman Catholicism. More

15. British Draft Constitution published in the Government Gazette of June 12, 1920, section 56 (1) – (2).

16. His Majesty's Order in Council, October 27, 1906.

17. *L'Assemblea Nazionale*, pp. 54, 77.

simply, one may say that in Malta, a Catholic country, Catholics would have *religious freedom*, while others would have *religious toleration*.

The amendment which the National Assembly proposed to the provision in the British Draft Constitution on religious discrimination<sup>(18)</sup> confirmed that the local political community was drawing a line, implicitly or explicitly, between Catholics and non-Catholics, granting full freedom to the former and restraining, where necessary, the freedom of the latter. Though religious discrimination was to be prohibited in general, there were cases in which a certain degree of religious discrimination might have to be accepted in the interest of the common good. Health and education were the two most sensitive areas in this respect. Should not Maltese patients in public hospitals and clinics have the services only of Catholic nurses and doctors who would be in a better position to understand their religious needs? Should not teaching in public schools be open only to those who profess the Catholic religion, given the great risk to which the faith of children and young people would be exposed through the employment of non-Catholic teachers in public schools? This was one of the most hotly debated issues at the time. Eventually, the National Assembly agreed to propose the following amendment to 56-(2) of the British Draft Constitution:

“No person shall be subjected to any disability or excluded from holding any office by reason of his religious profession, provided that persons not professing the Roman Catholic Religion may be debarred from holding any office connected with public instruction or education”.<sup>(19)</sup>

The fact that the local political community justified religious discrimination in *one* case only, that is, in the interest of the spiritual welfare of Maltese children and young people in general, showed, at least in the circumstances, how wide was the scope of religious toleration it was prepared to admit. The fact, however, of allowing even a very limited form of religious discrimination proved that the notion of *full* freedom of conscience and worship was still unacceptable. The limitations which the Maltese political community in the early twenties contemplated to impose regarding the exercise of freedom of conscience and worship went beyond those dictated purely by public safety, public order, public morality or decency, public health or the protection of the rights and freedom of others. The right to freedom of conscience and worship, it was supposed, could also be restrained in the interest of a *spiritual* good: the religiously sound upbringing of children and youth. That meant that the Constitution, as envisaged from the Maltese point of view, was to give Government the necessary power, in the first place, to cater for the rights of the Catholic people in

18. Section 56 (2).

19. *L'Assemblea Nazionale*, pp. 54, 77.

Malta and, secondly, to protect the religious freedom of others in so far as such freedom was compatible with the legitimate religious interests of the Maltese people. The deep consciousness of the obligation of the Government to keep always in view the fact that Malta was a Catholic country led the local political community to look at freedom of conscience and worship with some reservations.

The Colonial Government stuck to its original position. It rejected the Maltese proposal to introduce a new clause recognizing the special historical and social status of Roman Catholicism in Malta and to amend the clause on freedom of conscience and on religious discrimination. Explaining its decision on the matter, the Secretary of State said that the Constitution was not the proper document to declare what is the religion of the country. The Constitution should lay only the essential framework for self-government, imposing on the Maltese Parliament only those limits which were really necessary in the circumstances. Parliament remained free to make whatever legislation it deemed proper regarding the "security, well-being and public recognition of the Catholic Church in Malta" as well as "the safeguarding of their (i.e. the Maltese) religious institutions and the maintenance of the faith of their (i.e. Maltese) fathers".<sup>(20)</sup>

In the situation, the Maltese could only proceed to implement the proposal of the British Government and enact that the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion is the religion of Malta.<sup>(21)</sup> This was the first Act of Parliament passed under the Self-Government Constitution as a symbolic gesture of protest against the Colonial Government and a reaffirmation of the general local feelings on the matter.<sup>(22)</sup>

This is not the place to discuss at length the position of the Colonial Government. Suffice it to say that when a Constitution is stating what is the religion of the country, it is serving to identify the particular cultural and social make-up of the country in question; it is a way of expressing somehow the national identity. In taking cognizance of certain characteristic features of society, the Constitution reflects the general feelings, attitudes and way of life of the people involved. This is not out of place, for people are not abstract individuals but concrete human beings whose sensibilities and outlook on life have been moulded through their social and historical experiences in which religion very often plays a decisive part. In the context of the Maltese determination to assert their own self-identity as a nation having its own history and religion the emphasis which the National Assembly placed on the declaration that the religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic religion acquires a special significance. Such a declaration would

20. Letter of L.S. Amery for the Secretary of State to Governor Plumer, dated 9th April, 1921. Reproduced in Cremona, *op.cit.*, pp. 118 – 129, p. 120.

21. *The Religion of Malta Act (1922)*.

22. The debate in the Legislative Assembly of Malta is reported in the *Official Report of the Debates*, First Session – First Legislation, Vol. I, pp. 80 – 86; 537 – 541.

have expressed in a very important way the major aspiration of the Maltese at the beginning of the present century.

Taking the 1921 Constitution as it actually stood, however, one may ask: what was the position of the Roman Catholic religion and the Church under that Constitution? The answer is quite simple: People professing the Catholic faith had *at least* the same liberty to follow their conscience and to exercise their religious mode of worship as anybody else. This was the minimum which Parliament had to grant them. In this case the minimum consisted in *full* freedom of conscience and the free exercise of *their respective mode* of religious worship. In other words, the Constitution in 56 – (1) was recognizing the right of Catholics (and others) to act according to the dictates of their conscience and to worship God according to the principles of their faith. Recognition of the right to freedom of conscience and worship constituted the only possible constitutional basis of the Church's (and other religious bodies') claim to exist and operate in society freely and peacefully.

The 1921 Constitution, however, was not restraining the local Government from enacting such legislation as it deemed necessary in order to protect and promote the Catholic religion as well as to safeguard and help its institutions in the light of the special place which Catholicism held in Maltese society. As interpreted by the Colonial Government, the right to freedom of conscience and worship bound the State not to interfere in matters of conscience and religion but left it free to provide those conditions which it judged to be necessary to help the Maltese people to exercise their religion in a fuller way. So in recognizing freedom of conscience and worship, the State was declaring not its indifference to but its concern about the exercise of religion in Malta both on an individual and a collective level.

The sub-title which the 1921 Constitution gave to the section on religion is very significant, because it indicated the philosophical context in which the Constitution was seeing freedom of conscience and worship as well as religious non-discrimination. The context was clearly that of *religious toleration*. As it has been pointed out already, Catholic tradition accepted the principle of religious toleration but in a different sense. The argument was that the Church alone had, strictly speaking, the right to operate freely in society, for it alone professes the true religion. Others had no such right but they should be tolerated. Society should, therefore, ensure religious freedom for Catholics and religious toleration for others. The Constitution used the concept of religious toleration more in the Lockean sense, that is, to express the duty of the State and society in general, including churches, to respect everyone's right to follow one's own conscience and practise one's own religion.<sup>(23)</sup> The notion implied that freedom of conscience and worship was a human right. Nevertheless, the Maltese interpreted clause

23. Cf. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. and introd. by J.W. Gough, Oxford, 1948, pp. 121 – 165.

56—(1) and (2) more as an imposition by a foreign power to limit the jurisdiction of local Parliament than as an inalienable human right.

### **The Independence Constitution: Freedom of Conscience and Worship as a Fundamental Human Right**

The Independence Constitution recognized the Roman Catholic religion as the religion of Malta, guaranteed the Roman Catholic Church the autonomy necessary to exercise its ecclesiastical functions and manage its own affairs, affirmed the right to full freedom of conscience and worship and prohibited religious discrimination:

- 2—(1) The Religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion.
  - (2) The State guarantees to the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church the right freely to exercise her proper spiritual and ecclesiastical functions and duties and to manage her own affairs.
- 41—(1) All persons in Malta shall have full freedom of conscience and enjoy the free exercise of their respective mode of religious worship.
- (2) Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of subsection (1), to the extent that the law in question makes provision that is reasonably required in the interests of public safety, public order, public morality or decency, public health, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others, and except so far as that provision or, as the case may be, the thing done under the authority thereof, is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.
- 46—(1) ... no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect.
- (2) ... no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any written law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority.
  - (3) ... 'discriminatory' means affording different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour or creed whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another such description are not subject or accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description''.

The major difference between the Self-Government and the Independen-

dence Constitution lies, in my opinion, not so much in the recognition which the latter takes of the special status of the Roman Catholic religion in Malta as in the specific guarantee of freedom which it gives to the Roman Catholic Church. The desirability of giving this constitutional guarantee was discussed in connection with the Constitution of 1921 but it did not gain the necessary support especially among the lay political community. While there was national unanimity on the need to include in the Constitution that the Roman Catholic religion is the religion of Malta, it was practically only the clerical side which insisted that the freedom of the Church should be guaranteed explicitly. Differences of opinion on this matter, however, were of minor importance in practice, because, as it has been noted already, the general assumption was that Parliament should not restrain the legitimate freedom of the Church in any way.

The socio-political context in the sixties was different.<sup>(24)</sup> The debate on the Independence Constitution raised the question about the relationship between Church and State. The Constitution was creating not simply a State which was sovereign in relationship to other States but also a State which was autonomous in relationship to the other institutions in Maltese society, particularly the Church which had traditionally exercised considerable influence. The authority of the new Maltese State *vis-à-vis* the Church was the principal issue underlying the discussions on the religious question.

There were two main currents of thought, one emphasising the autonomy of the *Church* in relation to the State, the other emphasising the autonomy of the *State* in relation to the Church, one maintaining that the Constitution should restrain the power of the State, the other maintaining that the Constitution should leave the State free with respect to its relations with the Church. The Church itself played a very active role in the whole issue, having already pronounced itself concerning the threat which the Malta Labour Party, the party campaigning for the secularization of the State, posed for the free and effective exercise of its mission in Maltese society. The Church felt that its position was so precarious that it even declared it a mortal sin to vote for the Malta Labour Party and imposed a number of ecclesiastical sanctions on its members and supporters.<sup>(25)</sup> Under-

24. Cf. Adrianus Koster, *Prelates and Politicians in Malta: Changing Power-balances between Church and State in a Mediterranean Island Fortress (1800–1976)*, Assen, The Netherlands, 1984, pp. 151–196.

25. The Party leader and members of the Party executive were interdicted, while well-known supporters were refused Church burial and Easter house blessing. Cf. Koster, *op.cit.*, pp. 169–185. The objections of ecclesiastical authorities against the Malta Labour Party stemmed in general from the fact that the Party called itself a *socialist* party. The approach of the local Church to socialism was influenced mainly by the teaching of Pius XI on the matter (*Quadragesimo Anno*, nn. 111–126). In this encyclical the Pope noted the developments that had taken place within socialism but he reaffirmed the incompatibility of Catholic social teaching with socialism in so far as it implied, among other things, the laicization of society or the creation of a form of life from which God is absent and in which religion is doomed to a purely private existence. The Church in Malta seemed to have been very much afraid that it



standably enough, this made the party concerned very much conscious of the actual power of the Church and very strongly interested in restraining such power. In my opinion, the problem would not have been solved merely by a more qualified approach on the part of the Church, for the key problem was whether the party promoting the concept of a lay State was actually prepared to allow the Church the freedom to which it was entitled in a democratic country.

The side favouring the traditional position of the Church submitted two proposals to ensure the Church's freedom under the new Constitution. The pro-Church minority parties proposed the reaffirmation of the status-quo:

“The Roman Catholic Religion and the Roman Catholic Church in Malta shall continue to enjoy all those rights, privileges and prerogatives, in accordance with the laws of Malta and Code of Canon Law obtaining on the appointed day”.<sup>(26)</sup>

The party in government proposed to exempt the Church in the exercise of its spiritual powers or duties and the State in protecting the religion of Malta from the provisions of human rights:

“48 (10) Nothing done by the Roman Catholic Church in the exercise of its spiritual powers or duties shall be held to be in contravention of any of the provisions of this Chapter.

(11) Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law for the protection of the Religion in Malta shall be inconsistent with or in contravention of any of the provisions of this Chapter”.<sup>(27)</sup>

This proposal betrayed a certain prejudice against fundamental human rights, particularly freedom of conscience and worship and religious non-discrimination. Rather than looking at such rights as giving a foundation to the Church's own claim to freedom and equality, the Government of the day feared that human rights could somehow be interpreted and applied to restrain the Church's freedom of action.

Unfortunately, neither those in favour nor those against explicit constitutional recognition of the Church's right to freedom saw the relevance of approaching the whole issue from the point of view of the fundamental human right to religious freedom. Those in favour regarded

would lose its legitimate freedom under a socialist Government. Cf. the *Lenten Pastoral Letter* of 1960, Empire Press, Valletta, p. 10, where the bishops of Malta and Gozo referred to the socialists' attempts in other countries to monopolize the educational system and suppress private schools. Cf. also, the *Pastoral Letter* issued on 1/9/1964 in commemoration of the Independence celebrations in which Mgr Gonzi stated that the Church opposed only those constitutional changes which could harm and even destroy Catholic traditions, denying the Church its true freedom.

26. Koster, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

27. *Proposed Constitution for Independence*, 1964, section 48.

the right to full freedom of conscience and worship as an insufficient guarantee of or even as a possible hindrance to the Church's freedom. Those against appealed to the early liberal principle about the equality of all religions to justify their demand for narrowing down the Church's sphere of influence; while affirming the right to freedom of conscience and worship, they failed to see the practical implications of this right for the freedom of the Church in a truly democratic society.

The outcome of the whole (very hot) debate was, however, not altogether unsatisfactory. Full freedom of conscience and worship as well as religious non-discrimination were recognized as fundamental human rights and, therefore, as limits to civil power in religious matters. Besides, after declaring that the Roman Catholic religion is the religion of Malta, the Constitution proceeded to affirm the *autonomy* of the Church in the exercise of its specific mission. In my opinion, the autonomy of the Church was already implied in the fundamental human right to full freedom of conscience and worship. It was affirmed separately more for sociological and historical than for strictly logical reasons. In Malta as in Italy (to mention only one example), where the Roman Catholic religion has played a dominant rôle for centuries, the problem of religious freedom very often reduced itself chiefly to the problem of Church-State relations. The Concordat between the Republic of Italy and the Holy See, signed in 1984, after referring in the preliminary section to the modern concept of religious freedom, devoted the very first article to the affirmation of the independence and sovereignty of both Church and State in the respective spheres of their own competence.<sup>(28)</sup> The Independence Constitution did basically the same thing, the reason being, obviously, that of laying down the fundamental principle for the regulation of healthy relations between Church and State. Apparently, however, the party promoting the secularization of the State was not in favour of the way in which the Independence Constitution formulated this principle, as one can see from an examination of the amendment of article 2 (2) introduced, on its insistence, in the Republic Constitution.

### **The Republic Constitution: Freedom of Conscience and Worship as Basis for the Freedom of the Church?**

The Republic Constitution made several amendments to the clauses of the Independence Constitution on religion. For subsection 2 (2) it substituted the following:

“2 (2) The authorities of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church have

28. “La Repubblica italiana e la Santa Sede riaffermano che lo Stato e la Chiesa cattolica sono, ciascuno nel proprio ordine, indipendenti e sovrani, impegnandosi al pieno rispetto di tale principio nei loro rapporti ed alla reciproca collaborazione per la promozione dell'uomo e il bene del Paese”. Concordat between the Holy See and the Italian Republic, Roma, 1984, art.

the duty and the right to teach which principles are right and which are wrong”.

Right after this, it introduced a new (unentrenched) subsection:

“2 (3) Religious teaching of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Faith shall be provided in all state schools as part of compulsory education”.

Regarding 41 (1), it laid down the following two provisions:

“41 (2) No person shall be required to receive instruction in religion or to show knowledge or proficiency in religion if, in the case of a person who has not attended the age of sixteen years, objection to such requirement is made by the person who according to law has authority over him and, in any other case, if the person so required objects thereto:

41 (3) Provided that no such requirement shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the knowledge of, or the proficiency or instruction in, religion is required for the teaching of such religion, or for admission to the priesthood or to a religious order, or for other religious purposes, and except so far as that requirement is shown to be reasonably justified in a democratic society”.

The Republic Constitution includes also a new section on corrupt practices which, as I shall say presently, has to be read especially in the light of the Malta Labour Party’s dispute with the Church in the sixties.

Like the other Constitutions, the Republic Constitution has to be seen in the socio-political context of the time. Being in government, the Malta Labour Party was in a much more favourable position this time to implement its ideas on religion than it had been a decade before. Unfortunately, the whole religious question reduced itself again to the problem of Church-State relations. For the ruling party the main target was to water down the obligation which the Independence Constitution had imposed on the State to respect the autonomy of the Church.

The step which the Labour Government was taking could not but raise certain fears about its future intentions. Was it preparing the way to interfere in the legitimate freedom of the Church? It was somewhat difficult to answer this central question in the circumstances. The local Church upset many people by keeping silent on an issue in which it was directly involved and for which it had fought so strongly in the early sixties.<sup>(29)</sup> The Government found it politically convenient to remove the highly controversial matter from the arena of public debate by declaring that Church

29. Cf. Koster, *op.cit.*, pp. 231 – 235.

authorities in Rome had already given their approval to the proposed amendments.<sup>(30)</sup> It seemed however, that the Holy See had not actually agreed with the specific amendments which the Government had submitted but that it had simply raised no objections, in the light of the clarifications which were made, to the positive consideration of such amendments.<sup>(31)</sup> Lack of proper public information on what was going on behind the scenes indicated that the future of the Church under a Labour Government was somewhat uncertain.

The discrepancy between what the Malta Labour Party had agreed to concede to the Church in 1969 and what it was proposing now as a substitute for 2 (2) was another possible cause for concern. The agreement, which the Malta Labour Party and the local Church reached in 1969 and which brought to an end, at least for the time being, the dispute that they had during the previous decade, included acceptance of the duty and the right of Church authority (a) to safeguard its spiritual and temporal interests and (b) whenever need arises, to teach which principles are right and which are wrong.<sup>(32)</sup> Basically, this was only a reformulation of the existing constitutional provision declaring the State's obligation to respect the independence and sovereignty of the Church in its own proper sphere. Unfortunately, the Malta Labour Party proposed to include in the Republic Constitution only part of what in 1969 it had agreed that the Church had a right to. In fact, it left out that the Church had also the *right* to safeguard its spiritual and temporal interests. This omission revealed, even if indirectly, the Labour Government's inclination to assume increasing power over the Church. This would raise, however, the more basic constitutional problem, namely, the scope of religious freedom under the Maltese Constitution. Before taking up this issue, it is useful to examine the question of corrupt practices, as it also has a bearing on the present subject.

The question of corrupt practices constituted probably the chief bone of contention in the quarrel of the Church with the Malta Labour Party in the early sixties. In practice, what the Malta Labour Party was seeking was to prevent the Church from declaring it a (mortal) sin to vote for a particular party, whatever its ideology, claiming that such a measure

30. Cf. Press Release of the Department of Information, 21.8.74.

31. According to the *Avvenire*, the position of the Holy See on the matter was the following: "On the part of the Holy See (whilst reiterating, naturally, the autonomous responsibility of Maltese political elements in decisions relating to the modification of the State's constitutional laws), considering the furnished clarifications, no objections were raised to positively considering the submitted points in the interest of peaceful relations between the State and the Church in Malta" (22.8.74) as reproduced and translated by Koster, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

32. The agreement between the Church and the Malta Labour Party, signed on April 4, 1969, said: "In modern society it is necessary that distinction be made between the political community and the Church. The very nature of the Church demands she does not interfere in politics. The Church Authority has the duty and the right to safeguard her spiritual and temporal interests and whenever need arises to teach which principles are correct and which are wrong. The Church does not impose mortal sin as a censure".

amounts to undue interference in a purely political matter. The Church had actually made such a declaration in 1930 and 1962 to warn its members of the grave spiritual consequences they would suffer, if they voted for a party which embraced an ideology that was in conflict with Catholic social teaching. Yet, the Church had agreed in 1969 not to impose mortal sin as censure. This was, of course, a piece of theological nonsense, for mortal sin is never imposed but incurred. Without entering into the prudence or otherwise of the Church's approach to the politico-religious issue in the thirties and sixties, one may say that the Church can, at most, only give certain guidance to help the individual Christian to realize the gravity of the matters on which he has to decide one way or another. But sin is never inflicted by an outside authority, not even by the Church; it is a self-inflicted wound or a sickness in which one falls through one's subjectively wrong decisions.

Apparently to give a constitutionally binding force to the 1969 declaration that mortal sin would not be imposed as a censure, the Malta Labour Party insisted that the new Constitution should be free from corrupt practices and, shortly afterwards, amended the Electoral (Polling) Ordinance by substituting the phrase "any temporal or spiritual injury" for the phrase "any material or moral injury".<sup>(33)</sup> Seen in the context of the earlier dispute of the Church with the Malta Labour Party, this change had an obvious purpose, namely that of extending the definition of undue *influence* (a form of corrupt practice) to restrain the Church from making the kind of declarations it had made in connection with the 1930 and 1962 elections.

The present legal situation may give rise to certain unnecessary problems over the behaviour of the Church in future general elections. Assuming that the Church will exercise much prudence when declaring what is and, especially, what is not to be expected of a Government in a contemporary democratic society, one may still envisage situations in which the Church will be morally bound to say that the ideology of some party or parties, contesting an election, is seriously harmful to the fundamental human rights or the salvation of the soul and that Catholics have a grave obligation to take this fact into account in forming their own conscience and making their particular decision to vote or not vote for this or that party. Will a declaration in this sense amount to undue influence and, therefore, a corrupt practice? Both Vatican II and Canon Law affirm that the Church has the right and the duty to express itself in matters involving violation of the dignity and fundamental rights of man or the salvation of the soul.<sup>(34)</sup> The modality of exercising such right and duty in practice is

33. Act No. LVI, 1974.

34. "She (i.e. the Church) also has the right to pass moral judgments touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of souls make such judgments necessary". Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World* edit. by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. and Mgr. Joseph Gallagher, London, 1965, n. 76. Cf. also *Canon Law*, 747 (2).

another question which cannot be discussed in the present context. In principle, however, one can say that the Church should remain free to give whatever spiritual and moral guidance it judges to be fitting in the particular circumstances.

As we have seen, the 1974 constitutional amendments were principally directed to deprive the Church of the special guarantee which it had been enjoying since Malta became independent. But the major question remains: has the Church actually lost the constitutional right to the free exercise of its ecclesiastical rights and duties and the free management of its affairs? The answer to this question depends on (a) whether the right to freedom of conscience and worship applies to religious bodies and, if in the affirmative, (b) whether such freedom is wide enough to give religious bodies an opportunity to fulfil their proper mission, as they understand it. By way of conclusion, I should like to offer some observations on the scope of freedom of conscience and worship and religious discrimination.

### **A Note on Freedom of Conscience and Worship and on Religious Discrimination**

In 41 (1) the Constitution is not speaking of one right but of two rights, for freedom of conscience, though related to, is not identical with freedom of worship. It is important to deal with these two rights separately, especially when discussing whether they apply to individuals only or to organizations as well. The general rule is that human rights apply to physical as well as juridical persons, unless the nature of the right in question requires otherwise, as it is the case with the right to life which is evidently only applicable to physical persons.<sup>35</sup> So if one is seeking to know whether freedom of conscience and worship extends to organizations, like churches, one should first examine the meaning of *conscience* and *worship*.

Conscience is a moral phenomenon. It constitutes the immediate norm on which the individual person is entitled and bound to act in all spheres of his life. What X feels to be his duty may not be exactly what Y feels to be his duty in an identical situation. This does not mean that there is no objective and so no universal norms to guide human behaviour. Such norms exist but how the individual interprets them may vary from case to case. The right to freedom of conscience gives the individual the right to interpret and apply the objective norm on the basis of one's own understanding and appreciation of the various factors entering into the context of the whole action.

"Having a conscience" is not identical with "having a religion", because even an atheist has a conscience which he has the right to follow and others have the duty to respect. Conscience may lead the individual to embrace a specific religious belief and join a religious organization. On the

35. Cf. Felix Ermacora, *Handbuch der Grundfreiheiten und der Menschenrechte: Ein Kommentar zu den österreichischen Grundrechtsbestimmungen*, Wien, 1963, p. 447.

contrary, it may lead him to change his religion and leave his Church. Properly understood, the right to freedom of conscience entitles one "to keep one's distance", if one so decides, from the beliefs and practices of others. This is the fundamental reason why the individual should be free from any form of coercion, whether by the State, the Church or anyone else, in the exercise of his freedom of conscience. Vatican II described conscience as the sanctuary where the person is alone with God.<sup>(36)</sup>

By definition, therefore, the right to freedom of conscience refers directly and immediately to the individual. But what about the individual who is a member of a particular church? For example, the Catholic remains free even to leave the Church, if he wants to do so. He is, however, equally free to remain a Catholic and accept the moral and spiritual guidance of the Church. In this case, is his conscience not violated, if the Church is denied, for example, the right to communicate with its members? Is it reasonable to say that someone who is, for example, a bishop can actually enjoy full freedom of conscience, if he is impeded from governing his community in accordance with the teaching and norms of the Church, that is, if the Church is not allowed to exercise its mission in peace and freedom? In my opinion, freedom of conscience postulates the freedom of religious bodies.<sup>(37)</sup>

In the case of *worship*, there is clearly not only a personal but also a social dimension. The theology of Catholic worship – to mention one example of a specific form of religious worship – insists upon the sincerity of heart (the personal aspect), as a necessary condition for authentic worship. But it insists also on the need for people to worship God together (the social aspect), as a sign that they are one family, having a common Father and a common destiny. The word *liturgy* itself, of which the Eucharist is the apex, means the worship of the Church as the *people* of God.

Golsong, director of Juridical Affairs at the Council of Europe, attaches a lot of importance to the qualifying phrase "in community with others", used in the European Convention's formulation of the right to freedom of religion,<sup>(38)</sup> to prove that religious freedom extends both to physical and juridical persons. Ermacora, member of the European Commission of Human Rights, states that it is natural for people to worship God or to exercise their religion together as a community.<sup>(39)</sup> Our Constitution

36. Cf. Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, n. 16.

37. Hence, although it is true to say (as, for example, Ermacora does, *op.cit.*, pp. 363 – 365) that freedom of conscience belongs essentially to the physical person, it seems to me that for the concrete individual (for example, a member of or an authority in a particular church) the full exercise of freedom of conscience is meaningless in the absence of the freedom of the Church.

38. H. Golsong, "La Convention européenne des Droits de l'Homme et les Personnes morales", in Premier Colloque du Département des Droits de l'Homme, *Les droits de l'homme et les personnes morales*, Burxelles, 1970, 15 – 33, p. 28.

39. Ermacora, *op.cit.*, pp. 447 – 448.

asserts simply that “all persons in Malta . . . enjoy the free exercise of *their respective mode* of religious worship”. This is actually a short formula for saying that people professing a religion, like Christianity, where the formation of the faithful into one community is essential, have a constitutional right to exist and act as a religious organization.

Granted that the right to freedom of worship has both a personal and a community dimension, there is still the problem concerning the scope of this right. This is not an easy problem to solve, since the more recent formulations of this right seem to prefer to speak of “freedom of religion” than of “freedom of worship”.<sup>(40)</sup> Besides, the manifestation of worship is often presented as one of the components (along with “teaching, practice and observance”) of freedom of religion. Naturally, the Constitution would make things easier, if it explicates, as far as possible, the meaning of the key terms it is using, particularly in the case of very important sections like that of human rights. As we have seen, the clause on freedom of conscience and worship was never reformulated since 1921; it passed unchanged from one Constitution to the other in the form given by the Colonial Government. In my opinion, however, the way it was and is still phrased gives every religious body the right to state itself in what manner it believes God should be worshiped. In fact, the Constitution says that “all persons in in Malta shall . . . enjoy the free exercise of *their respective mode* of religious worship”. What is the mode of religious worship specific to a religious body is something which only the religious body concerned is competent to say.

The law has no right to set a limit to the exercise of any mode in which a church may believe that it should worship God, as long as such exercise does not harm the interests of public safety, public order, public morality or decency, public health, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This means that a Christian church, for example, should be fully entitled to work for the promotion of human rights through its educational and charitable institutions, given that such work is one of the essential Christian ways of worshiping God in practice and, if it is missing, liturgical worship itself loses its authenticity.

The Maltese Constitution corroborates further the right to freedom of conscience and worship by prohibiting religious discrimination. The definition which the Constitution gives of discrimination, however, can easily give rise to an erroneous interpretation of religious discrimination.<sup>(41)</sup> In the light of this definition, discrimination on the basis of creed should mean that A is not being given the same treatment as B, because A belongs to

40. Cf. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 18 and *The European Convention of Human Rights*, art. 9. On the history of the formulation of art. 18 of the *Universal Declaration* see Ph. De La Chapelle, *La Déclaration Universelle des droits de l'homme e la catholicism*, Paris, 1969, pp. 146 – 152.

41. Section 46 (3).



creed X and B belongs to creed Y. In other words, A and B share a common point of reference or a common way of description, that is, description by creed. The discrimination verifies itself, whenever persons are treated differently, simply and solely because their creed is different. But what does *description by creed* mean?

When the Constitution speaks of *description by creed*, it means more than the description of people according to the religion to which they belong. If a person is asked to say what is his creed, he can answer that he is a Catholic, Protestant, Hindu or an adherent of some other religion or that he has no religion at all. But *having no religion* indicates also description of a person *by creed* for one's own creed, that is, outlook on life and basic norm of conduct may not necessarily be religious but it may also be purely secular and even atheistic.

If the interpretation of religious discrimination which has been submitted is a valid one, the law will discriminate against religious bodies, even when it subjects *all* such bodies to certain disabilities. In fact, the test of religious non-discrimination should not be simply that no discrimination is made between one religious body and another but also that no discrimination is made between religious bodies and bodies which are established, for example, to promote and propagate atheism.

## Conclusion

In my opinion, what the three major Constitutions that have been examined have said on religion is not merely the result of the pressure exerted or the power exercised by certain individuals, institutions and foreign or local Governments. It is also in a certain way the product of a historical process which has had its own logic.

In the context of the Maltese people's attempt in the 1920's to assert their own national identity it is reasonable to find a local community insisting on the need for a form of a religious self-identification by means of a suitable constitutional declaration. The freedom of the Church was taken for granted, while freedom of conscience and worship was seen more or less as a foreign intrusion to be accepted only with certain reservations.

Independence gave Malta for the first time the opportunity to create a sovereign and independent State. Among other things, that involved for some the affirmation of the legitimate independence of the Church from the State and for others the assertion of the sovereignty of the State over the Church. Hence, the key issue was the autonomy of the Church from the State, while the constitutional identification of the religion of Malta raised no problem and recognition of freedom of conscience and worship was made, apparently without realizing its full implications.

The experience of society and the Church in independent Malta seems to have led slowly to the development of a new consciousness. This is the consciousness that the real problem now is not how much power is the State

to have over society and the Church but how much freedom are society and the Church to have in a truly democratic country. The politico-religious issue today coincides with the socio-political issue, as the problem for the Church and society is basically the same, namely, the meaning which fundamental human rights actually have in Malta.

# THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE NATIVITY STORIES IN LUKE

James M. Dawsey

The purpose of this essay is to explore the form of Lk. 1:5 – 2:52 and its function in the Gospel. Although some good work has been done showing how the content of the first two chapters fits within the author's theological plan,<sup>(1)</sup> not much attention has been devoted to the relationship of the form of Lk. 1 – 2 to the author's purpose.<sup>(2)</sup>

As a point of departure, I will suggest that the author intended his gospel to be recited in worship, not piece meal, a few verses at a sitting, but as a whole, from beginning to end. Whereas many have suggested that Lk. 1 – 2 represents a translation of a Hebrew original, or on the other hand, the product of the creative spirit of the author, I will try to show that these chapters are best understood in connection with the worship of the Christian community – that the language and the form of the material is liturgical, and was intended to serve a special function in the recitation of the gospel.

As is well known, the language of Lk. 1:5 – 2:52 presents a puzzle to the New Testament reader. It is strongly Hebraic in flavour and notably different from the rest of the Gospel. The section represents a shift in style from the Lucan prologue (Lk. 1:1 – 4) which shows a construction and vocabulary fitting better with Attic Greek than with the remainder of the New Testament.<sup>(3)</sup> At the other end, the section is framed by the speech of

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1. Notable examples are H.H. Oliver's "The Lucan Birth Stories and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 10 (1967): 202 – 26; and W.B. Tatum's "The Epoch of Israel: Luke i – ii and the Theological Plan of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 13 (1967): 184 – 95.

2. The exception is John Drury's, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), pp. 46 – 66.

3. For a complete study of the Attic qualities of Lk. 1:1 – 4, see Friedrich Blass, "The Poem of St. Luke," *Philology of the Gospel* (Chicago: Argonatu, Inc., 1969, originally published in 1898), pp. 7 – 20. Also helpful are H.J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 2, ed. F.J. Foakes – Jackson and K. Lake (London: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 7 – 29; and W.L. Knox, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity* (London: Oxford University, 1944), Lecture I.

John the Baptist, which in several places betrays an Aramaic idiom. Thus, for example, the Semitic use of a relative pronoun at the beginning of a clause resumed by a reflexive at the end (οὗτο πτόυν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ, Lk. 3:17)<sup>(4)</sup> and the Semitic construction ἄροξηθε c. infinitive to indicate the future (Lk 3:8)<sup>(5)</sup> are probably Aramaisms and not Hebraisms.<sup>(6)</sup>

The nativity stories themselves, however, betray no trace at all of this Aramaic idiom,<sup>(7)</sup> and, as already mentioned, are full of Hebraisms. The contrast is so striking, in fact, that a number of Lucan scholars have contended that this section of Luke represents a translation from a Hebrew original.<sup>(8)</sup>

Especially interesting in this regard is Harald Sahlin's claim that part of Proto-Luke, Lk. 1:5–3:7a, was in Hebrew and shifted into Aramaic at Lk. 3:7b, precisely with the speech of John the Baptist.<sup>(9)</sup> The force of this argument lies in the quantity of non-Aramaic Hebraisms, few of which are exact replications of the Septuagint, present at the beginning of the third Gospel. Thus, Sahlin thought that behind such phrases as ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως (Lk. 1:5), προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν (Lk. 1:7), and ἔλαχε τοῦ θυμιαῖσαι (Lk. 1:9) could be found the Hebrew of late Judaism.<sup>(10)</sup> Since the idioms that Sahlin reconstructed were sometimes foreign to the Septuagint, he reasoned that they could not represent imitation Biblicisms.

The evidence that he reproduced is extensive and includes discernible Hebraisms in almost all verses of Lk. 1–2: εἰς τὸν ναόν (Lk. 1:9), πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος ἦν τοῦ λαοῦ προσευχόμενον ἔξω (Lk. 1:10), ἔσται with χαρά as subject, πολλοὶ, and γενέσει (Lk. 1:14), ἔσται γὰρ μέγας ἐνώπιον κυτίου, οἶνον και σίκερα and πνεύματος ἁγίου πλησθήσεται ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ (Lk. 1:15), καὶ αὐτὸς προελεύσεται ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἁλίου,

4. Cf. J.M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (New York: St. Martin's, 1957, originally published in 1930), p. lxxx; A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: George H. Doran, 1919), p. 120.

5. Cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by Robert W. Funk, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), p. 200; H.J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1920), pp. 162f.; J.H. Moulton, W.F. Howard, and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957, 3rd reprint ed., originally published in 1908), p. 15.

6. J.M. Creed, *The Gospel*, p. lxxx.

7. H.G.D. Sparks, "The Semitisms of St. Luke's Gospel," *JTS* 44 (1943):135.

8. Among others René Laurentin, *Structure et theologie de Luc I, II* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957); C.C. Torrey, *Out Translated Gospels* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930); Paul Winter, "The Main Literary Problems of the Lucan Infancy Story," *ATR* 40 (1958):257–264.

9. Harald Sahlin, *Der messias un das Gottesvolk* (Uppsala: Almqvist, 1945), pp. 70ff., 50, 320.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 72.

ἐπιστρέψαι καρδίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα, ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπειθεῖς ἐν φρονήσει δικαίων and ἐτοιμάσται κυρίῳ λαὸν κατεσκευασμένον (Lk. 1:17), και εἶπεν (Lk. 1:18), εὐαγγελισάσθαι σοι ταῦτα (Lk. 1:19), ἔση σιωπῶν καὶ μὴ δυνάμενος λαλῆσαι, and οὔτινες πληρωθήτονται εἰς τὸν καιρὸν αὐτῶν (Lk. 1:20), ἔθαθαζον (Lk. 1:21), καὶ αὐτός ἦν διανεύων αὐτοῖς (Lk. 1:22), περιέκρυβεν ἑαυτην μῆνας πέντε καὶ λέγουσα (Lk. 1:24), οὕτως, κύριος ἐπεῖδεν and ὄνειδος (Lk. 1:25), etc.<sup>(11)</sup> Sahlin's point is especially well illustrated by this last example, as he followed Lagrange in seeing ὄνειδος (without the article) as a conspicuous Semitism avoided even by the Septuagint.<sup>(12)</sup>

### *The Form of the Nativity Stories*

In spite of his ability to parallel Greek forms in Lk. 1–2 with the Hebrew language, Sahlin seems to have overstated his case in at least two ways. On the one hand, the so-called Hebraisms of Luke are not confined to the first two chapters of the Gospel. There are certain formulas used frequently in the Septuagint to represent the Hebrew, which also occur often in the narration of Lk. 3:7b–24:53. Thus, (καὶ) ἐγένετο with a following verb, ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, και ἰδοῦ, and ἐν τῷ c. infinitive following καὶ ἐγένετο might all be said to be Hebraisms.<sup>(13)</sup> On the other hand, as has often been pointed out since the time of Harnack, the theory of a Semitic original behind Lk. 1–2 does not adequately explain the multitude of specifically Lucan vocabulary and grammatical constructions that are found in this section of the Gospel.<sup>(14)</sup> In fact, these types of idioms are so

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–97.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 97. Paul Winter also offered a list of Hebraic constructions in Lk. 1–2 that cannot be traced to the Septuagint ("On Luke and Lukan Sources," *ZNW* 47 (1956):217–242. Cf. "Two Notes of Lc. 1–2 With Regards to the Theory of 'Imitation Hebraisms'." *Studia Theologica* 7 (1953):158–165.

13. (καὶ) ἐγένετο with a following verb, which is used frequently in the Septuagint appears about forty times in the narration of the Gospel; ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, also frequent in the Septuagint appears about thirty-six times; καὶ ἰδοῦ, likewise frequent, appears about fifteen times; and ἐν τῷ c. infinitive following καὶ ἐγένετο, which corresponds to the Septuagint's rendering of אַ with the infinitive appears about twenty-four times.

14. As early as 1906, A. Harnack advanced the theory that the Semitisms of Lk. 1–2 were best explained by the author's desire to imitate the language of the Septuagint (cf. *Luke the Physician: The Author of the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J.R. Wilkinson (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), pp. 96–105). See also A. Harnack, "Der Magnificat der Elisabeth (Luk. i. 46–55) nebst einigen Bemerkungen zu Luk. i und ii," in *Studien zur Geschichte des neuen Testaments, und der älteren kirche, I: Zu neutestamentlichen Textkritik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1931), pp. 62–85; H.J. Cadbury, "Luke – Translator or Author?" *American Journal of Theology* 24 (1920):436–455; *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1927; reprint ed., London: SPCK, 1968), pp. 142f., H.F.D. Sparks, "The Semitisms of St. Luke's Gospel," pp. 129ff.; N. Turner, "The Relations of Luke I and II to Hebraic Sources and to the Rest of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 2 (1956):100–109; P. Benoit, "L'enfance de Jean Baptiste selon Luc 1," *NTS* 3 (1957):167ff.

pronounced, that in a recent dissertation on the unity of Lk. 1–2 and Lk. 3–Acts 28, D.S. Tam claimed that “the concentration of Lucanisms in Lk. 1–2 is the highest in the gospel, and at least as high as that in Acts.”<sup>(15)</sup>

As Tam correctly pointed out, the real linguistic difficulty of Lk. 1–2 is that this section of the Gospel is both strongly Semitic and Lucan. And actually, when the so-called Hebraisms and Lucanisms in Lk. 1–2 are regarded with care, one must admit the somewhat overlapping nature of the two groups. Thus, to look again at the first three examples above, where Sahlin described the phrases ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως (Lk. 1:5), προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν (Lk. 1:7), and ἔλαχε τοῦ θυμιάσαι (Lk. 1:9) as Hebraisms, Tam described ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου (Lk. 1:5), ἀμφοτέροι προβεβηκότες (Lk. 1:7), and τοῦ θυμιάσαι (Lk. 1:9) as Lucanisms.<sup>(16)</sup>

Tam theorized that Luke retained and in fact emphasized the Semitic quality of the sources behind Lk. 1–2 – the Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria, and perhaps the Nunc Dimittis – which originated from the circles of Jewish Christians.<sup>(17)</sup> Unfortunately, Tam did not clearly specify a motive for this tendency on the part of the author to emphasize the Semitic character of his sources, but one can imagine that he might have been sympathetic to both John Drury’s suggestion that Luke intended by his Old Testament language to woo the reader into the new story of salvation,<sup>(18)</sup> and to the implication carried by H.H. Oliver’s work, that Luke intended by his Semitic language to indicate something of the theological plan of Luke-Acts.<sup>(19)</sup>

But, the real difficulty with these types of solutions is that they seem to assume a modern definition of the reading public. For example, it does not seem likely that the author had in mind to hook readers “coming to the book freshly” into the story.<sup>(20)</sup> In this regard, one only need think of the last phrase of the prologue,<sup>(21)</sup> or of the narrator’s penchant for calling Jesus “Lord” to realize how he presupposes a Christian audience already familiar with the story. And certainly one should not think of the author primarily as a theologian.<sup>(22)</sup>

15. David S. Tam, “The Literary and Theological Unity Between Lk. 1–2 and Lk. 3-Acts 28” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1978), p. 327.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 327, 169.

18. J. Drury, *Tradition and Design*.

19. H.H. Oliver, “The Lucan Birth Stories.”

20. J. Drury, *Tradition and Design*, p. 46.

21. To my mind κατηχήθης (Lk. 1:4) prohibits Drury’s interpretation.

22. Oliver attempted to show that Lk. 1–2 fit within the overall purpose of Luke-Acts gleaned from H. Conzelmann’s *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper and Row, 1961). He did not claim, however, as strong a theological motive for Luke as did Conzelmann, who thought of Luke’s scheme of salvation history as an answer to the problem of the delay of the parousia.

A much more appropriate solution to the special language of Lk. 1–2 has been offered by Paul Minear, who almost in passing drew attention to the liturgical nature of these chapters.<sup>(23)</sup> Thus, he indicated the prevalence of such words as δοξάζω, εὐλογέω, and ἀγαλλιάσις; of such themes as worship, the temple, fasting, prayer, joy and peace; the reliance in this section upon epiphany and angels; and the use of hymns as “programmatically entrances.” He also pointed out that prophecy in this section of Luke is a communal response in the Spirit to the fulfillment of God’s promise, and in this way shows a close kinship to the Pentecost event.

This insight into the tone of Lk. 1–2 seems to fit nicely with Fred Horton’s position that the Lucan Septuagintisms do not indicate a Hebrew source or a conscious attempt at imitation-Biblicisms but rather a specialized language of worship.<sup>(24)</sup> The Semitisms of Lk. 1–2 would have been then, a type of “Synagogue Greek” paralleling the “mixed style of Hebrew” discovered by C. Rabin for the religious vernacular at Qumran.<sup>(25)</sup> Thus, the language of Lk. 1–2 might well have originated and had its life in Greek worship. There is no consensus yet that Horton’s view is correct, but at least the theory gives an explanation that accounts for both the Lucanisms and the non-Septuagintal Hebraisms of the Gospel.

A liturgical setting also makes sense out of the poetic form of much of the material in Lk. 1–2. It is common to refer to the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Gloria in Excelsis, and the Nunc Dimittis as early specimens of Christian hymnody<sup>(26)</sup> – and their liturgical use can in fact be traced back as far as the 6th century and probably goes back to the earliest

23. Paul S. Minear, “Luke’s Use of the Birth Stories,” *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. Keck and J. Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980, reprinted from Abingdon, 1966), pp. 101–130.

24. F.L. Horton, “Reflection in the Semitisms of Luke-Acts,” *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1978), pp. 1–23. H.L.K. MacNeill’s view of corporate authorship for Lk. 1–2 is supportive of a liturgical setting (“The Sitz im Leben of Luke 1:5–2:20,” *JBL* 65 (1946):126) and perhaps the connection that S. Aalen discovered between Luke and I Enoch can also be traced to a common language of worship (“St. Luke’s Gospel and the Last Chapter of I Enoch,” *NTS* 13 (1967):1–13). The difficulty presented by the language of Lk. 1–2 has oftentimes been made more difficult by critics who limited the possible explanations to two. Thus, for example, Paul Winter wrote: “There seem to be two possibilities only to account for the frequent occurrence of Hebraistic phraseology in the Lucan Nativity and Infancy narrative: the first is, that the compiler, while freely composing the story in his own language, chose to offend against grammar and linguistic feeling simply because he wished to show that he could write as bad Greek as that of the Septuagintal authors; the other explanation is that a document written in Hebrew formed the basis of this part of the Third Gospel and that the compiler – out of respect for his source and in an endeavour to deviate as little as possible from it – retained the flavour of the original even at the price of suppressing his qualms as an author” (“Birth and Infancy Stories of the Third Gospel,” pp., 112f.; Cf. “The Main Literary Problem of the Lucan Infancy Story,” pp. 257–264).

25. C. Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century,” *The Jewish People in the First Century*, vol. 2, pp. 1007–1039.

26. F.W. Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), pp. 33–35.

church.<sup>(27)</sup> Drury actually indicated that there are thirteen psalms in the opening chapters of Luke,<sup>(28)</sup> and R.A. Aytoun discovered ten hymns of the nativity.<sup>(29)</sup> Aytoun's work, however, is especially interesting because he tried to show that these hymns, when translated into Hebrew "with as much literalness" as possible, betrayed a regular Hebrew metre. Aytoun's purpose was to prove that there was an original Hebrew document behind Lk. 1–2, but his findings with the Gloria in Excelsis actually suggest an original Greek rather than Hebrew hymn. According to Aytoun's own testimony, his Hebrew reconstruction of Lk. 2:14 proved of exceedingly clumsy metre. From this, he concluded that εὐδοκίας had been added interpretively to ἀνθρώποις.<sup>(30)</sup> The truth, however, is that in the Greek, it is the couplet without the εὐδοκίας which is rhythmically clumsy. Thus, Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρημὴ ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας is formed with two repeating feet, followed by a chiasmic construction of short and long elements.

The rhythmic patterns of Lk. 2:14 in Greek indicate a liturgical setting for the Gloria exactly as it stands in Luke.<sup>(31)</sup>

Again, the hymns in Lk. 1–2 are of poetic form, which seems to indicate a proper setting in public worship. There are many poetic features in the speech of the characters in Lk. 1–2. Robert Tannehill, in a recent analysis of the form of the Magnificat enumerates several.<sup>(32)</sup> Some which he mentions are the synonymous parallelism including the extensive use of "coupling" in the rest of the hymn; the rhythm developed by the repetition of action verbs in the first position clauses; and the repetitive strophic pattern which binds the hymn into a unity. These kinds of characteristics recur in all of the hymns in Lk. 1–2.

Finally, a liturgical setting for Lk. 1–2 also makes sense of the familiarity that it must be assumed that Luke's early audience had with Jewish conventions and customs. In this, Paul Winter was right. It is not feasible that an outsider could have been expected to understand the meaning of such story elements as "the priest of the course of Abijah," "the drawing of lots for liturgical assignments," "the burning incense," "the angel of the Presence," "the fête after John's birth," "the shepherds keeping watch," and "the calendar division of day night."<sup>(33)</sup> It is not

27. H. T. Kuist, "Sources of Power in the Nativity Hymns: An Exposition of Luke 1 and 2," *Interpretation* 2 (1948):288–298.

28. J. Drury, *Tradition and Design*, pp. 187f.

29. R. A. Aytoun, "The Ten Lucan Hymns of the Nativity in Their Original Language," *JTS* 18 (1917):274–288.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

31. This is not to say, however, that there was no Hebrew original behind the hymn (cf. Ernest Vogt S. J., "'Peace Among Men of God's Good Pleasure' Lk. 2:14," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 114–117).

32. R. C. Tannehill, "The Magnificat as Poem," *JBL* 93 (1974):263–275.

33. Paul Winter, "The Cultural Background of the narrative in Luke I and II," *JQR* 45 (1954):160–67, 230–42.



necessary, however, to jump from this conclusion to a setting in Southern Palestine. The inside view could just as well come through the cultic repetition of the story.<sup>(34)</sup>

### *The Function of the Form of Lk. 1–2*

The form of the birth narratives seems to link Lk. 1–2 to public worship. A liturgical tone explains both the so-called Hebraisms and Lucanisms of these chapters. But the key question concerns the author's purpose in the special language of Lk. 1–2. As demonstrated in the prologue, and in many other places in the Gospel,<sup>(35)</sup> the author of Luke was a writer who could control his style. Even if he appropriated the form of Lk. 1–2 from his sources, he did so consciously. But why then, did he choose to begin his Gospel with hymnic material? It seems to me that the author must have wanted to set the proper mood for the story of salvation.<sup>(36)</sup> However, we must not be led astray by a modern concept of "private readers." Rather, we should think in terms of a community of Christians who heard the Gospel read in worship. Instead of a literary device, it seems to me that the form of Lk. 1–2 served as a liturgical device.<sup>(37)</sup> The form of the chapters indicates that they functioned liturgically to establish the atmosphere of joyous praise to God for his saving activity which is told by the Gospel story.

This matter of the function of Lk. 1–2 intended by the author is not one that can be settled conclusively. Let me, though, offer a modern parallel to what I think accounts for the language and the form of these chapters. In modern religions songs often serve to allow the congregation to make the transition from secular to sacred time at an emotional level, thereby facilitating participation in the sacred event. Elizabeth Fernea gave us a good example of this use of hymnic material in her first-hand account of the recitation of the story of the killing and betrayal of the martyr Hussein during the Muslim fast of Ramadan:

Finally, when it seemed that not a single person more could be jammed into the court, the mullah stood up and clapped her hands to

34. So E.D. Burton, "The Purpose and Plan of the Gospel of Luke," *Biblical World* 16 (1900):258. Douglas Jones has argued convincingly that the Psalms in Lk. 1–2 are Christian and not Jewish Psalms ("Background and Character of the Lukan Psalms," *JTS* 19 (1968):19–50.

35. Cf. H.J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*.

36. So also J. Drury, *Tradition and Design*, pp. 46–66. C.T. Ruddick's attempt to show a connection between Lk. 1–2 and Genesis is also helpful ("Birth Narratives in Genesis and Luke," *NT* 12 (1970):343–48.

37. This is especially clear to the student of the relationships of poetry to the Jewish cult. Two points should be remembered. The universal custom at that time was to deliver poetry in musical tone and not in a speaking voice; and there was no separation of music or poetry from liturgy (cf. Edward Dichinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 20–30.

38. Elizabeth Fernea, *Guests of the Sheikh* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 115f.

quiet the crowd. The two young women who sat near me took their places on each side of her (they were novices, I later found out, in training to be mullahs themselves) and the kraya began.

The mullah sat down and the two young girls stood to lead the congregation in a long, involved song with many responses. Gradually the women began to beat in time to the pulse of the song, and occasionally joining in the choruses, or supplying spontaneous responses such as 'A-hoo-ha!' or a long-drawn-out 'Ooooooh!' This phase lasted perhaps ten minutes, the girls sank down into their places, and the mullah rose to deliver a short sermon. She began retelling the story of the killing and betrayal of the martyr Hussein, which is told every night during Ramadan and is the beginning of the important part of the kraya. At first two or three sobs could be heard, then perhaps twenty women had covered their heads with their abayahs and were weeping; in a few minutes the whole crowd was crying and sobbing loudly. When the mullah reached the most tragic parts of the story, she would stop and lead the congregation in a group chant, which started low and increased in volume until it reached the pitch of a full-fledged wail. Then she would stop dead again, and the result would be, by this time, a sincere sobbing and weeping as the women broke down after the tension of the wail.<sup>(38)</sup>

Even though an early Christian setting would have been different from Ramadan in many ways (and certainly the mood which is one of great sorrow in the Shi-ah representation is very different from the joy demanded by the christian story), one can imagine that the function of the hymnic material in drawing the congregation into the story might have been the same, then as now.

The peculiar combination of literary and liturgical elements in Luke does not disturb me. If the story of Jesus was an integral part of early worship, kept alive and repeated orally on special cultic occasions by the "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word," and not simply a literary form created by Mark, then Luke, in writing his Gospel, might well have filled out the narrative and made it more literary, while at the same time attempting to capture and pass down some of the formal characteristics of the recitation.

# SIN AND HOLINESS

Victor E. Shields, MSSP

Sin seems to be quite a serious topic, particularly for Christians. But no one who reflects on sin is indifferent to it.<sup>(1)</sup> Even advertisements indicate this. Perhaps you might have seen an ad which goes something like: 'Drink Maxwell Coffee – It Tastes So Good It's Sinful'. Today when belief is undergoing an enormous amount of critical inspection, the notion of sin, like most doctrines of faith, has come under severe re-examination. Hence a thorough re-thinking of the concept of sin has become one of the most urgent concerns of moral theology and such related human sciences as psychology and sociology. But sin is a negation, and a negation has meaning only in relation to the positive it negates. Thus any discussion of sin would be lacking and perhaps even depressing unless it is considered in the context of grace which redeems and saves. In other words, it makes little sense to speak of sin without remembering man's call to holiness. The concern to discern the ferments of good and evil within modern man has long caused many people to direct at him and his environment a questioning gaze.<sup>(2)</sup> It is the gaze of historians and sociologists, theologians and psychologists but above all of pastors. However, as a psychologist vitally interested in spirituality, I would like, in this article, to consider the theme of sin and holiness from a psycho-theological perspective. Discernment of the particular sins requires a full study of the corresponding virtues themselves. Therefore while looking at the question of sin in general, we shall also explore as Christians, what we are called by God to be and to become.

## The Sense of Sin Today

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on reconciliation and penance *Reconciliatio Et Paenitentia* makes us aware<sup>(3)</sup> that a glance at certain aspects of contemporary culture can help us to understand the progressive weakening of the *sense of sin*, precisely because of the crisis of conscience and crisis of the *sense of God*. This sense of sin is

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1. X. Thevenot, *Sin: A Christian View For Today*, Missouri, Liguori Press, 1984, p. 7
2. See Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, John Paul II, n. 1
3. *ibid.* n. 18

rooted in man's moral conscience and, as the *Exhortation* asserts, is linked to the sense of God, since it derives from man's conscious relationship with God as his Creator, Lord and Father. Hence, just as it is impossible to eradicate completely the sense of God or to silence the conscience completely, so the sense of sin is never completely eliminated. In our society today however, it seems that the idea of sin has changed because man's understanding of himself and the world has changed.

In former times man's destiny was largely in the hands of others. Not that oftentimes this is not yet true today, but certainly far less so, because the world has not only in a sense become somewhat smaller, but also because man appears to be in a better position to discover self and to relate to others. Today we have almost unlimited access to great varieties of past experience, and to many diversities of cultures. In today's environment the whole population of the world has become astronomical, since the earth is surrounded with satellites and other information means. The earth itself is now the content of this new man-made environment of information.<sup>(4)</sup> It is no surprise that this total environmental change of the electronic age should inspire some radical new outlook on life. Meanwhile, even if the outer quest for the conquest of space looks promising and exciting, the journey into the interior of ourselves promises to be much more arduous and demanding than anything undertaken by the astronauts today. All cultural skills and technologies generate environments and habits of perception that are natural to them. And since most sinful behaviour is social behaviour in the sense that it does not begin and end in a single individual but produces effects on others,<sup>(5)</sup> we should study the operation of these environments on human perception and milieu. Undoubtedly, the world-view of our age, the new mode of experience of life, the greater disposition for dialogue in an era of mass media, the critical spirit of our age, as well as several other factors, challenge us today to reflect more boldly on the concept, meaning and sense of sin in the light of the universal call to holiness.

In modern theological, philosophical and psychological literature sin emerges as more than the doing of evil or the breaking of laws. Sin is seen as compromising one's personal integrity.<sup>(6)</sup> Sin is understood in more human and personal terms. It is being untrue to oneself or dishonest and closed to God and others. Sin is further viewed as refusing to bring a loving outlook and commitment to bear on the key situations of life. It is treating oneself and the neighbour as a thing not as a person. Presumably, the process of secularization and technological progress, has enabled man to be freer to

4. Marshall McLuhan, *The Future of Morality: The Inner versus the Outer Quest*, in *The New Morality*, W. Dunphy (editor), London, Burns and Oates, 1968, pp. 175 – 189

5. J. Gaffney, *Sin Reconsidered*, New York, Paulist Press, 1983, p. 68

6. B. Haring, *Faith and Morality in a Secular Age*, England, St. Paul Publications, 1973, pp. 28 – 29. J.L. Carmody and D.L. Carmody, *Contemporary Catholic Theology*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, pp. 98 – 102. M.J. Taylor, *The Mystery of Sin and Forgiveness*, New York, St. Paul Publications, 1971, p. XI

reflect on who he is and what his responsibilities to self and others are. Most of all, psychological reflection has made him aware of his inner self and how he essentially needs the other not only for personal fulfillment but also for self-transcendence. Modern mass communications in the meantime, are showing us that the other is not just family and friends but the whole of society, namely, every man. This is certainly a very welcome change for Christian moralists, because a morality motivated by love, respect, and service appears to be the only morality that can cope with our present-day situation; a morality capable of repairing the hateful polarization that exists between men today. It is being suggested here that the selfless serving person is the true man.

### The Call To Holiness

In the above sense man becomes what he is called to be and become in his humanity, not by concentrating on his own needs alone and centering life in himself, or by exploiting others for his own gratification, but by losing himself to serve others. In this search the Christian is called in his actions to live consistently in line with his vocation to love and serve and be with Christ a “man for others”.

In view of this it behoves us to underline the fact that the biblical call to holiness is a universal call. God’s call to his creation cannot be understood as ‘more’ for some and ‘less’ for others.<sup>(7)</sup> In Genesis 1:26–28, we find: “God created man in his own image – male and female he created them, and God blessed them.” God’s blessing upon both man and woman points to the vocation of *all men* to reproduce in themselves that image in which they were created. Modern biblical scholarship hints that the history of salvation indicates God’s continual intervention among men to call them back to his original purpose of union with Him. And this has been made an achievable reality by Jesus Christ, because men and women who have God’s image ‘restored’ in their lives through Jesus, acquire in their lives what St. Paul calls ‘the liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:19–23).

It is God’s plan for mankind and his world to return to what God had originally planned for them. Men and women ‘lost their way’ in sin; and so did the animals, the plants and the earth itself, which had all become rebellious. Yet the redeeming activity of Christ does not only restore man but also the whole of creation. Meanwhile the central message of Jesus is the call to his disciples to re-enact, in other words, to represent to the world the life that he had received from his Father. It is for this reason that as committed Christians we hearken to bless the God and Father of Our Lord

7. F.J. Moloney, *Disciples and Prophets*, London, DLT, 1980, pp. 3–15. B. Haring, *Called to Holiness*, England, St. Paul Publications, 1982, pp. 7–9. *Concilium* 129(9/1979): Spirituality, Models of Holiness, *passim*

Jesus Christ, who destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

Jesus historically invited his followers to re-enact the life enacted by himself: 'Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36). 'Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). Thus the basic message of Jesus is that while the heavenly Father is always merciful and perfect the Christian *becomes* merciful and perfect. This of course, is reminiscent of Leviticus 19:2: 'You shall be holy, because I, Yahweh your God, am holy'. Holiness is the way of being which is proper to the Father of Jesus Christ. Jesus's teaching makes it obvious that he was enacting the spirit of God his Father. In like manner the followers of Jesus must re-enact the same holiness of God in their own lives and represent it to the world. More specifically this is a 'conversion' to and a 'reconciliation' with God the Father.

This reminds us that the story of the Prodigal Son (whose father had certainly not forgotten his son, indeed he had kept unchanged his affection and esteem for him) is man – every human being as is vividly depicted by John Paul II in his *Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance*: "bewitched by the temptation to separate himself from his Father in order to lead his own independent existence; disappointed by the emptiness of the mirage which had fascinated him; alone, dishonoured, exploited, when he tries to build a world all for himself; sorely tried, even in depths of his own misery by the desire to return to communion with his Father."<sup>(8)</sup> Christian revelation teaches us that finitude, suffering, sin are part of the human condition, but it also tells us of a God who plumbed the depths of that finitude in his Son's distress and death on a cross. Christ of course, did not die so that human beings would no longer suffer, but once freed from sin and enlightened by the cross-resurrection event we can now address ourselves to bettering the realities that constitute human life.<sup>(9)</sup> Thus Christianity is aware of a "Love" that is greater than sin.

We find in 1 John 1:8–9: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins." These words, insists the *Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance*, present the question of sin in its human dimension: sin as an integral part of the truth about man.<sup>(10)</sup> But they immediately relate the human dimension to its divine dimension, where sin is countered by the truth of divine love, which is just, generous and faithful, and which reveals itself above all in forgiveness and redemption. Hence St. John writes a little further on that: "whatever accusations (our conscience) may raise against us, God is greater than our conscience." (1 John 3:20).

8. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, op. cit. n. 5

9. H. Wattiaux, Eugenics and Catholic Morality, in *Theology Digest* 30, n. 3 (Fall 1982), p. 244

10. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, op. cit. n. 13

It is to be hoped that by treating the theme of sin and holiness from more than one point of view, a degree of clarification will result, rather than an increase in confusion. In particular we shall be looking for lines of convergence between psychology and moral theology in this area.<sup>(11)</sup> In our society to-day we are contending with the alleged demise of the supernatural, brought about by the secularization process. In our case we would like to use the term 'secularization' not in the sense of what has happened with social institutions as it has been the case of the separation of Church and State, for instance, but applying the word 'secularization' to the process taking place inside the human mind. This is what sociologist Peter Berger, in his enlightening book, *A Rumour of Angels*, calls a 'secularization of consciousness'.<sup>(12)</sup> Today the supernatural as a meaningful reality is absent or remote from the horizons of everyday life of large numbers, very probably of the majority, of people in modern societies, who seem to manage to get along without it quite well. Thus, those to whom the supernatural is still, or again, a meaningful reality find themselves in the status of a minority, more precisely a 'cognitive minority' – a very important consequence with very far-reaching implications. More specifically, a cognitive minority is a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society. In this sense the whole message of Christianity is based on the conviction that God exists. He has revealed himself in Christ. His nature is love. He has created us in his image and invited us to love ourselves and others as he loved himself and us. Faith sustains the Christian in this pursuit as a whole new dimension of sensitivity allows him to realise a little more the image of God in him as he strives to imitate the life of Jesus.

### Biblical Perspective of Sin

With this new emphasis we are not minimizing the biblical and traditional teaching on sin. I firmly believe that this will actually enhance and even bolster it. What we are doing is simply putting the traditional doctrine on sin in what we hope to be more personal terms which are relevant to our day and age.

Number 13 of the *Pastoral Constitution on 'The Church in The Modern World'* (*Gaudium et Spes*) gives a summary on the notion of sin which sets the mood for the biblical consideration of sin. It says in part: "Although set by God in a state of holiness, man, enticed by the evil one, abused his freedom at the very start of history. He lifted himself up against God, and sought to attain his goal apart from him. Although they had known God, they did not glorify him as God, but their senseless hearts were darkened, and

11. See B. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, Rome, Gregoriana, 1980, passim

12. P.L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*, A Pelican Book, 1971, pp. 16–19

they served the creature rather than the creator.”<sup>(13)</sup> The Vatican II document reflects St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 1:20 – 25 suggesting that although they knew God, certain people still refused to honour him as God or to thank him; instead, they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened. That is why God left them.

The traditional phrase ‘God left them’ or ‘God abandoned them’ means that religious error, if blameworthy, results in moral and social ills. Sin produces its own consequences and its own punishment. To know there is one, personal God means to know that one must pray to him and adore him. Yet often, man either sets himself up as the absolute measure of all things, or debases himself to the point of despair.

Ezekiel refers in an allegorical form to the history of the sinfulness of Jerusalem and Samaria: “For the Lord Jahweh says this: I now hand you over to those you hate, to those in whom you have lost interest. They will treat you with hatred, they will rob you of the fruit of your labours and leave you completely naked. And thus your shameful whoring will be exposed. Your debauchery and your whorings are the cause of these afflictions, since by playing the whore with the nations you have defiled yourself with their idols.” (Ez. 23:28 – 29). Speaking of God’s forbearance with Egypt the Book of Wisdom refers to the Egyptians’ wayward attitudes: “As their foolish and wicked notions led them astray into worshipping mindless reptiles and contemptible beasts you sent hordes of mindless creatures, to punish them and teach them that the instruments of sin are instruments of punishment.” On his part, St. Paul, although he judges and condemns pagan society, does not condemn individuals (whose intentions God alone must judge): “God, through Jesus Christ, judges the secrets of mankind.” (Rm. 2:16). St. Paul reaffirms this in 1 Cor 4:5 “There must be no passing of premature judgement. Leave that until the Lord comes: he will light up all that is hidden in the dark and reveal the secret intentions of men’s hearts. Then will be the time for each one to have whatever praise he deserves, from God.” St. Paul concludes in the following manner in Rm. 1:24 – 25: “That is why God left them to their filthy enjoyments, and the practices with which they dishonour their own bodies, since they have given up divine truth for a lie and have worshipped and served creatures instead of the creator.”

Thus in this light sin is a refusal to know and to adore God. Hence the person who is striving for holiness is primarily concerned with seeking to know God and adore him in so far as worship is an essential part of what human life means. So much so in fact that everyone prays, perhaps all the time, without realizing it.<sup>(14)</sup> The ability to pray is uniquely human. Man is the only being who prays. He is an eminently prayerful being. Whatever we

13. Pastoral Constitution on ‘The Church in The Modern World’ (Gaudium et Spes), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, (W.M. Abbott, ed.), New York, Angelus, 1966, p. 211, p. 13.

14. Thomas Hora, *Existential Metaphysichiatry*, New York, The Seabury Press, 1977, p. 18



cherish therefore, trust in or cling to is really our God. Hence in this existential and meaningful sense we ought to constantly inquire what we are praying to or worshipping and how? Prayer and transcendence appear to be the two most significant aspects of being human. Transcendence is the ability of man to be aware of what he is thinking. Reverence for God, the cherishing of God, is the beginning of wisdom. And the beginning of wisdom for the one who is striving to acknowledge his sinfulness as he seeks holiness is to worship the right God.

### Sin as "Alienation"

In this context the deepest need and desire of the human heart is the need to love and be loved by God.<sup>(15)</sup> Man's deepest longing, in the context of Divine Reality, would be to co-operate with God the Creator whereby alone he would be complete.<sup>(16)</sup> In conscious awareness of absolute attachment to God lies our real freedom of mind, heart and soul. But "what Revelation makes known to us is confirmed", says the Vatican II document on 'The Church in the Modern World', "by our own experience. For when man looks into his own heart he finds that he is drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from his good creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his source, man has also upset the relationship which should link him to his last end; and at the same time he has broken the right order that should reign within himself as well as between himself and other men and all creatures." The document continues to assert that: "Man therefore is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness. Man finds that he is unable of himself to overcome the assault of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though bound by chains. But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out the 'prince of this world'"<sup>(17)</sup>

This divisiveness highlights modern man's "alienation". In fact, the alienation of contemporary man from other persons (including God), and from himself is one of the dominant themes not only of modern existentialist philosophy but also of contemporary literature and theological writing.<sup>(18)</sup> The notion of alienation involves the feeling of apartness and strangeness. St. Paul in fact, speaks of sin in Col. 1:21-22, as an estrangement from God: "When you were estranged from God, your minds alienated from him by a life of sin, he used Christ's natural body to win you

15. B.J. Tyrrell, *Christotherapy (Healing Through Enlightenment)*, New York, Seabury Press, 1975, p. 37

16. Th. Hora, op. cit. pp. 77-78

17. Gaudium et Spes, in op. cit. p. 211, n. 13

18. Cf. B. Haring, *Sin in the Secular Age*, England, St. Paul Publications, 1974, p. 59

back through his death, so that he would bring you into his presence holy, pure and blameless.”

Furthermore alienation means the absence of warm or friendly relationship with people. In the light of existentialist philosophy it entails a separation of the individual from the real self because of a preoccupation with abstractions and the necessity for conformity to the wishes of others and the dictates of social institutions. As a term in social psychology and in clinical psychotherapy, alienation indicates states of mind that cause conflict, such as self-alienation or estrangement from one's self, loss of a sense of identity, a feeling of depersonalization. The cause of alienation in clinical psychoanalysis is traced back to some environmental pressure as are for example excessive demands of social or performance standards.<sup>(19)</sup> Hegel originated the notion of *Entfremdung*, used to denote the distance between mind and reality.

By a psychological process, a person's attitudes towards others (and may I add towards God) become his attitudes towards himself. Alienation from others leads sooner or later to self-alienation. As a result of manipulation of others for purposes of increasing wealth and personal power, for instance, a person's sense of security and confidence are poisoned. One's own self becomes as much an object of manipulation to him as other persons may become. In the meantime some find positive substitutes for alienation, for example, in social service or political activities. Some may respond to alienation by withdrawing from society as a whole. This sometimes may involve deep despair, apathy, or defeat without any meaningful alternative commitment to relieve their feelings of alienation. Others may find only a blind, angry, disorganized, self-defeating striking back. Not infrequently, alienation becomes a state of fragmented identity.

However, when we have the humility and willingness to part with our cherished opinions and possessions we are open to learning, progress and growth. We have to be willing at any given time to ask: Is what I am attached to mentally really valid? Oftentimes our essential tendency to cling to something causes us to suffer; whether or not you call this tendency a dependency or attachment, possessiveness, fear, anxiety or wilfulness for that matter. All of us would like to find a footing in life. But reality and existence is based on what really is.<sup>(20)</sup> People discontented with their lives often seek solutions. All of us would like to be happy and fulfil our lives. The pearl of great price is for us to realize that what is really real is the perfect life, namely the perfect good of God which already is. We only have to discern it, without having to change or cure anyone. A person's decisive moral and religious choice lies in whether or not he wants to know God

19. H.J. Eysenck, W. Arnold, R. Meili (eds), *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Volume One, London, Searcl Press, 1972, p. 44

20. Th. Hora, op. cit. p. 154

more and more, and honour him who is the origin, centre and goal of our life. A man who does not consider God worthy of being recognized or adored, inevitably chooses chaos of values. His whole life and personal relationships are disturbed by this fundamental alienation.

Hence we need to see sin in God's context. As such, the first thing we know of man is not that of man as a sinner but that he is a man of God, namely a man called to be with God. By God's gift and by God's word man is called to be freely in faithful love and in Christ, one with God, one with others and one with himself. These are basically the three dimensions of man's recovery of his own unity and wholeness. In this sense God becomes the centre of our life.

### **The Sin of Pride and Idolatry**

On the other hand however, the sin of pride is to make oneself and one's dignity the all-important value of life.<sup>(21)</sup> Ultimately it is a refusal to acknowledge one's dependence on God or to obey Him. It is vanity and pride when a person relies on the praise and admiration of others to maintain the feeling of his significance. This means adhering to the idea of one's own importance, regardless of protest from within oneself or from outside. This is a defensive quality in man and an unwillingness to trust and to be open. This is an attitude which engenders false or inadequate ideas of God. It is false worship and a substitute for worshipping the unseen God.

This is the idolatry of an idea of oneself, as it is so well depicted in psalm 35: "Sin speaks to the sinner in the depths of his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. He so flatters himself in his mind that he knows not his guilt. In his mouth are mischief and deceit. All wisdom is gone." As a person relies on the idea of his own importance to maintain his self-esteem, he will invariably suffer from feelings of insecurity because any threat of his importance (which is inescapable) is extremely disturbing. The vain man depends on the praise or the liking of other people to maintain his self-esteem, instead of relying on God working within the forces of self-esteem and inner security.

The idol is a method of coping with the fears alternative to trusting in God. One worships created things instead of the Creator. Basically this is the idol of power, whereby one views others only as helps or hindrances to his power, instead of treating others as human beings equally created in the image and likeness of God. This leads to isolation and consequently to alienation from self, others and God, which becomes to a certain extent hell on earth. This is the self-inflicted punishment of pride of a pompous and self-conscious existence, unaware of the barrier it creates to natural and friendly relations with others. The ego's struggle to control repression and

21. Christopher Bryant, *Depth Psychology and Religious Belief*, England, Mirfield Publications, 1977, p. 32

idolatry as one directs his drives and desires to specifically human ends is man's refusal to worship God.

Psalm 8 helps us ask the right questions about man's real identity in verses 5–8: "... what is man that you should spare a thought for him, the son of man that you should care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and splendour, made him lord over the work of your hands, set all things under his feet." Thus man, frail yet made in the likeness of God, on the border between the spiritual and material worlds, rules the natural creation. In the meantime one must not play down man's fall, in the sense that he is not only created, but he is also not now as he ought to be. And insofar that he does not fulfil the image of God, man falls short of the glory of God.

However, the world we live in is a sea of mental garbage. And it is very easy to pick up all sorts of rubbish thoughts about ourselves and others.<sup>(22)</sup> We pick and choose things in order to express ourselves or to confirm ourselves. We are always trying to say "I am" whether it is with perfume or a necktie, fine clothes, through bragging or inferiority complexes. But while the world offers us rubbish thoughts with which to make self-confirmatory statements, the most precise self-confirmatory statement that we can ever make is the following: 'God is the only I am; I am because God is.' It is in this same sense that Jesus asserts: "I and my Father are one."

### **Sin In The Light Of The Freedom of the Children of God**

Perceiving ourselves in this light, we realise that each and every one of us is a child of God; a perfect manifestation of God's self-revealing presence; unique individuality endowed with all the good, the intelligence, the love which God is. Once we understand about ourselves, this existentially valid self-confirmatory idea, we can behold others in the same perspective. Through the mercy of the Father, as believers we are enabled in a mysterious but real fashion to put on the mind of Christ and to have as our own the self-image which was also in Christ Jesus. But above all Christ gives us the "power to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12) and to be transformed into his glorious image. Each one of us, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is called to be a son or daughter through the Son in an inchoate fashion in this life and perfectly in the life to come.

It is of the utmost importance for the Christian who longs to enjoy the freedom of a child in his/her relationship with God, to acknowledge Christ as he who is anointed and filled by the Holy Spirit and the One in whom we are children of God by his Spirit. Our faith seeks to understand Christ as our Way to Truth and Life. Our Christian faith becomes a grateful acceptance of Christ Jesus as our Father's free gift to us.<sup>(23)</sup> As free gift of

22. Th. Hora, op. cit. p. 182

23. Cf. Josef Fuchs, S.J., *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1983, pp. 20–21

the Father, Christ's own freedom is directed towards our freedom. Christ ultimately frees us from the bondage of sin in its different forms and aspects. Sin – personal sin and the sin of the world and in the world (original sin) – means in this context, a situation where a person or mankind refuses in freedom, to be free for God, for true love and for fullness of truth.

St. Paul states in his letter to the Galatians: “When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free” (Gal. 5:1). He writes this in view of Christian liberty. Human beings must choose either Christ or the Law as author of liberation from the bondage of their sinful condition. Choosing Christ means having faith in him and accepting his message in the sense of Galatians 3:23 – 29: “Before faith came, we were allowed no freedom by the Law; we were being looked after till we could be justified by faith. Now that that time has come we are no longer under that guardian, and you are, all of you, *sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*. All baptized in Christ, you have clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Merely by *belonging to Christ* you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised.” Faith and baptism are not being contrasted here, but they are shown as one involving the other. Furthermore it is indicated that all those who believe in him are all of Christ Jesus. St. Paul also stresses this liberation of Christ in so far as it redeems man from the bondage of selfishness and for a self-giving love.

St. John as well, makes this liberation in Christ the focus of profound reflection in his theology. John, however, stresses more the bondage of falsehood and liberation in and for truth. To all those who freely receive him and open themselves to his transforming power and healing light, Christ gives “power to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12) and to be transformed into his glorious image. By the Spirit we can be born anew to a Christlike life; a life as sons and daughters of God, as it is affirmed in John 3:3 – 7: “Jesus answered” (in his conversation with Nicodemus), “I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said, “How can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born again?” Jesus replied, “I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: what is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above.”

Hence the true and perfect freedom is that of the Son of God. Everything is given by the Father. The freedom of the Son is the expression of his being one with the Father: “The Father and I are one.” Jesus shares everything with the Father who is infinite freedom for love. The richest form of healing to the Christian in fact, is when he “dares” to call the Father “Abba” and who makes the Father the vital centre of his consciousness, just as the Father was and forever is the centre of the

consciousness of Jesus the Christ.<sup>(24)</sup> But it is at this point perhaps that we need to gather our thoughts and take a look at biblical anthropology.

### **Biblical Anthropology**

There are two great starting points for the development of biblical anthropology. The first goes back to the beginning and develops the doctrine of man along the line of progression from creation. The second starting point begins with the revelation of man at his best, which begins with the person of Christ, the perfect man.<sup>(25)</sup>

The creation-centred model is summed up in the word *image*. Genesis, in 1:26–27, presents the most positive and uplifting anthropological insight of Scripture in the assertion that God has created man in his own image and likeness. In this manner man is both a representation and a representative of God. In this approach man is not truly self-referent and to understand man's nature fully we should refer to the original, namely, to that which is represented in man. Thus man is made from the dust of the earth in the image of God. However, he has the likeness of God but is not God himself. Meanwhile man has a purpose and a task to fulfil that are set in the context of a community, no matter how basic.<sup>(26)</sup> God did not create man a solitary being. "Male and female he created them." The partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons. This already points to the fact that in his innermost nature man is a social being; and that "if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts", in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>(27)</sup> It is also very affirming for man to recall what Genesis says, namely, that God saw "all the things that he had made, and they were very good" (Gen. 1:31).

The second approach centres on the Incarnation, the revelation of Christ. Thus, a truly biblical anthropology shows man not only as he is, but also as he may be. In other words man, in Christ, is truly man. In the model of Christ we have the revelation of the glory of God and at the same time the revelation of the glory of man. Hence we are what we are created to be, not what we make ourselves to be. It is initially very much the quality of his self-perception that determines a person's state of health and well-being. And if we accept in faith that 'God is love' as He is defined by St. John in his First Letter (verse 4:8), then, love becomes the fundamental and inborn vocation of every human being, created in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, our self-image will improve tremendously if we reflect on the words of St. Paul addressed to the Ephesians (2:8–10): "We are God's

24. B.J. Tyrrell, *op. cit.* p. 60

25. E. David Cook, *Man in Society*, in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, (D.F. Wright ed.) Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1978, pp. 134–141

26. See Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them*, Great Britain, DLT, 1985, p. 49

27. *Gaudium et Spes*, in *op. cit.* p. 211, n. 12

work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live.”

### A New Kind of Existence

At any rate, sin brought man to a lower state, forcing him away from the completeness that is his to attain. Both the high calling to holiness and the deep misery which men experience find their final explanation in the light of revelation. We are called under the dynamic force of the Gospel to an ongoing conversion and watchfulness for the presence of God in the ever-new opportunities to serve others.

Sin is all that opposes the joy and message of the paschal mystery. In contrast the authentic Christian aims for wholehearted holiness. A Christian in fact, is a person for whom Christ is the ultimate decisive authority in such questions as use of force, terror, peace, justice, love as well as meaning of life, dying and death, personal guilt, suffering and personal destiny.<sup>(28)</sup> Our salvation consists mainly in our freedom from sin and our participation in a new life, namely, Christ's divine life communicated to us. This means a new and true moral goodness in Christ. Furthermore, if Jesus Christ is both truly God-in-man and the only proper Man, then in him, God opened to men the possibility of a new kind of personal existence. Particularly Jesus' humanity is important to us because it is potentially what all men have in their nature to become. The life of Jesus opens up for us a completely new mode of human life. His utter self-offering love to man and obedience to God are a unique example that he sets before us. Hence to become like Jesus is to hope that the expression of God in Jesus becomes manifest also in us who follow him in trust. This is a process whereby our humanity is re-formed into a way of existence which originates in God's non-temporal mode of existence. Our basis of hope in Christ is therefore our confidence that God will continue this process and bring his purpose to fruition, not only beyond the limits of our finite lives, but beyond even the disappearance of the part of the material cosmos, the Earth, in which He has been at work to achieve His ends.

Obviously the Christian life is something much more noble than just avoiding mortal sin at all costs. Nor is Christian life led in the fear of punishment; but rather one flowing from the love of and the enthusiasm for the ideal of conformity to Christ in life and action. According to St. Thomas (See *Summa Theologica* I, II, 6, prol.), sin is that which impedes or even stifles completely growth in Godlikeness and Christlikeness. Sin, attests Aquinas, brings with it its own punishment, which consists precisely in a real diminution of the human being — a real deformation of God's image in

28. Hans Kung in his book *On Being a Christian*, London, Collins, 1977, suggests on page 125 that: “all those can be called Christians for whom in life and death Jesus Christ is ultimately decisive.”

us.<sup>(29)</sup> Sin becomes something barring our entry into the Kingdom of God, and rendering impossible that sharing in God's own life which has its culmination in the vision of heaven to which all men are called, and to which all men, leading their daily lives according to the will of God and the teaching and example of Christ, are invited to grow.

### **Moral and Emotional Growth**

Constant transformation of our self-image is as natural and essential to the believer as is the growth of the self. This transformation in self-image involves a change on both the conceptual and the feeling level. Thus growth in the awareness of one's sinfulness and the need for one's personal sanctification demands morally mature reasons, as well as emotional maturity. And if we want to understand more fully the notion of sin as a negation of the all-embracing virtue of holiness, we need to realise that an essential facet of moral development is emotional growth.

Hence the first task of the authentic Christian is to educate his feelings. To the individual who feels, what is felt is a reflection of how he is appraising the world and himself, how he is assessing particular situations, and what kinds of behaviour are from time to time being activated within him.<sup>(30)</sup> A person who has insight into his feelings can report for instance, that he feels angry with his wife, or that he is still grieving for his mother, or that he is jealous of another person. If he has no insight we may be able, by noticing how he behaves and what he says, to infer what behavioural systems are currently activated within him to communicate to him our inferences. In summary, the language of feeling is an indispensable means for talking about ways in which a situation is appraised. A judgement that something is good may be deemed correct, but is only mature if such a judgement is formed by a mature reasoning process that gradually leads to emotional maturity in the individual. The aim of moral education is moral maturity, but since moral maturity requires development, one should know about the ways that are able to facilitate this developmental process.

The status of a 'cognitive minority' (such as that of committed Christians) is invariably an uncomfortable one – not necessarily because the majority is repressive or intolerant, but simply because it refuses to accept the minority's definitions of reality as 'knowledge'.<sup>(31)</sup> The plausibility of a cognitive structure that is not socially shared, that is challenged by our fellow men, is endangered, not just in our dealings with others, but much

29. C. Bianco deals with various aspects of sin in the theology of Aquinas, in his doctoral dissertation for the Gregorian University, entitled *Sin and Providence in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. See especially pp. 48 – 55 of his Extract published in 1968, where he deals specifically with sin and its own punishment.

30. B. Lonergan S.J., *Method in Theology*, London, DLT, 1972, pp. 30 – 34

31. P.L. Berger, *op. cit.* p. 19



more importantly in our own minds. And unless one can insulate himself against the massive challenge to his previously taken-for-granted reality, he will soon begin to doubt his challenged 'knowledge'. Meanwhile there are different ways of coping with doubt and individuals vary in their ability to resist social pressure. For instance one could either try to keep his truths to himself, or he could seek to gain converts in order to feel more secure in his convictions. He could also perhaps seek for some sort of compromise and accommodation. This does not exclude that he could choose a destructive way of dealing with this type of stress and denigrate those who may hold different opinions than his. What could easily happen, at any rate, is the progressive disintegration of the acceptability of the challenged 'knowledge' in the consciousness of the one holding it, unless due moral development takes place.

There are good reasons for stating that on a certain level the Christian, like everyone else, has to learn the content of morality almost as he has to learn to read and write, in the sense that he is subject to certain laws of psychological development in the area of moral reasoning.<sup>(32)</sup> In fact the work of prominent developmental psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget on moral development showed that moral reasoning has qualitatively different stages of development, and that not many people reach the higher stages. Ideally all moral development must end up in personal integration. These two scientists have sketched a very comprehensive picture of individual moral development. They have developed theories which indicate what stages an individual goes through in achieving moral maturity. Even though we may be convinced that some actions are right and wrong in general, when we get down to particular circumstances, we often find that we are no longer so certain about the path to be followed. Anyone who experienced a real moral dilemma, real moral anguish, is aware that situations are not neatly cut and dried. It is also possible that someone can do the right thing for the wrong reasons. Hence the reason for the moral judgement should always be taken into consideration.

Thus the meaning and value of life consists in one's moral attitudes. When I say I am a moral being I am understanding myself as a responsible and accountable being and therefore obligated or bound morally and to some extent also psychologically. First of all to be human is to be responsible for oneself. This in some sense means to be obligated. It is a question of attachment; while we understand ourselves as beings who are capable of being free from trivial attachments we consider ourselves as obligated to God in the sense of a conscious awareness of a total attachment to Him as a way to our real freedom of heart, mind and soul.

Christian morality is ultimately a conversion to God. In this context

32. R. Duska and M. Whelan, *Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*, New York, Gill and Macmillan, 1978, pp. 80–99. See also B. Kiely, op. cit. pp. 46–62

conversion is a change in the whole person.<sup>33</sup> It means to change the whole thrust of one's life. Conversion in relation to sin means recapitulating and transforming the basic orientation of a person who has been so against God that he cannot come back to God by himself. It is the total person changing himself. Once a sinner, the person is now committing himself totally to the love of God, giving himself as a person to the Father. This ultimately means falling in with God's will in one's life as one starts to respond to the call of personal sanctification. However, real conversion cannot take place in the person without the help of the grace of Jesus Christ. The grace of Christ makes the sinner once more able and free to change himself, to overcome his resistance against the Father. As he converts the sinner, Christ enables him to change the orientation of his whole person and his whole will in relation to God and to Christ. A convert in this sense is, by the grace of Christ, a spiritual man in the Pauline sense, whereby every person is either a spiritual man or a carnal man. There is no middle ground. It is in the human act in which our person as a whole is engaged that we actualize ourselves fully as spiritual men or sinful men.

Christ is the supreme example of what it means to live humanly. He first established his identity as a separate Divine person and asserted the total affirmation of his goodness before he let his human availability be known. He announced his relationship of absolute oneness with God: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). He indicated his singlemindedness and absorption with God's kingdom: "I must be busy with my Father's affairs." And then Jesus spoke of his possession of fulness and loving availability: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." It was only later that his death became the stage of diminishment, of letting go, of renunciation and self-sacrifice out of love. Jesus Christ is above all the greatest manifestation of God's presence and saving activity among us.

### **Psycho-Theological Reflection**

When Scripture speaks of sin, the main context is always the call to conversion, whether from a total or partial alienation. There is not the slightest indication in the Bible that there is a quantitative measurement to define the borderline between mortal and venial sin.<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas states in his *Summa Theologiae* (I – II, 88, 1) that it is only mortal sin that which truly deserves the name "sin". Other events or realities we may call sin deserve that name only in an analogous sense.

Today we know more about human imperfection and about developmental psychology. Even if God's will must be accepted in its totality, not every human act and action expresses the person in his totality.

33. Karl Rahner, Conversion, in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, edited by Walter E. Conn, New York, Alba House, 1978, pp. 204 – 206

34. B. Haring, *Sin In The Secular Age*, op. cit. p. 159

There is no possibility whatsoever of giving a general quantitative and exact determination of where mortal sin begins and venial sin ends, because of the great diversity of psychological endowment and moral and religious giftedness of persons, and the great diversity of environment. Thus we must look not only to the objective dimension but also to the subjective dimensions and needs, fears and pressures. The task is for everyone to make a responsible human assessment of what things are seriously wrong in this particular context and situation; what things are trivially wrong and disordered. There is no one open and shut answer.

In the hierarchy of what is important for us, what comes first is our fundamental stance or outlook on life. Then come fundamental options. And thirdly come those actions, those human acts, by which we express or fail to express our inner personhood.

### **The Fundamental Option**

The fundamental option, for the most part is not a sudden event, but is prepared for by a long maturation that takes place in the subconscious. The option is not necessarily expressed in an explicit act or with a distinct and conscious act, but is incarnate in a particular choice. The fundamental option towards God does not consist merely in a spontaneous religious inclination, but is a dedication of the person, and therefore it is a supremely active attitude, the most complete actuation of personal liberty. A true act of love of friendship towards God cannot be anything but a fundamental option, which of its nature cannot be restricted to one single act. It includes necessarily a pledge of dedication to the will of God with all one's being and for the whole of life. To love God above all things does not merely mean that God becomes the last end of one act but that the ordering of oneself to God as to one's last end takes possession of the whole person, giving form to his whole life.

Since the fundamental option is a commitment for the whole of life, its influence is not limited to that instant in which the act is made. The person who has opted for God, has set up a norm for himself and the acceptance of this norm has become the vital form of his moral personality, the determining pole for the values of his affective world. If the fundamental option for God did not exercise a further influence over the affective life, this would indicate either that it was not properly made in the first place, or that it has already been implicitly revoked.

### **Mortal Sin**

In view of the concept of fundamental option, mortal sin, as an act, is nothing else than a synonym for fundamental option. In this sense a mortal sin is that act by which we substantially reject God and assume instead a posture apart from and in alienation from God. Mortal sin is the moment in

which we deny the God who calls us, through and in, creation, and thus paradoxically, deny our own deepest selves. All persons have the same basic physiological and psychological needs. But the two most basic psychological needs that Christian morality ought to be concerned with are: the need to love and be loved and the need to feel that we are worthwhile to ourselves and to others. For the authentic Christian however, the deepest need and desire of the human heart is the need to love and be loved by God. Furthermore, as Christians, we live by loving faith in the same sense expressed by St. Paul: "Faith in the Son of God who loved me and sacrificed himself for my sake" (Gal: 2:20).

Mortal sin then, is the act of sin by which we take upon ourselves the state of sin. But if mortal sin is nothing else than a negative fundamental option, it follows that it is an act of self-disposition occurring through and in concrete particular categorical acts. What is being said here is that real sin is not found in external action but in the inner disposition of the heart. Not what is on the outside of a man that makes him unclean, but what is inside his heart what makes him unclean, in the words of Jesus himself. Thus our real faithfulness to God is our new heart and new mind that God pours into us – the mind and heart of his own Son. In St. Paul's definition sin is that which makes us fall short of the glory of God. The Powers that affect me and make me tend to fall short of such glory and sin, is those decisions which I ratify, that disorder, that alienation, those actions which I approve or, that tendency in me to be shut in myself, shutting others and God out.

In view of our identification of mortal sin with fundamental option, sin is a relatively rare phenomenon. Mortal sin is not a thing that you do just in passing, almost by chance, without having your heart in it. Objectively there must be serious matter, weighty matter, something of significance and substantially important – a direct rejection of the love of God or direct rejection (e.g. hate) of my neighbour. Those extreme stances would be quite rare; but possible. In any case the Church is asking us to reduce the facile multiplication of mortal sins.

### **Venial Sin**

In contrast with the preaching of the Apostles and the teaching of the first centuries of Christianity, there seems to have existed a real obsession in the minds of moralists and of many scrupulous people to determine accurately the borderline between mortal and venial sin. This was perhaps the effect of a Church that strongly asserted her direct or indirect power over all events in the secular world.<sup>(35)</sup> This was also due to the impact of Jansenistic rigorism spreading in a great part of the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile for both Calvinists and Catholics, a rigoristic concept of sin produced innumerable traumas and concealed faith in God who is

35. *ibid.* p. 156

love for all. This type of rigorism upheld that the greatest part of humanity is doomed to eternal condemnation. God, (taught Calvin), who is just, punishes those predestined to eternal damnation. Such teaching gives a terrifying image of God.

Meanwhile venial sin is not to be identified with "not serious". Venial sin is purely and simply a human act which is not fully so; which does not come from the core of the human person and which does not involve a fundamental option. From the point of view of the concept of fundamental option therefore, the difference between venial and mortal sin is the degree of personal penetration and involvement in the act. In venial sin there is no deep core involvement, while in mortal sin there is. When committing a mortal sin the person deciding to do this deed, is also deciding to be this particular person, to reject God, the world and paradoxically himself; whereas in the case of venial sin this is not the case. The person committing a venial sin is choosing to do this deed while at the same time he is also more deeply choosing to be the sort of person who stands opposed to this deed. Hence in every act of venial sin there is an inner contradiction, only possible due to the effects of original sin. In the meantime the insights of modern psychology indicate to us that for a variety of reasons we do things that are seriously wrong without in fact making such a personal decision.

### **Towards a Psycho-Theology of Guilt**

Always speaking in terms of personal fundamental orientation, just as it would be impossible for a wave to be apart from the sea, it would be equally impossible for a man to sin, to be without God, (*sine Deo*) if he would really understand his complete at-one-ment with the fundamental principle of existence. A sinner, in fact, is someone who is victim of insufficient understanding of man's complete at-one-ment with his creative principle, God. But ignorance of existential reality is the common denominator of evil, sin and guilt.<sup>(36)</sup>

In order to learn something we must approach it with an open, uncluttered mind. Thus we need to look at guilt with an open mind and heart, if we want to see the meaning and understand the sense of guilt that each and every one of us so often experiences. Guilt is a human phenomenon. It is a universal human experience.<sup>(37)</sup> All of us have a tendency to feel guilty about almost everything. It is a passion rather than an affliction. We just love to feel guilty. When I feel guilty, I am actually saying "I am great", asserting that "I am". This is the self-confirmatory essence of guilt. When we feel guilty, our sense of selfhood is increased. Feeling guilty and confessing to it is a hidden form of boasting.

36. Th. Hora, op. cit. p. 103

37. Bernard J. Bush, *The Critical Eye*, in *Guilt: Issues of Emotional Living in an Age of Stress for Clergy and Religious*, Affirmation Books, Whitinsville, Massachusetts, 1980, p. 35

## Real Guilt and Neurotic Guilt

Guilt could be an anxiety-provoking element in one's psyche, or it could be a growth-stimulating factor in one's personality. It is in a sense an automatic self-evaluator in every person; more of a mental process than a feeling. It is a process of judging or condemning one's behaviour, thoughts or words. Guilt is the free decision to evil, evil with regard to God and man.

Real guilt is the conscious awareness of one's free choice of a behaviour that is destructive to oneself as well as to others. The freedom required for acting out of conscience rather than automatically includes the ability to weigh alternatives, select opinions, judge what is the best course under the circumstances, and act decisively. In the last resort, the norm of moral behaviour is love. Good conscience demands that we act out of love.<sup>(38)</sup> Meanwhile, to sustain a loving outlook on life is the result of a life that is free, prayerful and principled, rather than one based on whim, impulse, sheer feelings of the moment, or overwhelming passion.

Neurotic guilt starts in childhood. The child requires security. If he is denied security, the child becomes anxious. Furthermore, the child is emotionally dependent on his parents; and if his parents mete out reward and punishment in approximately equal amounts, he is likely to become confused concerning his relationship with them. He feels insecure because their reaction to what he does is likely to be anger as much as love. An erratic pattern in the distribution of love and anger is very disturbing for the child and is liable in such a situation to learn anxiety. Such anxiety in turn, is bound to be accompanied by a feeling of guilt.

Now, while real guilt is based on a conscious and free act, neurotic guilt is influenced by an unconscious pattern of guilt which has its roots in childhood. Real guilt encourages compunction and a desire for reconciliation with a *Significant Relationship*, whereas neurotic guilt produces shame, anger, and hostility. Real guilt does not inhibit hope, love and trust because of the individual's capacity to accept compassion. On the other hand, neurotic guilt pushes the individual to despair, as (s)he is incapable of compassion or forgiveness and therefore unable to accept forgiveness or compassion from anyone. While real guilt is deliberate, neurotic guilt is compulsive.

## The Quest For Truth

Neurotic guilt can only be healed by facing up to the truth of ignorance. Fortunately ignorance can be healed by becoming enlightened on the issue involved. Neurotic guilt is a form of existential ignorance – ignorance of what really is. Our task is to endeavour to relieve the suffering that we are all prone to because of ignorance. We must seek increasingly and search continuously to come into conscious union with the creative source

38. Philomena Agudo, *Guilt: Its Effect on Wholeness*, in *Guilt*: *ibid.* pp. 17 – 27. See also E. Mark Stern and Burt G. Marino, *Psycho-Theology: The Discovery of Sacredness in Humanity*, New York, Paulist Press, 1970, pp. 125 – 138

of our being. It is the purpose of our life to acquire conscious at-one-ment with God, the ultimate reality. Man cannot exist without God. Our life in him and love of him is an existential imperative under which we live. The creator can never be left out of his creation. Scripture speaks of man as the loved son of God, spiritual and perfect, even as his Father is perfect and spiritual. But ignorance of existential reality is the common denominator of evil, sin and guilt. Evil is the absence of good (*privatio boni* according to St. Augustine), in the same manner that darkness is the absence of light. Once man understands real power (the power of God), evil will lose its power and hold on him. Just as light is never really absent, the good of God is omnipresent.

However, despite the fact that we constantly clamour for fulfilment, we are somehow born in ignorance. In his priestly prayer Christ addresses the Father, asking Him to let the Son give eternal life to all those he had entrusted to him. "And", Jesus prays, "eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3). What is meant by "to know" in this context is knowledge in the biblical sense. In biblical language, 'knowledge' is not merely the conclusion of an intellectual process but the fruit of an 'experience', a personal contact, which when it matures, is love. And it is the inner eye of the heart, the eye of real wisdom, the eye of love, which can enlighten us and save us from our existential ignorance.<sup>(39)</sup> Let us not forget that love is the most human of human activities, an activity in which men and women transcend themselves and become authentic. And as believers in the transforming power in our heart and will of the memory of Jesus, we can only justify our existence by accepting in our lives the reality of the love made available to us in the self-emptying of Jesus and his cross.

In comparison with the phenomenal world which comes and goes, truth is eternal. Jesus said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away" (Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Truth validates itself existentially, even if it is seldom popular. The major effect of truth is freedom. Jesus himself tells us that truth is that which sets man free to be what he really is. Each person has to discover what he really is; and once he does that he is enlightened. If we are to know the truth, we have first to become aware of that which is not true. We do so by inquiring about the thought process underlying the particular phenomenon. Then perhaps we can proceed to understand what is what really is. Ultimate reality for man is however, that real man lives in the context of divine reality. Divine reality is the existential context of man: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Discovering the truth will help us discover and accept our real self.

### Self-Acceptance

We need to feel good about the constituent parts of our personality; otherwise our possession of ourselves will be hopelessly incomplete. There

39. Cf. B.J. Tyrell, op. cit. pp. 31 - 32

are people who spend their lives trying to please others, undertaking excessive good works and fitting in with everyone else's wishes, in order to gain approval. Deep down inside such persons often is a persistent sense of self-rejection, which no amount of external approbation can alter. A person in this frame of mind would need to gradually overcome the feeling of untouchability and be led to feel acceptable and ultimately lovable.

We often develop guilt feelings to help us maintain our idealized self-image intact. It is psychologically important to keep one's self-image to help provide a sense of personal continuity. Most of us like to think of ourselves as fairly decent individuals, and any inappropriate behaviour on our part attacks that self-image. When I have guilt feelings, I am on the one hand the culprit; on the other hand, I am the condemning judge who is absolutely against those acts. The endangered self-image is protected as the actions of the culprit are judged. The inferior culprit is condemned by the superior judge, both being the same person.

It is the task of the authentic Christian continually to strive to become like Jesus who perceived himself as a perfect manifestation of God's self-revealing presence, unique individuality endowed with all the good, the intelligence, and the love which God is: "I can of my own self do nothing" (John 14:10). "But the Father who dwells in me, he does the works" (John 14:10). Jesus sets us an example of conscious union with God: "I and the Father are one". We can come to such union by knowing how not to hold to, or attach ourselves to ideas, thoughts, or anything not beneficial that comes into our consciousness. The life of those who sincerely seek this conscious union with God becomes more and more harmonious, as they follow the advice of the Psalmist: "Be still and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme on the earth." (Ps. 46). He who loves God, prefers knowledge of him to all things made by him, and by desire ceaselessly devotes himself to it. This is nothing short of total attachment to God.

All of us want to hold on to something meaningful which would give us the impression of having a firm footing and grounding on reality. But the tendency to form attachments creates insecurity in man. And as long as we only seek to feel good throughout our lives, we are not interested in being freed from our misplaced attachments and be healed. "You shall know the truth", says Jesus, "and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The truth of which Jesus speaks can heal depressions, liberate from psychological enslavement, as well as bring the joy of freedom into life. We are healed and become sound only when we attach ourselves to that which can give real meaning and value to our lives. He who holds God dear loves the glory of his creator. It is the mark of the soul sensitive to the love of God ever to seek the glory of God in the fulfilment of every commandment, and to delight in its own abasement, since to God alone, on account of his greatness, belongs glory, as is so well asserted in the Book of Revelation: "You O Lord, are the One, who was and who is, the just one" (Rev. 16:5).

Attainment of such self-perception in imitation of Jesus leads us to true humility which is not only the virtue of a sense of reality but also the antithesis of pride and vanity. True humility seeks with the minimum of



psychological defences, to deny not one iota of our worth but neither to add one hair's breadth of anything that does not exist.<sup>(40)</sup> Thus by having a constant positive image of ourselves we foster our capacity to grow in the image of God until the end of our days and beyond in eternity. This reminds us of Christ's immense claim of his fulness of awareness and being: "Before Abraham ever was I am" (John 8:58). This means we have to learn to be unafraid of the repercussions of self-acceptance.

### **The Experience of Forgiveness**

We need to face up to our total being and to the claim on us by others. We have to learn to respond creatively to pressure from outside and within us, as we respond to God's summons to us to grow to our full stature. We need to stop relying for security on vain ideas or inane objects and start putting our trust in God, who is present to us in every influence from outside and from within. We ought to seek to acquire a change of attitude and openness to the spirit of Jesus who reassures us in such comforting words: "My own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you." Jesus can offer us this kind of peace because he is at one with the Father. Furthermore, this peace promotes in us only soundness of body but more important still, perfect happiness and the deliverance which Jesus as Messiah brings. Ultimately it will also lead us to the most self-confirmatory statement that we can ever make concerning ourselves: 'God is the only I am; I am because God is.'

Hence we require to change the attitude of the ego, particularly the habit of defensiveness, and foster a readiness in us to experience forgiveness. If God can go that far in tolerating men as they are, then a man should be able to tolerate himself. We need to learn through the burden of our own cross to experience the peace of those who accept themselves because they believe God has accepted them. We need to accept the totality of ourselves, including the bad, the seemingly discreditable side of ourselves. Besides, we need to stop being afraid, because it is the healing work in the spirit of fellowship, of mutual acceptance, that unites.

### **Freedom from Fear and Guilt**

One of the main signs of independence and self-esteem is the gradual loss of fear and guilt. Independence and freedom, along with possession of self and self-esteem are essential ingredients for the experience of forgiveness and self-acceptance. They promote in us freedom from fear and from a neurotic sense of guilt.

At any rate, we are often afraid that others whoever they may be, may destroy us, mutilate us, drop us.<sup>(41)</sup> It is interesting to notice that the only fear an infant has is the fear of falling. Based on the innate sense in man for

40. Jack Dominian, *Cycles of Affirmation: Psychological Essays in Christian Living*, Great Britain, DLT, 1975, p. 23

41. Andrew M. Greeley, *The Friendship Game*, Image Book, Doubleday, 1971, p. 26

self-preservation, the fear of falling is a primary human fear; and as such is neurological. With the passage of time however, this neurological human factor becomes overlaid with psychological fears. Consequently man tends to refuse to trust himself to his fellowmen because he may fear that once he leaves himself open to others, the others will kill him, either physically or emotionally. Fear, suspicion, distrust, anger well up within the personality of each one of us and we frequently feel that we must either kill or be killed.

However, when we have independence and freedom, we are able to act without fear and move trustingly towards others; and these negative feelings will disappear, as we learn to be truly sorry only when we do not love enough. Little by little our conscience becomes conformed more to that of Christ, for whom love was the only criterion of human and divine integrity. It is Christ's absolute certainty of not being alone and of being one with the Father, as is disclosed in St. John's Gospel, that introduces us to this central aspect in Christ's life, where self-esteem was complete and love the only motivating energy. Christ was so totally available because his love of himself was also complete. There was no thing and no one he had to avoid, except what was altogether incompatible with his nature, namely sin, or the refusal of love.

### **The Primacy of Charity**

Charity enjoys a certain primacy in God's revelation of himself in the Old and New Testaments. The two great commandments (love of God and love of neighbour – Matthew 22:34–40 – were explicitly taken by Christ from the Old Testament – Deut. 6:5; Lev. 18:18). In Christ's teaching they were expressly joined together, given a new extension and depth.<sup>(42)</sup> The theological reflection made in John's First Epistle underlines the implications of the new commandment as he insists on love of the neighbour as the ultimate criterion of love of God. "Anyone who says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen" (1 John 4:20–21). St. Paul further says that love of neighbour is the bond of perfection and is the fulfilment of the Law. In the last resort all that matters is to find God and surrender everything to Him. It is a question of 'falling in love' with God. But loving God does not mean mere attachment of clinging to him or simply loving Him as a good that we long to have for ourselves. To love God is to participate in the divine agape or charity, whereby we desire the glory of God in himself and its spreading abroad to others. However, in the other-centred approach to Christian morality, the best way you can see God operating in you is to observe in you the source of his love when you love your neighbour.

Love is the fundamental act which actualizes the human reality of a human being. It is the fundamental act of his life. Thus when a human

42. Josef Fuchs, S.J., *op. cit.* pp. 28–31

being adopts an attitude of love towards his fellow-men, this very same fundamental act of his life, through the universal divinizing saving will of God, is at the same time implicitly and tacitly but really, an act of charity of the love of God. Meanwhile we need to understand the function of prayer as a way of increasing our ability to love. Thus we realize the importance of love as an eminently integrative value. Through a prayerful attitude and ceaseless prayer, we gradually become aware that it is love of God expressed in love of neighbour which can ultimately integrate the Christian person, and give him a sense of wholeness and wholesomeness. In order to be healthy we must always orient ourselves in the direction of being optimally and maximally loving. Just as it is not possible for us to live without prayer, it is really not possible to remain healthy without love. Our aim is to cultivate a consciousness which is capable of loving in order to be a beneficial presence in the world.<sup>(43)</sup> This becomes existential worship of God which will render us to be a centre of loving in the world. This is a form of prayer which is beyond words and thoughts. Being a beneficial presence or becoming a centre of loving in the world is fostered by cherishing and consciously manifesting as well as expressing spiritual values, such as love, honesty, humility, joy, generosity, assurance, freedom, harmony and health.

In view of the above outlook, sin is deliberately choosing to remain selfish and closed in oneself refusing to open oneself up in response to others and to God. It is remaining infantile and morally underdeveloped so to speak. In this respect, virtue and restraint are considered as necessary steps to personal development and manhood. Obviously this is very much a question of motivation.

### Inspired Living

One of many human tendencies is to mistake excitement for vitality. Man has a taste for excitement. We do not want to be dead. All of us want to be alive. There is a universal fear of death, which often expresses itself in a fear of peace and quiet seeking more noise, excitement and external stimulation. We try to feel alive, forgetting that excitement is counterfeit happiness.<sup>(44)</sup> But in order to live life fully one must seek to understand what real life is. One may think that one is dead unless life is exciting. In any case it is inspired living what real life is all about, namely, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life", as Jesus told the Samaritan woman in his conversation with her as she came to draw water from Jacob's well. The well of living water that Jesus is speaking about is inspired living in the form of an inner flow of intelligent, creative and loving ideas. This is a discovery

43. Jack Dominian, *Growth in the Capacity to Love*, A Marist Chapel Reprint, Sydney, 1981, p. 9

44. Th. Hora, op. cit. pp. 118–123

of God described as the mysterious source of wisdom, energy, power, love and creativity that flow continually into consciousness seeking expression in wholesome and harmonious living.

Jesus teaches us how to establish contact with this source of inspired living. He teaches us to discover something better in place of what we may mistakenly consider of vital importance. Jesus points to us the method of establishing, maintaining and increasing contact with God, our wholesome source of harmonious living. This method consists of prayer and meditation, as well as the right understanding of the difference between a life of excitement and inspired living.

### Concluding Reflections

In recent times much more account is being taken of the fact that the knowledge of truth requires a complex of a delicate and psychological environment. In addition, no matter how convinced one is of the truth of a doctrine, one ought to appreciate more the fact that others may not necessarily perceive it as such. This, of course, is by no means an advocacy of a relativism of truth. Rather, the suggestion is being made that not truth itself but the knowledge and perception of truth is instead relative. Moreover, despite the fact that society is becoming more and more aware of the necessity to integrate all the manifestations of truth, there appears to exist in the modern world a real fragmentation of truth itself. Hence today one could in no way lay a claim to possess the whole truth without showing concern for these fragments of truth.

In view of this it is not surprising that a profound theological crisis exists today. Like every other human being the theologian (or the expert in human sciences for that matter) exists in a social *milieu*, and as such he is, as well, the product of socialization processes. Theological knowledge, as much as any other type of knowledge, is socially acquired, and is in need of social support. Hence, as much as any other 'cognitive structure', theological thinking is subject to social pressures. At the same time, the meaningfulness of the 'supernatural' has been a necessary condition of the theological enterprise. But in a situation where one may speak of the demise of the supernatural, theology is confronted with truly formidable difficulties. There are still religious and theological environments in which the crisis is, at the most, dimly sensed as an external threat in the distance; others may tend to interpret the crisis as a threat deep inside the fabric of religious practice, faith and thought. Personally I would prefer to interpret such crisis as a temporary imbalance providing us with an opportunity of re-evaluating our Christian commitment and our moral behaviour, as we re-consider our stance towards sin and holiness.

Following biblical anthropology I have been suggesting that God made man simple and that man's complex problems are very often completely of his own devising. Hence all thoughts of inferiority, unworthiness, fear,

insecurity, are all man's inventions. They stem from incorrect ways of asserting ourselves. We are often choosing mistaken words and manners to express ourselves, in other words to say 'I am'. As a matter of fact, our happiness, health and success in life depends so much on discovering a meaningful and valid way of asserting our identity. It has been suggested that for the authentic believer the most precise self-confirmatory statement will always remain: "God, 'He Who Is', is the only 'I am'; I am because God is ." Furthermore, inspired by St. Paul's teaching on sin and the call to holiness, I have emphasized the idea of belonging to Christ in freedom. St. Paul stresses this liberation brought about by Christ insofar as it redeems man from the bondage of selfishness and for a self-giving love. St. Paul himself has experienced the freeing power of the resurrection of Christ and sought to liberate the early Christian community from those misinterpretations of Law that could have kept Christ's message of love in bondage and unreleased. This can be observed in Romans: 7:24 – 25 and 8:1 – 2: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! In short, it is I who with my reason serve the Law of God, and no less I who serve in my unspiritual self the law of sin. The reason therefore, why those who are in Christ are not condemned, is that the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." In this context St. Paul is contrasting the inward struggle that wars on between good and evil in man and the Christian's call to the life of the spirit. Thus St. Paul first speaks in the person of mankind under the dominion of sin and not yet justified. Subsequently he speaks in the name of the justified Christian with the gift of the Spirit who, nonetheless, is aware of an inward struggle while on earth. This point is further brought out by St. Paul where he shows concern with the body and its component members, namely, with the human being as he actually is, a sentient creature with a sexual life. It is in the body that man lives morally and religiously. However, even if tyrannized by the 'flesh', by sin and by death – (in this sense it is 'a body of flesh', a 'body of sin' and a 'body of death') – it is not doomed to perish. According to the biblical tradition it is destined to live through resurrection. The principle of this renewal is the Spirit, which takes the place of the psyche and transforms the body of the Christian into the likeness of the risen body of Christ. Until this ultimate deliverance takes place, the body of the Christian, provisionally delivered from the 'flesh' by its union with Christ's death, is even now the home of the Holy Spirit, who produces in it a new life of righteousness and holiness, which is meritorious and gives glory to God.

Ultimately, a morality motivated by love, respect and service appears to be the only morality that can help heal the present-day situation; a morality capable of repairing the hateful polarization that exists between men today, convinced, that while violence changes nothing, love changes everything.

Violence in a sense is a form of darkness. In contrast love may be gentle; but it has the power of light and in it we find great strength. Love (along with compassion, understanding and receptivity) is like light which gently but very effectively overcomes darkness. Violence could either be self-inflicted, that is, inflicted by the subject on his very self; or else violence could be inflicted on others. But we do cause violence, which is, as such, an expression of our sinfulness, in proportion to our ignorance of our spiritual identity. Violence however, will be part of our human experience as long as we cherish the unconscious desire to confirm ourselves as a physical entity apart from our Creator. In Pauline terms, it is the case of the unspiritual person who is interested in what is unspiritual. Violence is healed by helping a person to go beyond his assertive materialism as he learns to walk in the Spirit, in order not to fulfil the lust of the flesh. Walking in the spirit involves the realization that we are essentially spiritual in nature, and that the violent and exciting ways of the carnal mind do not move the spiritual man anymore.

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ANALECTA CRACOVIENSA  
ANGELICUM  
ARCHIVO TEOLOGICO GRANADINO  
ASPRENAS  
ANALECTA TOR  
BIBLE TRANSLATOR  
BULLETIN D'INFORMATION DE L'ACADEMIE THEOLOGIQUE - VARSOVIE  
CARMELUS  
CATHOLIC BIBLICAL QUARTERLY  
COLLECTANEA THEOLOGICA  
CRISTIANESIMO NELLA STORIA  
CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION  
EAST ASIAN PASTORAL REVIEW  
ESCRITOS DEL VEDAT  
EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY  
FRANCISCANUM  
HOMILETIC AND PASTORAL REVIEW  
HUMANISTICA E TEOLOGIA  
INTERNATIONALE ZEITSCHRIFTENSHAU FUR BIBEL WISSENSCHAFT UND  
GRENZGEBIETE  
IRISH THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY  
JOURNAL OF ECUMENICAL STUDIES  
JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY  
JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY  
JURIST  
LATERANUM  
LOUVAIN STUDIES  
MANUSCRIPTA  
MARIANUM  
MEDICINA E MORALE  
MELITA HISTORICA  
MISSIONE OGGI  
MULINO  
NEW LITURGY  
NEW TESTAMENT ABSTRACTS  
NICOLAUS  
OLD TESTAMENT ABSTRACTS  
PAROLE DI VITA  
PARROCCHIA  
PRESENZA PASTORALE  
PROYECCION  
RASSEGNA DI TEOLOGIA  
RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS  
RENOVATIO  
RICERCHE BIBLICHE E RELIGIOSE  
RIVISTA DEL CLERO ITALIANO  
RIVISTA DI TEOLOGIA MORALE  
SACRA DOCTRINA  
SCRIPTURE IN CHURCH



SCUOLA CATTOLICA  
SPIRITUALITY TODAY  
STROMATA  
STUDIA PATAVINA  
STUDIUM  
STUDIUM OVETENSE  
SYNAXIS  
TEOLOGIA  
THEOLOGICAL STUDIES  
UST JOURNAL  
VIA MONASTICA  
VITA SOCIALE

## **NEW EXCHANGES**

ARCHIVO TEOLOGICO GRANADINO: an annual publication by the 'Facultad de Teologia', Granada, Spain, dealing specifically with the history of post-Tridentine theology.  
PROYECCION: a theological quarterly from the 'Facultad de Teologia', Granada, Spain.  
SYNAXIS: a publication of the 'Istituto per la Documentazione e la Ricerca San Paolo', Catania, Sicily, to make readers appreciate more the religious, cultural and historical heritage of Sicily.  
UST JOURNAL: an annual publication of the 'Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas', Manila, Philippines, containing articles on theology proper and others, helping us to familiarise ourselves with the local scene. Subjects such as popular religiosity, native beliefs, Filipino-Muslim-Christian relations are treated by various scholars.



In 1975 Mid-Med Bank Limited was established to take over the business of Barclays Bank International Limited in Malta and Gozo. Barclays had originally taken over, 50 years earlier, the business of the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, which bank had been established in Malta since 1881! So, in reality, though we are only 10 years old, our foundations were laid over 100 years ago.

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