

CHRISTIAN SUBJECTIVITY.

When we give testimony as to what Jesus and his Holy Spirit have done for us we are giving external expression to our internal experience. We are thus entering into a new manner of giving voice to truth. We call this our Subjectivity and , as we shall see, each one's subjectivity is utterly unique. It seems at first a very shaky ground on which to build a general science. Nevertheless there is one entity which unites us and this entity is both human, totally human, and divine, totally divine. This entity is the same "*yesterday, today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8) and so we have a basic, unmovable starting point on which a sure science of subjectivity can be built. This eternal "still point" was called , by his adopted father, 'Jesus' at the bidding of his very real and spotless Mother. He is a totally stable starting point and thus the science that is built on him is more firmly grounded than any other science. Compared to this all of the so-called physical and biological sciences and all of the human sciences are just fairy tales.

It could not be otherwise! The Epistle of St. James makes clear the unmovable source from which our unmovable starting point was brought forth into our world:

" Make no mistake about this, my dear brothers: it is all that is good, everything that is perfect; which is given from above; it comes down from the Father of all lights; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change"

(James 1:16,17)

This does not mean that the Father does not act. Rather he is pure act, without any potentiality; he is endlessly compassionate, just as his Son is compassionate.

In speaking of the end times, Jesus was careful to point out that "*Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away*".Mt.24:35. So, not only Jesus but his words, his teachings are an incomparable basis for the science of Christian subjectivity.

This anchor for Christian subjectivity is only accessible through an act of faith which is possible when we become conscious that a revelation has been made to us through the teaching of Jesus the Christ. One knows when this has happened and that a total response is requested. As the Church explains in her documents, particularly the Vatican I document :*The Constitution on Catholic Faith*" and various Vatican II documents, especially "*The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*" the response to Jesus in faith must be absolutely free. It consists in the total submission of

one's whole self to Jesus, God and Man, offering the full submission of intellect and will to him and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him. This faith has the quality of being manifest externally and is accompanied by great joy and ease in believing the gospel. A relationship with Jesus is established enabling one to be carried along in one's life by the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

Let us study this relationship more closely, for this is the matter of Christian subjectivity, with profound relationships to the external world. For an external observer with eyes and ears:

“Now raised to the heights by God's right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.”

(Acts of Apostles 2:33)

The manifestations of the Holy Spirit are many and varied. There are not only answers to prayer, miracles, prophecies, signs and wonders which are readily seen by those with eyes to see. It is these realities which make a profound consonance between faith and reason. With the sure anchor of Christ Jesus, we can have no fear of living in an imaginative fairyland. A genuine manifestation of the Holy Spirit has the note of incarnation.

However, we have to be aware that the most obvious and sure manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the obvious and undeniable light, has been, for probably several centuries, in partial if not total eclipse. This light is fully explained by simple verses of scripture:

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

(Jn 13:35)

“Beloved, if God so loved us we also ought to love one another”

(1Jn 4:11)

There are over two dozen similar texts in the New Testament.

The reason this obvious manifestation of the Holy Spirit has been in eclipse is due to the steady deterioration of the Christian commonwealth since the sixteenth century. There were many factors contributing to this and every scholar may see a different path for the decline. Nevertheless it is obvious that from the eighteenth century onwards, Western civilization had repudiated its Christian origins.

There were, however, several significant figures who attempted to call the bluff of the scientific materialists, the evolutionists, the so-called exponents of the rational mode of consciousness. Such figures as Goethe, Swedenborg, Blake, Pascal and others, were not prepared to allow the barbarians to walk rough-shod over the visionary mode of consciousness. To them the Enlightenment *philosophes* had repudiated everything human.. But what about love? A poet celebrated by Czeslaw Milosz, a Nobel Prize winner for Literature was the Polish poet, Mickiewicz. A ballad of his which Milosz learnt in high school was called "The Romantic". It is the story of a village girl who wants to die with her dead true love Johnny. She laments bitterly. The last few verse of the poem are:

*Hearing what they are saying,
I, too start praying.*

*"The girl is out of her senses!"
Shouts a man with a learned air,
"My eye and my lenses
Know there's nothing there.*

*Ghosts are a myth
Of ale-wife and blacksmith.
Clodhoppers! This is treason
Against King Reason!*

*"Yet the girl loves," I reply diffidently,
And the people believe reverently:
Faith and love are more discerning
Than lenses or learning*

*"You know the dead truths, not the living
The world of things, not the world of loving
Where does any miracle start?
Cold eye, look in your heart!"*

(Translated by W.H. Auden)

Milosz laments that having heard this poem in the Literature class, they were herded into the natural-sciences lab for instruction in the use of the microscope. The lens was a trope for everything distasteful in the new learning, and the lens was simply the forerunner of the most sophisticated of modern technological devices.

Love is experienced in three created forms in the human person; love of life, love of friendship, love of God; Eros, Philia, Agape. In Christian knowledge, everything was created through and for the Son of God who, breaking into time and space, became the perfect Man. See for example St. Paul's epistle to the Colossians, 1:15-20. Thus, Jesus becomes the touchstone, the standard, of all expressions of love. It is here we must introduce a most important word which is a sign of a most important reality; the word 'relationship'. To be properly human one always has a relationship to an other person. In our science, the other person is Jesus the Christ. Some writers today, eg. Emanuel Levinas, refer the transcendent other as the Other., and reserve the small 'o' for use with other than the divine; another person or persons or a society of persons.

Our Other is always Jesus, who teaches us the glories of Eros, Philia and Agape. All are aspects of divine love.

The sad truth, however, is that the human condition after the Fall has been prone to disfigure the divine benevolence in many grotesque ways. Narcissus is easily made a substitute for the Other; This underlines the radical free choice which Dostoevsky saw so starkly; either man is God or God became Man. Our eternal destiny depends simply on the free choice, to love God more than ourselves. In short, either Jesus or his adversary, Satan.

It is not my intention to spend a great amount of time talking about Eros. The word is usually associated with sexual love but its ambit is far wider. It means entering in to and embracing the wonder of the human body and indeed of all created things. This most important aspect of Christianity is diametrically opposed to the negation of the body in many Eastern spiritualities. Christianity is not about escape from the body into the world of Eternal Returns. In fact, there is a dogma of Christian faith which speaks of the Resurrection of the Body for living both in eternal and everlasting life. Sexual love is a most important aspect of Eros, but not exclusively. Milosz describes the emotion he felt as a six year old when given a wooden toy squirrel by his mother and he recognised this emotion later as erotic before he had contemplated the face of a woman. To be in love with Being (*esse*) is to be in love with those uncorrupted things that Being provides, like sweet tree-ripened peaches. In addition Being calls us into

obedience to seek good by propagating the species. Sexual pleasure exists to call us into action to beget but never abandon the great good of the fruit of this action, the child. Being is synonymous with Love, which, to quote St. Thomas, is “naturally diffusive of itself”. Each child conceived is a unique “I”, along with every other unique “I”. There is thus established a Love given natural *philia*, the sons of God. It is this reality that has become drastically debased in the course of human history. The Judeo-Christian scriptures give the most coherent account of this calamity. In an attempt to reach back to their Creator by their own efforts, they became subject to a Babel of different languages, cultures, races and mimetic rivalries of many kinds and implications..

When René Girard describes the “I” as an interdividual person, this designation has to be carefully understood. He means that the pattern of our desires is taken from the desires of others. It does not mean that thereby we lose any trace of personal responsibility for our actions. Some writers, for example Martin Heidegger believes that one belongs to *Mitsein* (the hordes) first and foremost. Similarly the post-Marxist, Gombrowicz, claimed that our actions derive, not from within, from some mysterious centre of our person, but in response to the behaviour of others, in a specific and constantly shifting pattern. The inference is that we are automatons belonging to a horde. As evidence he called upon the 20th century, a century that had seen respectable persons, caught up in a pattern of mutual agitation and incitement, becoming grand scale butchers. Girard concedes that individuals can willingly join lynch mobs, taking their cues from the unanimity of the mob. The classic example is the unanimity of the mob which killed Jesus; Jewish, Roman and the followers of Christ but not yet Christian. Emanuel Levinas tells us that if an entire society is unanimous that a prisoner is guilty, he should be released immediately for he is certainly innocent.

Civilisation as we know it, stemming from centuries of Christian understanding, has sustained itself through a belief in the uniqueness of the individual human soul, as the source of our decisions to act upon our desires. There is a profound Christian belief that the soul’s good or evil intentions would tip the scale on the Day of Judgment., with the understanding, of course, that such intentions and consequent actions stem from living faith.

From the divine origin of each human person there arises the notion of chosenness.

“I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father, You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another”

(John 15:16,17)

Thus “chosenness” leads to responsibility. Joachim Duyndam has summarized for us the teaching of Levinas. I will try to summarise Duyndam. When we become face to face with the Other, we then have a responsibility for the Other. This is the source of *agape*. The same principle applies to *philia*. When we become face to face with the other, who is equally chosen, we have a responsibility for that other. The two commandments of the Law are perfected by the two commandments of Jesus the Christ.

“I give you a new commandment; love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another”

(John 13:34)

Levinas puts strong emphasis on the Face as the real source of chosenness and responsibility, thus emphasizing the loving gaze of the Other.

The experience of being chosen is something that occurs within the relationship with the Other. This is an internal realisation. Responsibility stems from this internality. Responsibility does not emerge from any external reality like, for example, a moral code or theory of ethics. These are secondary to responsibility.

Because this relationship between the Other and me is utterly unique, my responsibility is utterly unique. No one can take over from me for I am especially chosen.

Since uniqueness is a specific form of chosenness within a relationship, it is incomparable with the characteristics of someone else’s unique relationship. This is not the same as the often ascribed but overestimated quality of authenticity. You are not unique on your own in the same way as you can be authentic on your own.; you are unique and irreplaceable for someone; for friends, parents, your children ; for the other or the Other .

From this internal perspective on responsibility, I cannot say how responsibility would look for others in general. I would only know this if I were to leave the internal perspective and survey myself and others comparatively from an external perspective.

“Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you; a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back”

(Luke 6:36-38)

Being chosen is beyond compare and only has meaning from an internal perspective. To say that any person or group has been chosen from outside means that one is placing this person or group first. This applies more strongly if one speaks of oneself as chosen. This also happens from “outside”, usually through narcissistic mirroring. Some Christians are particularly prone to this possibility. However, from an internal perspective everyone can be ‘the only one’ unique and irreplaceable. This has profound implications when one is a member of a Christian community. It also has consequences for so-called secular communities, even if the light of chosenness is in total or partial eclipse.

LEVINAS AND GIRARD.

Levinas and Girard share several common insights into the human psyche . Being chosen with a consequent responsibility means that one may be suddenly called upon to account for that responsibility. Suddenly you are the only one!

Girard gives a wonderful example; the story of the adulterous woman:

“The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, ‘Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?’ They asked him this as a test, looking for something use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, ‘If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’. Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No

one , sir' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and don't sin any more.' “

From this very rich passage several themes can be drawn. Although no consensus has emerged among scholars as to why and what Jesus was writing on the ground, the episode is an object lesson in being chosen for responsibility, or rather, in this case, shirking that responsibility.

Being left alone with the adulterous woman, Jesus avoided being sacrificed as a scapegoat in her place, which it seems he was quite prepared to do. The mob had come together to get him to agree to the lynching. But the difference between the Old and New Testaments was established when Jesus said: 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'.

However not one of them was prepared to cast the first stone. The first stone has no precedent, there is no model. Girard is sure that our desires follow the example of others. If any one of the accusers could take responsibility for the first stone, the others would have a model to follow. The others would follow mimetically. This 'mechanism' is just as prevalent today as it was in Jesus' time. By placing the emphasis on the first stone Jesus makes each of the accusers responsible. Each one of them is unique, the only one chosen for responsibility. Responsibility inheres in the individual person as a concomitant of a relationship to the other or the Other.

Probably the temptation of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism is the most vehement temptation to which Christians are prone. It can be avoided only with the help of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father.

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See COV&R Website devoted to the influence of René Girard.