Horizons and Transpositions

Prof. Gerald McCool of Fordham University has recently given us an illuminating study of the influences that led Pope Leo XIII to write the encyclical, Aeterni Patris, and thereby to impose the doctrine of Aquinas on Catholic teaching of philosophy and theology. To his book, moreover, Prof. McCool has added an article Scholasticism, on its initial vigor and, since the pastoral council, Vatican II, on its subsequent decline (McCool 1977, 1978).

Both the book and the article are relevant to our topic. For the word, horizon, denotes a range or field of a person's interests and knowledge, and Fr. McCool's studies have set before us not only many different persons but also not a few different horizons and even a few changes of horizon.

Now a change of horizon takes one out of the field of deductive logic. As long as one is simply logical, one remains within the same horizon. As soon as one changes one's horizon, one begins to operate in virtue of a minor or major change in one's basic assumptions. Such a change may be just a jump but also it may be a genuine transposition, a restatement of an earlier position in a new and broader context.

Our present concern is to illustrate the notion of a genuine transposition. To this end first we ask whether there was anything genuine about the process that transplanted the gospel from the religious soil of Palestine to the arid context of Greek speculation. Next we shall ask what constituted the golden

age of Scholasticism and what led to the breakdown of theology in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Finally we shall ask whether there were oversights in the nineteenth century resurgence of Thomism that account for the debacle that followed the pastoral council, Vatican II.

Throughout it is to be noted that, when a horizon shifts, its later stage cannot be deduced from its earlier stage. It follows that the genuineness of a transposition cannot be a logical conclusion. Here as elsewhere the criterion of genuineness is authenticity. It is a summit towards which one may strive and, only through such striving, may one come to some fuller yet still imperfect participation of what Augustine and Aquinas named Uncreated Light.

The Transition from a Palestinian to a Hellenistic Horizon

For the followers of the History of Religions School it has long been a commonplace that the high christology of the Christian church emerged under the dominance of a Hellenistic milieu. It happens, however, that in the recent decade this commonplace has come under fire both on its Palestinian and on its Hellenistic front.

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Tübingen in 1973 (revised and published in German in 1975 and translated and published in English in 1976) the well-known specialist in comparative studies of Judaism and Christianity, Martin Hengel, has maintained that the letters of Paul to Galatians, to I and II Corinthians, and to Romans,

a) are the earliest, certainly authentic Christian documents we possess,

b) teach a high christology, and

c) are expressed in language of Palestinian origin.

Since scholarly work cannot be summarized effectively, I must be content to repeat Hengel's contention that, if high christology emerged under the dominance of a Hellenistic milieu, then more happened in the first two decades of Christian history than in the subsequent seven centuries (Hengel 2).

Activity on the Hellenistic front calls for more ample treatment. Eric Voegelin, a historian and not a metaphysician, has written a highly illuminating article entitled "Reason: The Classic Experience" (Voegelin 1974). I quote:

> I shall not deal with the "idea" or (with) a nominalist "definition" of Reason but with the process inreality in shich concrete human beings, the "lovers of wisdom" as they styled themselves, were engaged in an act of resistance against the personal and social disorder of their age. From this act there emerged the Nous as the cognitively luminous force that inspired the philosophers to resist and, at the same tiem, enabled them to recognize the phenomena of disorder in the light of a humanity ordered by the Nous. Thus, Reason in the noetic sense was discovered as both the force and the criterion of order. Thus Reason in the noetic sense was discovered as the criterion and the force of order (237).

I have been reproducing the second paragraph of Voegelin's article in The Southern Review. It states clearly and succinctly his viewpoint. For him the Sitz im Leben of Platonic and of Aristotelian philosophy was personal morality and social order. Yet to reach that interpretation of the high point of Greek philosophy one has to be familiar, from personal experience,

both with what Michael Polanyi refers to as "tacit knowledge" and with the symbols and signs of the transition from what is tacit to what is explicitly expressed. Or again one has to be aware both of Fr. Doran's primary process and of the intermediate zone that lies between it and his secondary process. Or to speak with Wittgenstein one has to place Polanyi's tacit knowledge as the starting-point for trying to show what as yet one cannot say. Or, finally, to speak with Vernon Gregson and Robert Doran, one has to grasp how exactly they describe my book, Insight, when they name it a set of exercises in intellectual therapy.

Now let me briefly recall how my own intellectual therapy has advanced since writing Insight, before I proceed to a brief outline of key elements in Voegelin's earlier and longer paper on "The Gospel and Culture."

Traditionally "nature" is an immanent principle of movement and rest, but for present purposes we are led from such generality to what is more specific and so multiple. We distinguish in man a series of horizontal processes traversed by a vertical process. On the successive levels of sensitivity, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility each horizontal process has its own principle yielding moments first of movement and then of rest. Across them, as it were, the vertical process rises from an undifferentiated eros (commonly referred to as the unconscious), influences in turn each of the horizontal processes, and finds in proper goal beyong them in a self-transcending being-in-love that reaches from actuation in the home to actuation in the civil community only to find its anchor and its strength in the agape of the New Testament.

The basic horizontal process is the spontaneity of our sensitivity. Undifferentiated eros, pregnant with dreams and fantasies, memories and anticipations, is oriented by our perceptions of persons and things, and is powered by our feelings of desire and fear to pour itself out in movement and action.

But spontaneous vitality can shift to give place to the wonder and detachment of intelligence. In itself such a pause is tacit, but it can come to be expressed in questions such as why, what, how, how often, what for. Whether tacit or expressed, wonder leads to insight revealed commonly in a quiet smile but at great moments in an Archimedean shout of triumph.

One insight leads to other complementary insights. It may do so tacitly or explicitly: tacitly in the genesis of common sense; methodically and elaborately in the genesis of science. There is a tacit process of learning that watches the performance of others, endeavors to imitate it, fails perhaps repeatedly only to watch ever more intently until we have caught the knack, mastered the technique, brought performance to a routine. But there is the explicit process of the scientist who formulates just what the insight adds to the data, selects from them just as much as is needed for the recurrence of the insight, goes on to work out presuppositions and implications, designs processes of testing that may eliminate unnecessary suppositions or add others that are needed, determines whether the consequences all follow whenver the data needed for the insight are present, and whether they may equally follow when some of the conditions are dropped.

On the accumulation of insights a new principle supervenes. There is the pause of reflection, which ceases to be tacit and

and becomes explicit when we ask, Is that possible? probable? certain? In philosophy such questions demand elaborate answers. In the sciences there is a continuity in which reorganizations and even revolutions preserve what is sound in previous work and so can argue that, since the new explains more than the old, it has a claim to greater probability. Finally, in common sense abstract principles give place to reassuring proverbs; universal affirmations are not very seriously entertained; amusement at mistakes discourages their repetition; and familiarity with one's daily task, with one's circle of friends and acquaintances, with the routines of successful collaboration, all give birth to the security to which Macbeth appealed when he addressed, "Thou sure and firm-set earth on which I tread."

The addition of reflection and judgment to accumulated and complementary insights places us in a world of greater or less truth and reality, and then there supervenes the question for responsibility. It takes successive forms. The self-regarding form asks, What is in it for me? The legalistic form asks, What does the law say, what does it imply, what does it enforce? The strictly moral form raises the question of value. Are my goals worth while? Are they making me an authentic person?

Such are the successive horizontal processes from discrete principles towards movement and eventually to rest. But running through them all is the vertical drive from undifferentiated eros to agape. It transmutes our sensitivity from a biological function into the carrier of artistic inspiration, into an instrument of practical and theoretical intelligence, into an embodiment of wisdom's concern for the true and the good.

I have been attempting to outline a context for Voegelin's account of the classic experience of reason (1974). But that paper followed on another and longer paper entitled "The Gospel and Culture" (1971). There he had asked why Christianity could come to dominate the decaying empire of Rome and the subsequent history of Europe, yet today experiences an inability to gain a hearing in the modern world (51). His answer comes from the introduction to the Dialogue with Trypho. Justin had tried to live by many philosophies but set them aside when he discovered in Christianity, not something opposed to Philosophy, but Philosophy in its state of perfection (60). But what Justin could discern, our age cannot for, if the answer is still available, still the question has been lost. We ask about the meaning which must be given to the fact of existence, but existence is

"... not a fact. Rather it is the non-fact of a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfilment, and ultimately of life and death" (62f).

On the ultimate, life and death, he stressed the ambiguity disturbingly stressed by Euripides ("Who knows if to live is to be dead, and to be dead to live?"), by Jesus ("Whoever would save his live will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"), by Paul ("If you live according to the flesh, you are bound to die; but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live"). In brief, "There is a direction in existence; and as we follow it or not, life can be death, and death be life eternal... The question expressed by the double meaning of life and death is the question of every man's existence, not only of the philosopher's... It is a question buttressed by the representative death suffered by

the deeds of the body, you will live"). In brief,

> There is a direction in existence; and as we follow it or not, life can be death, and death be life eternal... The question expressed by the double meaning of life and death is the question of every man's existence, not only of the philosopher's... It is a question buttressed by the representative death suffered by Socrates for its truth. Plato's Apology concludes with the ironic parting words to the judges: "But now the time has come to go. I go to die and you to live. But who goes to the better lot is unknown to anyone but the God" (66f).

In the Gospel of John, when a group of Greeks approach the apostoles with the Greek names, Philip and Andrew, in the hope of speaking with Jesus, the symbolic meaning of life and death is applied to the divine sacrifice. "Most solemnly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Who loves his life loses it, but who hates his life in this world, keeps it for life eternal. If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and wherever I am, my servant will be too." And some verses later: "And I, when I am lifted up from this earth, will draw all men to myself" (68f).

Voegelin considered this double meaning of life and death as the symbolism engendered by man's experience of being pulled in various directions and his need to choose between them. For Plato "when opinion leads through reason toward the best and is more powerful, its power is called self-restraint, but when desire drags us toward pleasures and rules within us, its rule is called excess" (Phaedrus 238A). The pulls are in con-