



CONFERENCE II

The rise of the religious in Europe: creativity from memory

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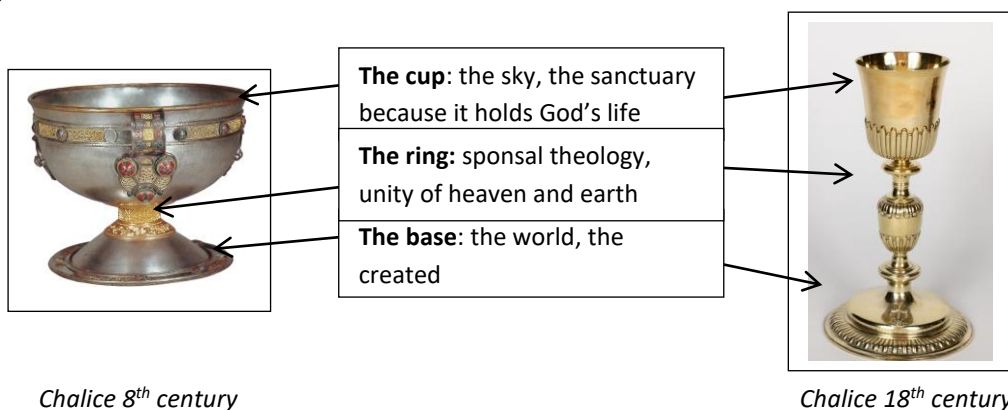
1. Anticipation of the Kingdom
 - a. Monastic life and then religious life has always been seen as a prophetic vocation, an anticipation of the new times and of the manifestation of the Kingdom. Because it is about the explicit manifestation of divine life received in baptism, that is, a humanity lived in Christ, as the humanity of Christ, it is obvious that what we have emerging here is an eschatological reality.
 - b. Although mission is carried out in this world, the true homeland of monastics and religious has always been the eschaton, so they have been like pilgrims and strangers in this world.
 - c. For a good understanding of the eschatological nature of religious life (today almost completely absent, and in any case clamorously inefficient and unconvincing), it will be worthwhile to take a theological and historical itinerary through some strong figures in the Bible, figures that are valuable and fundamental for monastic and religious life.

2. The principal figures of passage presented to us in the Bible take us
 - a. from the *image* of God to the *likeness* of God.
 - b. Abram and his vocation to uproot himself and make for the new land.
 - c. Jacob and his sons, with the dramatic passage of Joseph to a strange country.
 - d. Moses and the exodus from slavery to the Promised Land.
 - e. Christ, whose call sets humanity on the march.
 - f. Christ's Pasch as the passage to the Father.
 - g. The Eucharist as the passage to the eschaton.
 - h. Monastic and religious life as testimony of passage to sonship, to the Father and to the Kingdom, because it is the revelation of life in Christ.
 - i. Life in Christ is the life of communion in the Holy Spirit as children of the Father. Religious life is the testimony of communion in relationships, in friendship and in love, all plunging into the life of the Trinity.
 - j. This life of communion is the principle of the transfiguration of creation (freeing it from sin) through the work that liturgically flows into sacrament, to the manifestation of creation redeemed.

3. The first great crisis of this monastic religious setting
 - a. Entering the Empire, facing an enormous multitude of Christians with no experience of salvation and therefore without a personal/community experimental knowledge of Christ and the life of the Triune God in which they had been called to share, means and methods were sought to explain the phenomenon of faith.
 - b. The language that developed was predominantly philosophical, conceptual and rational.
 - c. Consequently, there were great developments of ethical judgments about behaviour, about thought, and about action.

- d. After a while, practically the whole real world of God was replaced by an elaborate framework of idealistic thought, an absolutely rationalistic approach.
- e. If, previously, the *heart* had been the organ of faith, the centre of human integrity, now *reason* became the organ of faith, and the whole discourse about faith was transferred from relationship to content. And thus was born the modern age's absurd conflict between faith and reason.
- f. Faith is becoming a sort of religion in itself; it no longer concentrates on passage or communion or even of life, because a rationalistic framework such as this only works through raising itself on morality.
- g. There is no life, no faith and no love among the concepts and ideas being transmitted.
- h. Little by little we are losing the famous noumeno (essence of things) and concentrating only on phemonema, on what is earthly life.
- i. We are very idealistic about Christ's humanity, but it is no longer for us the place of passage from creation to redemption, and from a merely human to the human-divine life.

We have moved towards dualism, individualism... we have this mentality behind us!
...that can be seen in the liturgy, which makes visible what the Church is internally.



Chalice 8th century

Chalice 18th century

- Chalices in the first millennium are broad because one never drinks alone, we drink as the body of Christ, because we live a life no longer connected to the blood of the parents but to the blood of Christ: the blood of Christ is a life in communion, the whole Church drinks.
- The cup and the base are very close.

- The cup: it says many things! There is space for only one person, only one drinks because divine life comes to me, for me... people do not understand that **divine life** is not only for the community **but it is communion!** Christ is not an individual, he is a person par excellence!
- The cup and the base: huge distance between heaven and earth.

4. Religious life, occupied in works for building a better society

- a. finds itself with 3 poles: an abstract, rationalistic, scientific and academic theology; large works structured in an almost parastatal system; people affecting to be religious but nourishing themselves on devotion that is untheological, sentimental, individualistic and intimistic.
- b. all this prevailed when the general political culture was still formally sustained by the ecclesial Christian spirit. Once modern pluralism burst on the scene, the larger nations with a strong catholic or protestant tradition imploded in the space of a few years. Many are asking how this is possible, and are beginning to take up

sociological and cultural studies; the thing speaks for itself and is quite obvious. Christianity, reduced to a simple “religion”, will have human foundations, its faith based on human skill, human ability instead of on the power of God and the action of the Holy Spirit. Life has been diminished.

5. Failure of attempts at recovery. Curious absence of the ontological aspect in spirituality, no one teaches any more how to remain in Christ.
 - a. Transfiguration has vanished from our churches.
 - b. Resurrection has vanished from our churches.
 - c. The divine humanity of Christ has vanished, and ours with it.
 - d. Pneumatology is no longer part of any theological, ecclesiological, or pneumatological discussion.
 - e. Eschatology has vanished from the scene, having for a long time now been idealism.
 - f. Pastoral theology is becoming a question of methodology and socio-cultural psychology.
 - g. Formation is becoming psychology-centred, a kind of secularised spirituality.
 - h. New thoughts, new theories, new methodologies are continually being invented. But the desired effects do not happen.
 - i. An almost neurotic search for what is new, resulting in new theories, new forms, new approaches and methods.

6. Religious life faces two basic styles:
 - a. That of **religion**, that is, of human beings who are products of an anthropocentric culture which, in the name of an ideal, spiritual, divine, religious world seeks to improve the situation of humanity and of society. That of baptismal **communion**, in which through the Holy Spirit we are grafted into Christ, and in Christ enter into relationship with the Father.
 - b. In the first case we continue to compete with the world or to lose ourselves in the world, imprisoned in the dialectic between ideal and reality. In this case, we continue to run behind small and absolutely insignificant cultural phenomena from time to time suggested by or induced by anthropological culture. We have witnessed how often in the last decades we have run after the things of this world, seeking to be, at all costs, attractive, convincing and up to date. This is a consequence of the deviation explained above, which began long before with a true spiritual sclerosis in which the Christian life was no longer understood as a manifestation or theophany, but as attainable by human effort. We are always oscillating between what we are required to do to attain the proposed ideal and the lassitude and sleep caused by a wearisome morality. It is curious that we have planned all our catechesis starting from the commandments and from creation (the rational, ideal approach) and not from the redemption. All our theology starts from philosophy, *Of the One God*, instead of beginning from the life of the Spirit, and thus from *The Triune God*. Thought, learning and planning have always been, and still are, the point of departure. The conviction has always been that Christianity is a form of culture; and in fact, our contemporaries know us through our ethical and moral principles but not through our manifestation of the new life. It is impossible to reclaim religious life from this aspect, because it is impossible to reclaim communion. Everything becomes human endeavour, entirely reducible to the merely socio-psychological level, not to the level of grace. Without communion it is impossible to create *beauty*; beauty as the realisation of God’s love in our human history, the anticipation of fulfilment in Christ. Beauty makes present in this world and in its present history what the sacrament reveals as

eschaton. It is the principle of transfiguration. In fact, we have to admit that, in our attempt to renew religious life, our outstanding failure or area of neglect is the attainment of beauty (one only has to look at our houses, chapels, community life). We have fallen into the renaissance trap of equating beauty with opulence. Forgetting the true life in the Spirit, we have also forgotten that beauty is linked with holiness.

- c. In the second case, a new road is opening, inspired by a sapiential memory full of life and creativity. This second road represents a real break with our present outlook and most contemporary research. It is a true and fitting discovery of Tradition, a true initiation into the new life and communion, and it makes us understand that newness is not a matter of form and is not found in theories, but in knowledge of the Other, in knowledge through relationships. It is a knowledge that comes through love, which passes all knowledge, and which discovers that newness brings a continuous nourishment of the luminous depths of ecclesial communion, because absorbed into divine communion.

7. The experiences of Eastern Europe teach us

- a. Not knowing how to appreciate its experience under communism and how to make it into a theological and pastoral treasury, the East has run in haste to take on the present ways of Western religious life, and so has lost its principal characteristic, the treasury of the Spirit; and today finds itself almost without the aspect of communion.
- b. The Eastern experience of Orthodox monasticism testifies to the tradition of that sapiential memory, communion and transfiguration.
- c. The exchange of gifts is evidently inviting us to have the courage to abandon the methods of past centuries and embrace the way of prophecy, life, beauty and wisdom.

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