

Notes and Comments

ON THE RESPONSES TO THE CONFERENCE PAPERS

With such a wealth of papers to publish within a single issue, it is not possible here to do justice also to the remarks of the official respondents. Theirs was the task of providing in each case a brief commentary, a note of appreciation or criticism, a few words that would serve to provoke further reflection and to open up the discussion the conference organizers hoped would ensue. All I can do is provide a few quotations from the respondents whose texts have reached me, and include some notes of my own made at the time, in partial commentary upon the conference for those who were not able to attend.

There was no respondent to the opening address by Bishop Angelo Scola, but there were several questions asked which drew out some of the themes and implications of the bishop's stimulating presentation under the chairmanship of Bishop John Sheets. "The event [of Christ] posits the method"—the method, among other things, of evangelization. While Msgr. Richard Malone connected this lapidary statement to the contemporary debate in catechesis, and others focused on the challenge posed by contemporary forms of ni-

hilism, Fr. Marc Ouellet drew attention to its implications for the renewal of sacramental theology. The Holy Spirit is in some sense himself the "method" posited by the "event," because he is the Spirit of Christ, and his mission is *communio* and memory in the Church, the sacramental mediation between time and eternity. The Church's responsibility to teach and her responsibility to administer the sacraments are thus two aspects of one and the same sacramental function, distinct but impossible to separate.

The response of Bishop Francis George to the paper by Fr. Roch Kereszty was to ask how the rationale for the new evangelization would change if we were to start with the question, "What must I do to be good?" instead of, "What must I do to be saved?" The emphasis on our need for salvation rather than the call to holiness, Bishop George suggested, was partly influenced by Martin Luther and the Reformation, and may be too "narrow" for the present context. For "the encounter with God, if explained only in relation to the quest for personal salvation, is reduced to an experience which attests to a person's having accepted Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior. If the religious person starts rather with the quest for holiness, then one's perspective is immediately broadened to what God has told us of himself and not just what he is doing for me personally." The faith implied is one that "connects personal salvation to historical revelation."

Fr. Johann Roten's extensive paper, which will appear in a future issue of

Communio, provided an overview of Balthasar's pastoral theology and the "Marian dimension" of mission. The paper was responded to by Michael Waldstein of the University of Notre Dame, who concentrated his reflections on the concept of mission in the Gospel of John. The important paper by Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, which interestingly wove together some major themes of the conference already touched on by Bishop Scola, while looking forward to the papers by Fr. Matthew Lamb, David Schindler and Fr. Marc Ouellet, was sadly not available in advance to participants or to the respondent. Rather than respond directly to the paper, then, Robin Darling Young of The Catholic University of America took the opportunity to make some interesting remarks of her own, comparing the situation of the Church Fathers during the "first evangelization" with our own in the late twentieth century. Unfashionably, perhaps, she stressed the differences rather than the similarities: the Fathers, she maintained, knew no analogy to today's consumeristic hedonism. This is a new phenomenon in the history of the world, and we must find new ways of dealing with it.

In the Friday evening session, Fr. Matthew Lamb and Robert Royal each presented papers on the question of the challenge of modernity. Distinguishing between *optimism* and the virtue of *hope*, and applying this to American culture in particular, Royal argued that there can be no "grand strategy" for successful evangelization: all we can do is search out what is good within the culture and work with that. The ground was thus suitably prepared

for the main debate of Saturday morning, between David L. Schindler and Joseph Komonchak of The Catholic University of America. Fr. Komonchak courteously but strongly disagreed with Prof. Schindler's use of John Courtney Murray. He could not accept, he said, that Murray was (or remained) as much of a "dualist" as Schindler implied.

Peter Casarella of The Catholic University of America drew attention to the challenge posed in Professor Schmitz's paper to the "everyday view of language in modern culture": "The chatter of the new communication networks and information highways uproots us from the world in which we live even as we face virtually unlimited possibilities of talking to everyone on the face of the globe." In a conference on evangelization, it was important to be reminded that, "Even if faith comes from hearing, anyone who professes to speak Christian wisdom must always carry a monastic silence in his heart and not infrequently on his lips as well."

The afternoon was occupied with the vitally important topics of family and gender. Christophe Potworowski of Concordia University brought out several of the themes of Carl A. Anderson's rich literary-theological paper on the family, and connected them with the keynote speech by Bishop Scola. John Grabowski's response to Joyce Little, which began by paying tribute to her gift of repartee, focused quickly on her diagnosis that it is the *functionalization* of the human person in Western society which underlies the widespread acceptance of abortion, and that a trinitarian anthropology is the only possible antidote.

The concluding paper by Fr. Marc Ouellet brought together the main themes of the conference by laying the foundation of a new "theology of liberation" in the "Theo-drama" of the Trinity. Msgr. Albacete had already explained the origin of the term "new evangelization" in the pope's attempt to develop and redirect the work of the liberation theologians of Latin America. As moderator of the final session, William L. Portier of Mount Saint Mary's College referred to this point in asking for more discussion of how exactly the new evangelization can function as a concrete alternative to liberation theology, addressing "its genuine concern for those who suffer unjustly" in a specific cultural context. He proposed Gustavo Gutierrez, rather than Leonardo Boff, as the most appropriate dialogue partner, noting a possible convergence with the thought and idiom of Balthasar in Gutierrez's 1985 commentary on the Book of Job (which speaks of the "mysterious meeting of two freedoms" and the close connection, even identity, "between theological methodology and spirituality"). The key question remained how to cultivate a sense of "belonging to the sacred space of trinitarian relations" in such a way that out of this consciousness could arise a "civilization of love."

My own brief intervention was an attempt to pick up and connect two themes that still needed to be brought into relation: those of *liturgy* and *family*. In a conference on evangelization it needed to be emphasized that Russia had been converted to Christianity in large part by the sheer beauty of the Byzantine liturgy. Language itself is reformed in

the crucible of an encounter with the "event" and person of the Risen Lord in liturgy, in sacrament, in prayer (Scola, Schmitz). Without that *anamnesis* of the saving love of Christ, we could not hope to discover his sacramental presence in our neighbor. Without being introduced into the loving exchange of trinitarian life through the Mass, we would perhaps never have come to understand the human person as relational rather than functional, and as related first of all to God as to a loving Father (Little).

How does this connect with the family, that basic cell of society and of the Church, which the pope places at the heart of the new evangelization (Anderson)? Liturgy, sacrament and prayer are clearly the means by which a human family is inserted within the larger community of the Church, becoming a "Catholic family." But this way of putting it suggests that the family already exists and is simply "adopted" by the Church. In reality, the family is *created* by the liturgy of the Church. Without the Incarnation, without grace, and so also without the Church, there would be no families in the Catholic sense, no "domestic Church." If families in this sense existed before Christ, it was only in anticipation of that Advent for which the whole creation longs. The life of the Catholic family is founded on the sacrament of marriage—nourished, sustained and healed by reception of the sacraments of eucharist and reconciliation.

All of this ties the regeneration of Christian culture even more closely to the conversion and renewal of language. It is in the family that we

learn to speak. It is in the liturgy (and in the family precisely as domestic Church) that we learn to speak of, and with, Christ. Does, then, the renewal of our culture via family life largely depend upon a renewal of the sense of a transcendent mystery *in the Mass*, and upon a renewal of the language (including the body-language) of worship? If that is so, does the hope for renewal lie, at least in part, in the direction of a deeper *reconciliation with the Eastern Churches* that have better preserved the language of the sacred?

Mary, venerated in both East and West as the Mother of God, is not only the heart of the Holy Family itself, and the vessel of God's presence among us, but has been described as the paradigm of true hu-

man liberation. It seems appropriate, therefore, to bring this round-up of responses to the conference papers to an end by quoting from the Conclusion of the pope's 1990 encyclical on evangelization, *Redemptoris Missio*: "On the eve of the third millennium the whole Church is invited to live more intensely the mystery of Christ by gratefully cooperating in the work of salvation. The Church does this together with Mary and following the example of Mary, the Church's Mother and model: Mary is the model of that maternal love which should inspire all who cooperate in the Church's apostolic mission for the rebirth of humanity."

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