

HORIZONS AND TRANSPOSITIONS

Prof. Gerald McCool of Fordham University has recently described the process that led Pope Leo XIII to write the encyclical, Aeterni Patris (McCool 1977). To his book he has added an article on twentieth-century Scolasticism, on its initial vigor and, since the pastoral council, Vatican II, its sustained desires (McCool 1978).

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

Now a change of horizon is a broader category than an inference in deductive logic. If one is simply logical, one's horizon remains unchanged. But with a change of 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 it can be a genuine transposition, a restatement of an earlier position in a new and broader context. The restatement maintains the continuity of the new with the old. The new context may enrich the old by its affinity or clarify it by its contrast

Our present purpose will be to illustrate this notion of transposition. We begin from Eric Voegelin's account of the classical Greek notion of reason and its affinity to fundamental themes of the gospel. We turn next to the clarification added

to the Christian apprehension of God by its contrast with Gnostic views. Thirdly, a fuller contact with a succession of Greek philosophies came with increasing understanding of the title, Son of God. Fourthly, a spontaneous development of theological method marked the creative period of Scholasticism, while its fourteenth-century decline was accompanied by a rigorous adherence to the incomplete notion of science set forth in Aristotle's Posterior Analytics. Finally, while the achievements of Vatican II were both needed and salutary, abandoning Scholasticism instead of replacing it has resulted more in the ingestion of extraneous developments than in their assimilation by transposition into a Catholic matrix.

Palestinian Origins and Hellenistic Culture

Two recent studies find in St. Paul the bridge from a Palestinian to a Hellenistic horizon.

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Tübingen in 1973, Martin Hengel ~~has~~ maintained that the letters of St. Paul to Galatians, to first and second Corinthians, and to Romans (1) are the earliest, certainly authentic Christian documents we possess, (2) teach a high christology, and (3) are expressed in language of Palestinian origin. To summarize, he contended 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).

A complementary piece is E. P. Sanders Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion. Reviewers have regarded it as "a major work which ought to make a great impact upon all future studies on Paul and Palestinian Judaism" (Dahl 157) and as worthy of virtually unstinted praise (Sandmel 159). Now it is Sanders' contention that, while there are common elements in Palestinian Judaism and Pauline Christianity, still the two differ as patterns of religion. Palestinian Judaism is conceived as a "covenantal nomism" but Pauline Christianity is conceived as a "participationist eschatology" (Dahl 157). In brief, the context of one is not the context of the other, and perhaps one might speak of a transposition of Judaism into a Christian context.

A different aspect of the matter is brought into view by Eric Voegelin's affirmation of a significant affinity between classical Greek philosophy and the teaching of the gospels. His basic step is to set aside notions of mind and reason derived from 14th century Scholasticism, 17th century rationalism, 19th century idealism. The basic concern of the philosophers, the "lovers of wisdom," was their resistance to the personal and social disorder of their age. In this concern, mind (nous) came to light as the cognitively luminous force that enabled men to recognize the phenomena of disorder and inspired them to resist it (Voegelin 1974, 237). We are invited, then, to envisage an age of plague, defeat, foreign domination in which the personal and social concern of Socrates was the root of resistance, the dialogical communication of Plato was the trunk, the treatises of Aristotle were the spreading branches. But for Voegelin what was important was not primarily the conversations, the written

dialogues, the treatises, but an event, an emergence and unfolding of existential concern, in the history of mankind (ibid. 200).

Such was the conviction that in an earlier paper enabled Voegelin to ask how Christianity could come to dominate the decaying ecumenic empire of Rome and the subsequent history of Europe, while today it experiences an inability to gain a hearing in the modern world (Voegelin 1971, 51). His answer came out of Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho. Justin had tried to live the life of a succession of philosophies, but he set them all aside when he discovered in Christianity, not something opposed to philosophy, but philosophy in its perfection. 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 existence. But existence is not some simple datum but rather 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, V. stressed the disturbing ambiguity stressed by Euripides ("Who knows if to live is to be dead, and to be dead to live"), by Jesus ("Whoever would save his life 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 authority of 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." (67)

In the gospel of John, when a group of Greeks approached the apostles 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 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. He refers to Plato in the *Phaedrus* (238A) where we learn that, when opinion through reason leads to the best and prevails, its power is called self-restraint; but when desire drags us towards pleasures and rules within us, its rule is called excess. The pulls are in conflict, lifting us up or dragging us down.

A young man may be "drawn to philosophy" (Republic 494E) but social pressure may divert him towards a life of pleasure or towards success in politics. If he follows the second pull,

however, the question of meaning is not settled for him, for the first pull continues to be experienced as part of his existence. By following the second pull he does not transform his existence into a question-free fact but into a recognizably questionable course of life. He will sense the life he leads not as his own true life (495C) but will live in a state of alienation. The play of the pulls thus is luminous with truth. By following the wrong course one does not make it the right one, but slides into existence-in-untruth. This luminosity of existence with the truth-of-reason precedes all opinions and decisions about the pull to be followed. Moreover it remains alive as the judgment of truth-in-existence whatever opinions about it we may actually form (71).

For Voegelin "the terms seeking and drawing do not denote two different movements but symbolize the dynamics of the tension of existence between its divine and human poles. In the one movement there is experienced both a seeking from the human and a being drawn from the divine pole." Such experience is prior to what we call Classic Philosophy. "Only from the travail of this movement there emerges man the questioner, Aristotle's aperōn and thaumazōn (Met 982b18) and God as the mover who attracts or draws man to himself, as in Plato's Laws X or Aristotle's Metaphysics" (71).

Now this experience of being at a loss and wondering is not something peculiar to a few fourth-century Greeks. Nor does it fit into the rationalistic separation and segregation of the natural and supernatural, so that we can speak of Plato and Aristotle as merely pagans, and banish their thinking from the Christian religion kept pure and undefiled. On the contrary,

the ascetical mystical tradition, that reputedly belongs to the upper regions of Christian thought and practice, has a millennial familiarity with the pulls and counter-pulls that constitute the tension of Christian experience, its ambiguities, the need for discernment if one is not to go astray, even for different rules to be followed under existentially different circumstances.

There is evidence then for the claim of Justin Martyr that Christianity is philosophy in its state of perfection. But primarily this is true only of philosophy in its basic meaning, namely, the love of wisdom. Voegelin himself would claim no more but at least he gives indications of the process that led Christian thought, ever so gradually, to the use of metaphysical discourse.

Notions of Divinity

In a collection of Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament and edited by James B. Pritchard (1950), there is included the translation of excerpts from a long hymn to Amon as the Sole God. It is understood monotheistically by Voegelin (1971): Amon is the god above the cosmic and the national gods, the source of their dignity and power, but unknown not only to men but even to these known gods (84f),.

However, while the cosmic gods in 19th dynasty Egypt derived their dignity and power from the unknown god, seven centuries later in deutero-Isaiah (40:12-25) they have become mere man-made idols. Now for Isaiah god is alone with himself and his ruach from the beginning (40:12-14) as was Amon, but he also is the god who revealed himself in creation (40: 21). This identification continues in the New Testament and in Christian tradition: the unknown god worshipped by the Athen-

ians was the one proclaimed by St. Paul (Acts 17: 23); and Irenaeus quotes a lost work of Justin claiming he would not have believed the Lord himself if he had announced some other God than the one who created and sustains us (Haer. IV 6 2).

This identification was opposed by Gnostic writers, and the opposition became virulent in the Apocryphon of John. In a summary by Hans Jonas "... Ialdabaoth... became inflamed with the virgin Eve, ravished her and begot with her two sons: Javē the bear-faced, and Eloim the cat-faced, among men called Cain and Abel to this day...." (Jonas). The creator God of the Hebrews was regarded as just another of the national gods.

Christians today experience no little difficulty in saying what they mean when they speak of God. They can be quite sympathetic with the Christians of the second, third and fourth centuries who, in fact, succeeded in making their meaning plain despite unrestrained interpretations of symbols and the many philosophies current in their time (Lonergan 1976, 110-127).

Indeed, while the Amon hymns are taken monotheistically by Voegelin, John A. Wilson, who translated them, would question whether the ancient Egyptians acknowledged any difference of substance among men, gods, and other elements of the universe. And he concludes: "With relation to gods and men the Egyptians were monophysites: many men and many gods, but all ultimately of one nature" (Frankfurt 66). But on Voegelin's behalf one might retort that distinctions in substance or in nature are ^{ancient} philosophic. Among/Egyptians one may surmise that they were even less common than they are today. Without a philosophic commitment, one cannot attempt basic clarity,

The Son of God

If anyone comes to agree with Prof. Hengel's contention that a high christology is meant by Paul in his great epistles, if he goes on to inquire just what the basic meaning of high christology could be, in all probability he will have to work through a dialectical series of philosophic positions not altogether dissimilar to those confronted by successive Christian writers from the apologists through the Alexandrians and up to Nicea.

Elsewhere I have outlined a skeleton of this dialectical process (Lonergan 1976, 18-136), but a personal appropriation of its import becomes possible only when one goes back over one's own experience and recalls to what extent one has oneself been through it.