

### Religious Commitment

In a public lecture at the University of Toronto in January 1968 Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Director of the Harvard Institute for World Religions, began by remarking that much fruitful energy had been devoted to exploring the religious traditions and reconstructing the history of the overt data on mankind's religious living. Both in detail and in wide compass the observable forms have been observed and the observations have been recorded. But Professor Smith went on to claim that a further, a more important, and a more difficult question must be raised. To live religiously is not merely to live in the presence of certain symbols but, he urged, it is to be involved with them or through them in a quite special way -- a way that may lead far beyond the symbols, that may demand the totality of a person's response, and may affect his relation not only to the symbols but to everything else, to himself, to his neighbor, to the stars.

This special involvement, Professor Smith claimed, pleads to be elucidated. And elucidate it he did by naming this involvement, faith, and by distinguishing ~~it~~ such faith from the imperatives, the rituals, the traditions, the beliefs, that inspire faith or are inspired by faith. So conceived, faith is not the prerogative of some particular church or religion. It is not faith as conceived in the First Vatican Council or in the Summa theologiae of Thomas Aquinas. ~~It~~ is rather the ~~infinitesimal~~ grace, sufficient for salvation, that theologians commonly hold God to grant to all men. It is something not merely ecumenical but universalist.

observable differences, within the subjectivity of the genuinely religious person

It prescind from specific beliefs. It is not merely ecumenical but universalist. Within Catholic theology it is on the level of the grace, sufficient for salvation, that God grants to all men.



In brief, there are many religions. In externals, in all that can be seen or heard, they differ enormously. But the more thoroughly one studies them, the more sympathetically one examines them, the more penetratingly one understands them, the more one is led to put the question, What is religious commitment? What ~~is~~ happens when religion becomes something a man or a woman commitment? What has happened to ~~one~~ when religion in him or her becomes something alive, effective, enduring, even transforming? Is there a common root to all religion, not only to all the Christian religions, but to all the religions of mankind?

This question is, I think, appropriate to the present time and place. It is appropriate to the present time, for the Roman Church has set up secretariats for Christian unity and for relations with non-Christian religions and, within that context, it becomes extremely important for Catholics to understand what they have in common, ~~with~~ first, with other Christians, and, secondly, with religious persons that are not Christian. It is appropriate to the present place, ~~in which~~ where, within the confines of a secular university, there exist a number of different theological schools that have come together to multiply their resources by sharing them. Clearly enough, anything that can promote mutual understanding and sincerity also promotes theological collaboration.

I have formulated a question and indicated its relevance. I must add something about the answer. In substance it will be theological. It is God's grace that makes religion ~~live~~ become alive, effective, enduring, transforming, and God gives to all men sufficient grace for salvation. In form it will

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capacity for God's grace. I shall speak of being religious,  
for that is the effect of God's grace. I shall speak of being  
Christian

divide into three topics. For I wish to give those familiar words, God's grace, a meaning in terms of personal religious experience. First, then, I shall speak of being human, for that is our capacity for God's grace. Secondly, I shall speak of being religious, for that is the effect of the gift of God's grace. Thirdly, I shall speak of being Christian, for it is in Christ Jesus that God's grace is revealed.

1. On Being Human

There is a minimal notion of what is meant by being human. It holds that a man is a man whether he is awake or asleep, young or old, sane or crazy, well or ill, sober or drunk, a genius or a moron, a saint or a sinner.

Thirdly, modern science presented the philosophers with a new paradigm of science. Science is not a matter of drawing necessary conclusions from self-evident and necessary premisses. It is an ongoing process in which each new advance brings one closer to the remote ideal ~~the~~ named truth. And as modern science so too modern mathematics is not conceived in terms of necessity. Modern mathematics draws conclusions that follow necessarily from its premisses. But its premisses are not ~~the~~, and even ~~these~~ necessary truths. They are just postulates ~~and~~ whether ~~they~~ has not been they are coherent or not, ultimately ~~these~~ demonstrated.



that results from the ruthless exercise of power, to despair about human welfare springing from the conviction that the universe is an absurd.

The fulfilment that is being in love with God is not the product of our knowledge and choice. It is God's gift. So far from resulting from our knowledge and choice, it is the source of the inquiry that leads to knowledge of God and the ground of the decision that gratefully <sup>accepts</sup> ~~accepts~~ God's gift. So

fourth and highest level of man's waking consciousness.

It takes over the peak of the soul, the apex animae.

I think many of you will grant that a basic component of religious <sup>commitment</sup> ~~involvement~~ among Christians is God's gift of his love. The more Christian they are, the more easily we discern in them St. Paul's harvest of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. But if we hold that God gives all men sufficient grace for their salvation, we must be ready to discern the same harvest of the Spirit in non-Christians. If we are ~~ena~~ engaged in the study of non-Christian religions now is the time for all study of Christian spirituality, we must work out a phenomenology of God's grace, of its workings, of man's reluctance. If we are engaged in the study of non-Christian religions,

the unknown. The transcendent is the negation of all things finite, all that we easily say exists. To say of something that it exists, is to objectify it, and such objectification is a withdrawal from the ultimate solitude of the mystical state. The alleged atheism of the Buddhist may be the expression of a non-objectifying experience.

Again, at a far earlier stage, transcendence may be over-emphasized and immanence overlooked. Then God becomes remote, irrelevant, almost forgotten. Inversely, immanence can be over-emphasized and transcendence over-looked. Then the loss of reference to the transcendent will rob symbol, ritual, and recital of their proper meaning to leave them merely idol and magic and myth. Then, too, the divine may be identified with life as universal process, so that the individual and the group are conceived as part of the divine and participation in it.