

THREE RELIGIOUS TOPICS FOR THE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL BY THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY

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THE ROLE OF FAITH IN THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY

Personality grows through inter- personal relationships; that is, the person or the self has to transcend or go beyond himself and reach out to another in faith, trust and love. This involves one's accepting another. Accepting another requires faith since accepting another means accepting him *totally* while knowing him only *partially*. If a man is incapable of thus accepting another, he will be condemned to be imprisoned in himself and he will suffocate and die. He will never grow and become a person.

What do we mean by accepting another? What does it imply?

It is a sensitive reaching out to him in faith and trust believing in his worth as a unique human being capable of almost infinite growth. It is an unqualified acceptance of the other as he is. It is reaching out to his possibilities. It demands faith.

Acceptance like this gives a man confidence in himself and in his potentialities. And it engenders in him the desire to actualize them; in other words, to grow and develop himself. Once we understand this, we also understand why none of us can ever hope to grow and become fully ourselves if we lack this total acceptance. We are all too painfully conscious of our own shortcomings. The little desire we have for our self-improvement soon withers and dies when we lack encouragement, love and acceptance from those we love.

It can of course happen that our faith in another is misplaced. But it is better to sin by placing too much faith in another than to sin by having too little! For the one who betrays our faith in him may still redeem himself, while our lack of faith may totally ruin him. Let us not forget that it is our faith in him that acts as a prod and a goad to spur him to ever greater and greater achievement. Let us also remember that love is an act of faith and whoever is of little faith is also of little love.

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Personality growth depends on communication. True communication begins when we not only accept another but accept him with delight despite his faults and frailties. It is when we open ourselves to another in faith and trust that he reaches into himself with confidence and brings out the best in him.

Why is it then we find true communication difficult? Why is it that we build walls? Why is it that we do not reach out to our fellow men? Why is it we go through life as poor, pitiful human beings, mere caricatures of what we could be?

The answer is not too far to seek. We lack faith in ourselves and others. And without faith we cannot grow and develop and become fully human.

THE INCARNATION AS BUILDING

To make any sense of "The Incarnation As Building" we have to summon to our aid the Teilhardian vision of man and the universe. According to this vision, man is a part of the evolving universe and the universe is itself in the process of Christogenesis. Man and the universe being processes are capable of almost infinite modification, development and progress and infinite possibilities open up before man. This in itself is most wonderful and exciting. But when we realize that this almost infinite development is dependent on man's conscious choice and decision our wonder and excitement know no bounds. Man is called upon to give conscious direction to the evolution of the universe. But on second

thoughts, we are filled with awe and terrified at the frightening responsibilities placed upon his all too fragile shoulders.

Teilhard holds the view that to all appearances, the ultimate perfection of the human element was achieved many thousands of years ago. Then what is the difference between ourselves, citizens of the twentieth century, and the earliest human beings? The difference is seen in the realm of self-knowledge. We have a better understanding of our place in the universe. We have come to see ourselves as part of a vast and continuing process. We now realize that our mission in the world is to serve the work proceeding in the universe. We have discovered that there is a whole of which we are the parts. We have found the world in our own souls. This represents a genuine enlargement of our separate personalities. We thus have a progressive realisation of the universality of things surrounding each of us. The man of today acts in the knowledge that the choice he makes will have its repercussions through countless centuries and upon countless human beings. He feels in himself the responsibilities and the power of an entire universe.

Teilhard says, "through the unceasing operation of the Incarnation, the divine so thoroughly permeates all our creaturely energies that in order to meet it and lay hold on it we could not find a more fitting setting than that of our action." This means that creation and incarnation are ongoing processes and man, even by the humblest of his works can serve to complete them. There is an interrelation between matter, soul and Christ. With each one of his works, he labors to build the Pleroma; that is to say, he brings to Christ a little fulfillment.

(Christ fulfills himself gradually through the ages in the sum of man's individual labors.) So without the striving of every human cell to unite with all the others, the Parousia would be physically impossible. All human effort serves this purpose. According to Teilhard, "the whole world's industrial, aesthetic, scientific and moral endeavours serve physically to complete the Body of Christ whose charity animates and recreates all things."

Furthermore, "the power of the Word Incarnate penetrates matter itself; it goes down into the deepest depths of the lower forces. And the Incarnation will be complete only when the part of the chosen substance contained in every object, given spiritual import once in our souls, and a second time with our souls in Jesus, shall have rejoined the final centre of its completion. And it is through the collaboration that he stimulates in us that Christ, starting from all created things, is consummated and attains his plenitude."

All men are called to assist in this work. Through their work men must turn the world into a fitting abode for Christ. The universe must be unified. It continues to be the clay in which the creator shapes innumerable possibilities. Man must make the greatest possible effort to make the universe more supple and more fully animate. Teilhard says, "in our hands, in the hands of all of us, the world and life are placed like a Host, ready to be charged with the divine influence, that is to say, with a real presence of the Incarnate Word."

Man's salvation is pursued and achieved in solidarity with others. Individual efforts attain completion in their union with the efforts of all men. It is impossible to love Christ

without loving others. It is impossible to love others without moving nearer to Christ.

The Incarnation then is an invitation to all men to incarnate themselves in the world, to become one with the world. It is an invitation to all men to take upon themselves the miseries of the world and work to reduce them. It is an invitation to all men to collaborate in building the world.

CHRISTIANITY AS THE ACCEPTANCE OF A PERSON

Acceptance is a conscious act; therefore done by a conscious agent and done deliberately for a purpose. A conscious being can accept an idea but an idea cannot accept a person and enter into a conscious, deliberate relationship with him. In other words, an idea cannot accept a person the way a person can accept an idea or another person. This means that only two persons can mutually accept each other; that is, form a love relationship. A love relationship implies mutuality and reciprocity--taking and giving. So, if christianity is a religion of love, as it claims to be, then it must be the acceptance of a person, since as we have said only persons can enter into a love relationship. This explains the whole drive behind christian mysticism--the attainment of union with the beloved--God.

It is of course true that men are moved by ideas. But we do not see ideas per se strutting about claiming men's allegiance, loyalty, love and sacrifice! What happens is that great ideas incarnate themselves in a cause and different such causes are espoused by men. But even here, it is not to mere causes that men give their loyalty and

love. Men give their loyalty and love to a person who is imbued by these causes and their urgency. When he calls people spontaneously respond to him. Their response becomes all the more compelling when they see that his life is a shining testimony to their worth. What gives power to these causes is the personal testimony and integrity of the man who espouses them. Thus it is that when the noble christian ideals are embodied in Christ they acquire a power and potency that they could never achieve or command by themselves. Christianity which claims man's total allegiance "He who is not with me is against me" can only be the acceptance of and commitment to a person.

We can arrive at the same conclusion by starting at this claim: total commitment.

Total commitment of what?

Of our person.

Total commitment to what, to an idea or to a person?

Evidently, it cannot be to an idea! It would be degrading and disgraceful for man to commit himself to something abstract and impersonal; something in every way inferior to him. The object which claims his allegiance and commitment must at least be a person. Having arrived at this conclusion, let us further ask: what kind of person must he be who can claim--not only can claim but insists on claiming and brooks no denial--this total commitment of our person to him? That person cannot be our equal. Besides, he

must be in a position to claim our total and unqualified devotion. Now who can have such claim on man but God, if man is to keep his dignity?

We might go another step.

Why does God demand this total commitment? Does he need it?

We may say "yes" in a manner of speaking. Any way it is more flattering to us.

Why does he need it?

So that he, in turn, can commit himself to us and enter into a personal relationship with us; that is, enter into a love relationship with us.

And why does he want to establish a love relationship with us?

To enrich us, to make us share in his riches.

And what about him? Do we enrich him?

Yes, we do, too! Because we are free. We can deny him our love. And that can make him poor! We can refuse this free commitment, for he wants this love relationship to be free, totally free on our part. Then only has it meaning for him.

And why does he insist on this free total commitment?

Because he knows that it is in him alone we will find the fullness of our being; the fullness of being achieved through the free and total acceptance of two persons of each other. And that is Christianity.