

## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL OPTION

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### ABSTRACT:

The suggestion is made that, in the interests of evangelisation within the learned world, and indeed in the political and cultural worlds, the emphasis should shift from philosophy to anthropology and consequently to theology. The immense contribution of Thomas de Vio to the licitness of theological language in rational terms should not be ignored, but seen as complementary to the non-rational anthropological insights of René Girard, whose research programme has blossomed in many fields, particularly theology. The centrality of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in his oeuvre is emblematic of new life and New Renaissance.

TEXT: " Christ posed the foundation of the new ethos with words which for their part demand a thorough grounding in anthropology." *John Paul !!*

The arguments put up by our Churchmen and Churchwomen in the embryonic stem cell debate were not successful. Churchmen and women usually try to address these questions in terms of Natural Law and medical indications, seeing perhaps that rational argument is the only approach to be taken in a secular society where faith and politics are presumed to be separate. The irony is that the electorate is largely influenced by faith in positivistic science in which Natural Law arguments are a foreign language. Modernism and its 'natural' development, postmodernism, both suffer from a common ailment, metaphysical deficiency. I am suggesting that an approach based on specifically Christian principles is more likely to succeed, being designed by the Holy Spirit to meet exactly the real human condition.

The famous woman philosopher, Raissa Maritain has said that " man is an animal who feeds on transcendentals". When transcendentals are in short supply, human ingenuity easily finds substitutes- the gods of mimetic desire- which are extremely destructive. An intensely developed material culture soaks up and replaces the need for transcendence in the human soul. Another famous woman philosopher, Simone Weil, has noted that the Gospels present an anthropology of man before they present a theology of God. It was the reversal of this observation which has landed Western civilisation into its current abyssal state. To establish the centrality of human transcendental dignity would seem to be the first step in leading the way out of the abyss. This depends on the New Man, Jesus and his Holy Spirit of the Promise. To move on from metaphysical rationality in the interests of evangelisation does not mean that metaphysics should be ignored. Indeed we may depend on it to establish the rationality of biblical language. An anthropological starting point, on the other hand, may call into question the very process of rational discourse itself, through its genesis in violence. Indeed, in a postmodern environment, rational discourse is futile.

Thomas de Vio, the famous Cardinal Cajetan, was an advocate of the immense heights, depths, lengths and breadths of human intelligence, but he did not succeed in persuading Luther not to take the fatal step of initiating the Reformation. Luther was beyond calling back from the brink. Nevertheless Cajetan's contribution may now be of immense importance. In order to make sense of what is happening in our

world we are exposed to an immense number of abstract concepts which we hope are drawn from the real world, Cajetan noted that this is characteristic of the human condition. We need thousands of concepts to try and grasp the real world; and yet, when we grasp the implications of a created universe we are aware of its essential unity and the interrelatedness of all its parts. Otherwise science would be impossible. To avoid our monumental fragmentary understanding we need to conceptualise relationships into an ever smaller number of concepts. This is a work of intelligence Cajetan has a principle: "The more efficacious an intellect the more from few (concepts) does it gather many (concepts)"

Cajetan reduced his own philosophy to three concepts or principles or theses which are:

(i) God alone is his own BE.

(ii) Acts, habits and powers are distinguished on the basis of their formal objects.

(iii) Being is analogous according to the analogy of proper proportionality.

Without going into detail, each of these principles have far reaching consequences, From(i) it follows that God is utterly simple and has only one concept which has the force of universally true knowledge and wisdom. Theologically, of course, he expresses this concept as his Son. God does not exist-everything else does because God IS. There are theological resonances with Moses at the Burning Bush, and, of course, the New Testament.

From(ii) for example we can never say what science is ( or any other discipline or combination of disciplines for that matter) but we can only distinguish between disciplines on the score of what they do. Disciplines without purpose are travesties. From (iii) the analogy of proper proportionality is distinguished from the analogy of attribution and is opposed to the metaphorical, which is a lesser form of analogy. For example, "good" is attributively analogous and can be applied to all good things with a difference of meaning, eg. good food, good weather, good health etc. However Cajetan was concerned with the logic of using analogous terms validly in logical arguments. He wanted to show that there is proper proportionality between some equivocal terms and univocal terms. For example , in speaking of mystical or transcendent realities we are constrained to terms applying to the senses. To "see:" is an analogous term meaning "to understand" and here "understand " is proportional to vision:

understanding : soul:: seeing : body

Wisdom is a transcendental and is clearly related to vision, to insight etc. Likewise we use expressions like " taste and see that the Lord is sweet"; "He that has ears to hear let him hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches"; "to get a touch from the Lord is so real", and so on. It would be difficult to read , say, the Psalms, without noting the link between the sense experience and the wisdom sustained by it.

Cajetan, it is thought, could see a metaphysical link between the analogy of proper proportionality and its referent. Can we see, say, a link between "gnashing of teeth" and its referent?

Such analogous concepts (meaning realities) are *like* seeing say, but they are *not* seeing and are *much more than* seeing.

Metaphors, on the other hand, often show proportionality but such proportionality is not proper. For example:

smile: field:: smile : face

The smile on the field might be due to a show of golden daffodils. The smile on the face might be due to a wry joke. This metaphor, although exhibiting a kind of proportionality is not proper in the same sense that "seeing" and inward "seeing" are

properly proportional. The etymological roots of "wisdom" sees wisdom as a "seeing", and the equivalent word "sapience" has a root relating to taste. Nevertheless, from Cajetan's second principle we cannot say what "seeing" is but only what it does. There is an essential mystery in the created universe. I suspect that much scientific theorising is metaphorical rather than analogical; poetry rather than reality. There is always a gap between the real and its representation. To confuse representations with their referents is to make the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

We need something of Cajetan's parsimony in the project of humanising modern science.

Easily the most fruitful advance in interdisciplinary studies has come from the research programme initiated by René Girard, now retired as Professor of French Language, Literature and Culture at Stamford University. His contribution arose from Literary Criticism involving the canon of Western literature, eg. Shakespeare, Cervantes, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, Proust, etc., a genre of literature which Girard calls romanesque rather than romantic. His programme, which is radically different from that of Cajetan, nevertheless involves three concepts which we might explain as follows:

- (i) The existential human condition is characterised by mimetic desire, a covetousness for the goods and even the metaphysical being of others. We are apprised of what to desire by our models.
- (ii) Mimetic desire leads to a violence in human societies of all against all, which results in the unconscious convergence on a scapegoat, which, being sacrificed, results in the temporary return of societal peace and veneration of the sacred.
- (iii) The anthropological handbook on human violence is specifically the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, which uncover for all time the hidden structures of violence and contribute to its ultimate, apocalyptic demise. It also bespeaks the end of the notion of the sacred based on blood sacrifice and originary murder.

Girard's simple observations seem to have bridged the gap between the Two Cultures, and his influence has extended to almost every conceivable discipline including mathematical physics.

Girard has offered a research programme in the sense described by Imre Lakatos for the natural sciences.

In linguistics, for example, Eric Gans draws on central elements in Girard's work to develop a generative theory of language and human culture. Standard accounts of biological evolution are not sufficient to account for hominisation. The departure point for the emergence of the vertical sign-relation from the horizontal one of animal interaction needed to be accounted for.

Francisco Varela, a neurobiologist investigates the relationship between models of self-organisation in biology and physics with Girardian models of cultural theory. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, a political philosopher, Henri Atlan, a physicist, and Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize winner in mathematical chemistry of dissipative structures see parallels with Girard's hypothesis of surrogate victimhood, social upheaval and consolidation. Dupuy's work is highly original in economics and political theory. Money and economic exchange are heavily implicated in social life by diverting individual violence into common peace.

Jean-Michel Oughourlian has appropriated Girard to Psychology.

Michel Serres, a historian and philosopher of science has a startling thesis that it is not politics or sociology that is projected onto the natural world, but the sacred, and beneath the sacred, violence.

My main interest is in the theological work of Girardians, eg. Andrew Bartlett, Raymond Schwager, James Alison, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, James G. Williams. In this area Girard himself has a prophetic presence. In a recent book (not yet published in English) called "Truth or Weak Faith: Dialogue on Christianity and Relativism" Girard sees a coming Christian cultural revolution which will make the Renaissance "seem like nothing". " We will live in a world that will seem and be as Christian as today it seems scientific".

Understandably, in the current academic world, Girard is not without his critics. The vast majority of twentieth century anthropologists consider general theories, like Girard's are, in principle, impossible. Like St. Thomas' synthesis, they belong to a bygone age. Apparently the only valid sweeping theory that can be maintained is the one which proscribes sweeping theories. The infinitely multiplied "differences" observable in postmodern theory rule out any possibility of unifying "samenesses". Girard has a unique way of disarming his postmodern critics by agreeing with much of what they say. He is against systems of static classification and essentialist modes of thought, so that he sees 'reason' as problematic. The sacrificial crisis is not open to 'rational' or 'philosophic' treatment, and so he agrees with St. Paul. Reason cannot oppose the 'unreason' of violence. Indeed, reason can be easily enlisted in the perpetuation of violence, thus rendering violence more insidious. "Reason" can cover for barbarism and endow it with an aura of nobility and disguise it behind signs like 'progress' or 'historical necessity'. Reason is a child of the foundational murder, the starting point of cultural development.

Likewise Girard abandons the philosophical notion of 'truth'. This does not mean the end of true knowledge. Girard claims that the current cognitive nihilism is rooted in a purely philosophical idea of truth and of the means to reach it.

I have a quote from Girard's book, "To Double Business Bound":

"The sciences of man in their past and present state still share in an ideal of direct mastery and immediate evidence.... This avaricious ideal dominates both empiricism and phenomenology, which are never abandoned without a fight because their practitioners cannot see any possibility of knowledge.... The only intellectual activity they conceive is the interminable and solemn burial of 'Western philosophy'.

(D.B.213)

To my mind, the 'demise of Western philosophy' has become something like a 'mantra in Eastern philosophy'.

Girard believes that the way is open for what he calls 'hypothetical knowledge'. He is interested in inferences that seem the best fit for the available evidence. This is a method of reasoning which the philosopher of science, C.S. Peirce, called 'abduction'. Peirce emphasised that abduction is the only logical process that actually creates anything new. Criteria for picking out 'the best explanation' include its simplicity, its prior probability or its explanatory power.

I am convinced that Girard's research programme is the Holy Spirit's unique gift to the Church in its present predicament. Girard is first to admit that he is not the complete critic, so that there is immense room to move beyond the initial mileposts.

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