

Soul Is Not Saved Alone

THEOLOGY OF SPACE
(Eighth in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

The guest who sought the first place at table was sent to a lower place; he who sought the lowest place was put at the head. Lazarus, the beggar, is made rich; the rich man is made poor; the giants of earth must become as little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the law written across Christianity: The exalted are humbled, the humble are exalted.

Applied to the cosmos, we compared this to an emptying and a filling, or what St. Paul calls a Kenosis and a Pleroma. Last week we described how God "emptied" Himself by allowing chemicals and planets to share His Existence; dandelions and plants to participate in His life; birds and animals to unconsciously feel His goals and purposes in their instincts; and men to have a lion's share of God's image, thanks to reason.

But since Love always tends to become like that which it loves, Divine Love became man. Here God "emptied Himself" of His glory and became a foot-washing servant of men who would not wash one another's feet. Finally, God, in His Human Nature, emptied Himself of His last drop of blood and took our guilt upon Himself.

But there is no emptying without a filling; no becoming "nothing" without being made "something," no valley without a mountain. That brings us to the other side of the coin of the Incarnation, when the cosmos and everything in it is slowly brought back again to God through Christ. St. Paul bringing the "emptying" and "filling" together in Christ writes: "He emptied Himself for that reason God exalted Him." (Phil. 2/7, 9)

The Pleroma Age

We now live in the Pleroma Age. The chaos in the cosmos and the frustration in man, which were all a part of disruption through freedom turning to license, are gradually being reconciled to Christ Who Created them: "God was pleased through Him to reconcile in His own Person, as it were, everything on earth and everything in heaven by virtue of the sacrifice of the Cross." (Col. 1/20) Not a fragment shall be wasted; existence in the world of physics; life in the realm of biology; the driving instincts in the kingdom of zoology; the logic of the human species — all of these strewings and emptyings of Divine love will not be lost.

Even though disorder and chaos spoiled the remembrance of Divine bounty to man, it will all be brought back again to God, through man, and through Christ. This "filling up" or pleromization, if we may coin a word, will be in the opposite direction to creation; then the cosmos came first, then man, millions of years later, and finally the God-man.

On the road back, man is first re-made through Christ, and through Him the final resurrection, the renovation of the cosmos, will follow.

The Pleroma of the universe means its total reconciliation with God at the end of time. The Christian is not saved from the cosmos, as the pagans believed, but with the cosmos; the reconciliation of man is the key to the reconciliation of the universe; the Pleroma of one leads to the Pleroma of the other. (Rom. 8/20 It is not "souls" in isolation that are saved, but the totality of all things.)

The Body of Man

This, I believe, is one of the most important truths uncovered by the Vatican Council. We use it to stress in our catechism that we are on this earth to "save our souls." True, but we are here, also to save our body. "I believe in the Resurrection of the body," we say in the Creed.

To tame the body by fasting and mortification is to "empty" it of its errant impulses. But if we minimized it and yoked it in order to make its soul more free and less a slave, shall it not "be filled" or have its Pleroma in a glorified body? Heaven knows the body takes a beating in a true Christian life; then justice demands that it shall one day share in the glory of the soul. This Kenosis-Pleroma of the body begins with a crucifixion and ends with a Resurrection of body and soul: "You cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires." (Gal. 5/20)

Then Paul adds the reward: "Sharing His sufferings so as to share His glory." (Rom. 8/20) "Having died with Christ, we shall also return to life with Him." (Rom. 6/8) "The thing (body) that is sown perishable, is raised imperishable; the thing that is sown contemptible is raised glorious; the thing that is sown weak is raised powerful." (1 Cor. 15/42)

We are on this earth then not to save our souls alone, which we do directly, but also to save our body, which is saved indirectly, for by dying with Christ, we rise with Christ.

The Fullness of the Universe

But not only will the body be "filled" with glory because it "emptied" itself in penance — so will the cosmos also. This is our principal concern in this paper. Too long have some thought, as did the Colossians of old, that the world was wicked, and that God had nothing to do with the universe. The belittling of science by some, and the ignoring of the spiritual values attached to technology left scientific research and space study out of the theology of redemption. This is wrong.

The whole sweep of space, and the vast dimensions of the universe are all part of salvation-history. The heavens and the earth are going to be a part of Resurrection-glory after the Second Coming of Christ. And it should be so. Think how much this little sphere and the great constellations have contributed to both the saving of our soul and body. Do we not in the Psalms give praise to the sun and moon, to the stars, to Arcturus the star of first magnitude mentioned in Scripture?

Since our body is to be glorified as well as our soul, so all space is to be glorified with both. If the sun setting and rising makes us think of Good

Friday and Easter Sunday, shall it not have its role to play when Our Lord fulfills His promise: "I shall make all things new"? Maybe one of the reasons why we hate to leave this world is because we know that it is already a part of us, has entered into every fibre of our body and every thought of our mind. We do not want to be saved apart from it but with it. And that desire is right. After all, if Christ is to have dominion over all things shall we not share in that glory?

"May God enlighten the eyes of your mind So that you can see what hope His call holds for you. What rich glories He has promised the saints will inherit. This you can tell from the strength of His Power at work in Christ. When He used it to raise Him from the dead And to make Him sit at His right Hand in Heaven, Far above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power or Domination, Or any other name that can be named, Not only in this age but also in the age to come. He has put all things under His Feet And made Him ruler of everything, the Head of the Church, Which is His Body, the fullness (Pleroma) of Him Who fills the whole creation." (Eph. 1/19-23)

We have to skip so much in this beautiful subject of the Fullness because we have limited ourselves to the Theology of Space. It would be interesting to discuss the "Fullness of Time" (Gal. 4/4); the "Fullness of the Humanity of Christ" (Col. 2/9); the Church as the Fullness of Christ" (Eph. 1/23) and the Fullness of Christian Life (Eph. 3/17,18). But we must stick to our subject.

Just as our body does not yet enjoy its full glory, so neither does space. But once the first is fulfilled in the Second Coming, so will the second. But this does not mean that the final dim beginnings of the "new Heaven and earth" have not yet begun. There has to be some point where the direction changed from emptying to filling. And what is that moment?

Where Did Kenosis End and Pleroma Begin?

The low point was Our Lord's Death on the Cross, when evil was mightiest and carried its strongest armaments in the slaying of Godness; the reversal began when death died with the empty tomb and Our Lord rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

"He that descended is the same also That ascended far above all the heavens That He might fill all things." (Eph. 4/10)

The startling revelation is made here that He Who already embodies the fullness of God, is the one Who is to fill the cosmos. The cosmos, that second when chaos in man and anti-creation in the cosmos began to be reversed was with the Resurrection.

The last emptying was His burial. Burial is a reminder of man's limitation in the cosmos. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." Taking on our human condition, Our Lord, by having His Body laid in a tiny corner of this planet, was subjecting Himself to the final humiliation.

Promethean man, who has stolen atomic fires from the sun and blasted himself into space, may have cheering mobs in Moscow and New York; but in the end he is not the master of the cosmos. To remind him of his mortal coils, God taking Flesh, was wrapped in winding sheets for a burial, as He had swaddling bands at birth. Justinus Kerner poetically reminds man that temporality and spatiality have narrow limits:

"Rush on, Mankind, as fast as you can, From steamship to airship, Flying with eagle and lightning! You shall go no further than the tomb!"

He Who made the earth and sentenced man to "return to dust," Himself takes on the penalty. The earth was cursed on account of man; now He descends into it to remove the curse as He lifted sin from the soul of man. The Burial was also the beginning of the spiritualization of the cosmos: the earth receiving communion with the One Who would make it new. It was the corrective for all its thorns, thistles and disorders. The resurrection would be the labor pains of the new heaven and earth which is groaning for redemption. (Rom. 8/23)

The emptying of Christ, by allowing men to get a stranglehold on Him and drag Him to the grave, was overcome by the Pleroma of His Resurrection in which "death was swallowed up in victory." It was not the sight of the empty tomb which brought joy to His Disciples; they were filled with joy because they believed with the Pleroma of faith. The earth was no longer cursed.

The Ascension of Christ

The Ascension was not a local transition, like a space flight. It was a new mode of existence. That is why the Apostles were asked why they were staring into the heaven (Acts 1/10), as if the Ascension were no more than a rocket flight. It was a reminder that He would have a new Presence on earth, thanks to the Spirit which would begin the Pleromization first in the Church, and then spread to all creation.

The Cross was the great act of reversal in which discord in the cosmos begins to be a harmony. It is slow, but think of how long it took before God breathed a spark into man! Thanks to the Ascension and the Descent of the Spirit, man now recovers His Holy Spirit; Christ begins to fill up humanity through His Body the Church; science begins to reduce the "groaning of the cosmos" for its liberation. But the slow metamorphosis of the universe has begun.

St. Ambrose well expressed the great sweep: "In Him the world, in Him the heavens, rise again and in Him the earth." The Transfiguration scene, when Christ revealed the glorified body of man, is but the First Act leading to the Transfiguration

(Continued on Page 14)

LETTERS

to the editor



Point Missed?

Editor:

In his Letter to the Editor (Courier-Journal, 2/7/69), Father Edward Shamon, of Auburn, heaped abuse on New York Times social science writer John Leo for the latter's address to the Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen.

Rather an explosive reaction to a speech that struck most of the audience, that I talked to as more remarkable for its moderation and good humor than for the kind of anti-institutional malice that Father Shamon seems to think he detected.

How are we to explain such contrary evaluations? Can it be that Father Shamon is so lacking in a sense of humor that Leo's likening of most American bishops to district sales managers arouses only righteous indignation? Or can it be that Father Shamon's view of ecclesiastical authority is so totalitarian that every complaint, even question, about its exercise must be construed as arrogant and treasonous?

Or can it be that Father Shamon sees Christian faith as so clear and distinct, extending to every detail of the human situation, that any admission of confusion concerning the direction in which the Christian Church ought to be moving strikes him as an attack on the Faith itself?

J. Raymond Hensler
President, Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen

(With this exchange, the Courier Journal closes the John Leo case.)

POPE

Human Conscience Not Infallible

Vatican City — (RNS) — Human conscience is not always infallible and needs to be guided, Pope Paul VI said at his weekly general audience here.

In an apparent reply to numerous recent statements, including several by episcopal conferences, which have said that in the last resort a Catholic must follow the sincere dictates of his conscience, the Pope insisted that decisions of conscience must be based on external norms and the instructions of authority.

"Conscience must be instructed," the Pope said. "The conscience is not the daily voice of a divine guide; human activity, its voice is clarified and fortified when that of the law, and therefore of legitimate authority, is united with it."

"The voice of the conscience is not always infallible nor objectively supreme."

It is often said today, the Pope noted, that the whole morality of man should consist in following his own conscience emancipated from external norms or the dictates of authority.

"But it is necessary above all," he said, "to point out that conscience by itself is not the judge of the moral value of actions that it suggests. Conscience is the interpreter of an interior and superior norm. It does not create this by itself."

"We must observe that conscience, in order to be a valid norm of human actions, must be righteous. That means it must be sure of itself and true, not culpably erroneous. This, unfortunately, can very easily happen, given the weakness of human reason, when it is left to itself, when it is not instructed."

Word for Sunday

The Church Is Human and Divine

By Father Albert Shamon

When King Louis IX of France wanted to see how the beggars of Paris town and the rabble of low degree lived, he disguised himself as a beggar and moved among them. But whenever he got hungry, he returned to his palace for food; whenever he got cold, he put on warm garments under his rags.

By acting like this, could Louis really know how a beggar lived and felt and died? He was only play-acting as a beggar. He didn't know what it was to be hungry like a beggar, cold like a beggar, spurned like a beggar.

When the King of kings became man, He became every inch a man. Had He not accepted all the limitations of man, then His Incarnation would have been a mere sham, pure play-acting. If every time he felt the pang of hunger, He changed stones to bread, would He really know what man is? If when rejected by Scribes and Pharisees, He countered with an outburst of miracles, like jumping down unharmful from the Temple top, would that be the human thing to do?

This was the constant temptation posed to Christ: to slough off the limitations of His humanity. "Change stones into bread." "Cast yourself down." "Save yourself."

And this was the great humility of Christ: that once He had emptied Himself and had taken the form of a servant, He never "pulled rank." He embraced the limitations of His

An Objection

Editor:

A Father Anthony Mullaney spoke at Immaculate Conception Church Sunday, Feb. 9, 1969 expressing his views on civil disobedience.

I for one do not understand why this educated citizen-priest was invited to speak at our service and influence a group of people of diverse backgrounds who possibly can not discern his views and therefore may act unwisely.

Currently the Church is becoming crowded with self-made authorities all claiming top priority in his chosen subject that runs the gamut from the draft and war to urban crisis or birth prevention.

I would appreciate clarification on why our attitudes should be completely tolerant and broad-minded until we are practically shapeless. The potential anarchist grows more intolerant and militant and sometimes violent when his ideas are not readily accepted.

—Mrs. James Gould, Rochester.

How's It Done?

Editor:

Your series of articles on Catholic High Schools by Father William O'Malley from McQuaid Jesuit (Courier-Journal, 1/24-31/69) was an excellent expose of a controversial subject. The sources of aid for the financial problems of the Catholic high schools are in short supply.

But how has King's Prep found the solution? It must be depending on the purse of the Diocese to carry its monthly deficit. How else could it fight the rising costs and inflationary spiral, maintain small classes and quality instruction, — and in the end have the least expensive tuition of the Catholic high schools in the city?

—Richard K. Rudy, Webster

Abortion Assailed

Editor:

Once again abortion is making the headlines by its proponents for what reason — to deprive an unborn child of its right to life.

If these dedicated people pushing abortion would devote as much effort to some of our other more important problems facing us, such as stamping out pornography, helping to solve our unrest in the cities and on the campuses, helping the underprivileged and the poor, then they would be accomplishing something worthwhile.

I urge everyone to write their state representatives in Albany to oppose legislation which will open the gates to liberalizing abortion!

—Francis J. Mastrogirola
210 Clark St., Auburn, NY.

'Stamp Fever'

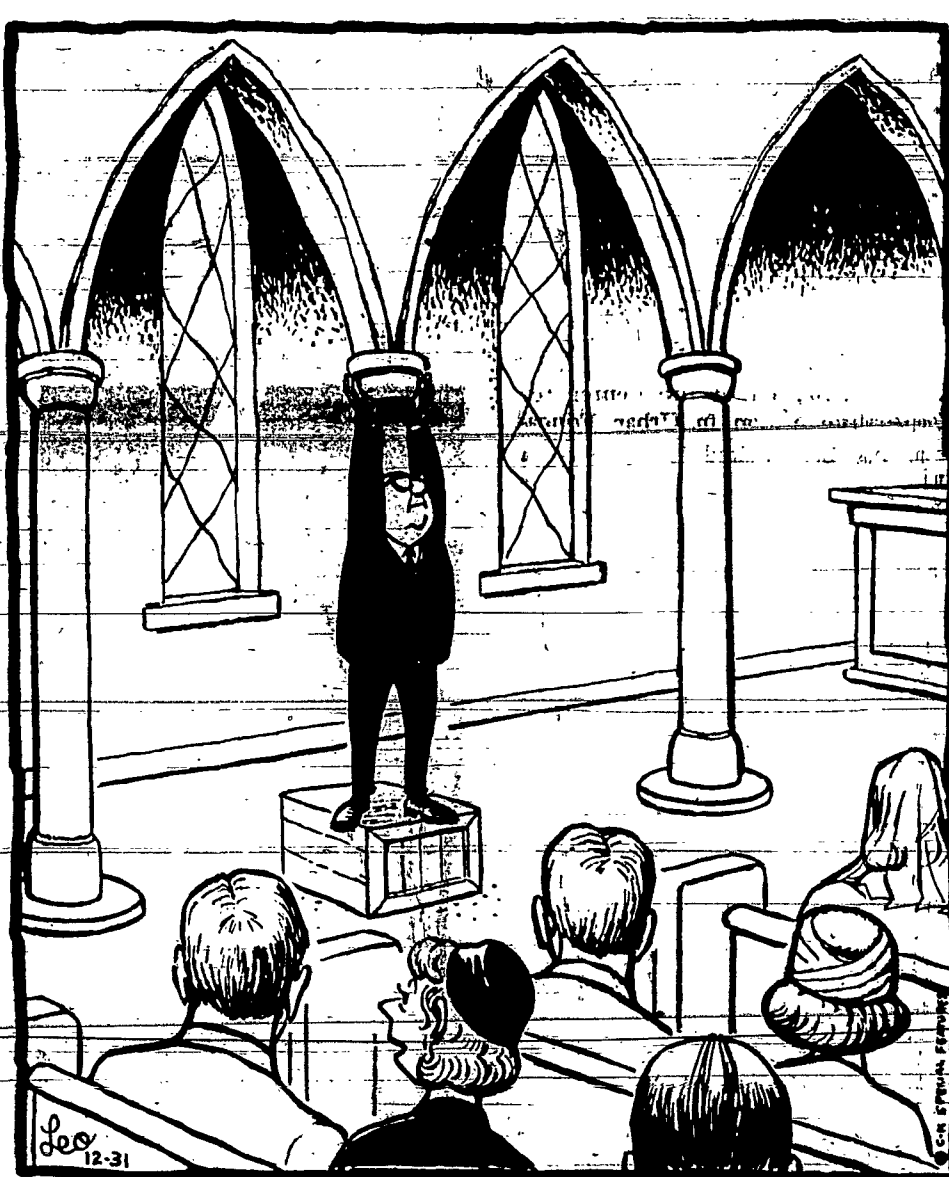
Editor:

We Oblate Seminarians "do our thing" for the poor by sorting and selling cancelled postage stamps. To "rich" Americans this may not seem like much, but to the poor of Laos the little we send means another year of life. In Hong Kong it may mean a job for a homeless family, or in Africa it may mean a hospital.

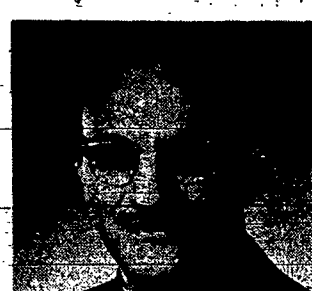
We wish to spread our "Stamp Fever." We would enlist all your readers to join our campaign to "Stamp out poverty!" Do you care enough to send us your least what you would otherwise throw away? These cancelled stamps, especially foreign and commemorative, can help others help themselves.

Send stamps to: Oblate Stamp Bureau, 391 Michigan Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017.

—Bro. Daniel Crahan, O.M.I.
Oblate College, Washington, D.C.



"He's been a pillar of the church for years."



Lau Wit

A Jesuit legal abolition of all against abortion at McQuaid Jes

Father Robert Boston College L denying the tradi tion as immor should not, in pl regarded as a let

He suggested be substituted le would at least:

- minimize th deaths;
- avoid the in

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Sister To N

Sister Mary J Administrator of Teacher Program cooperative Action, has been a national panel of Jr. Childhood Ed

There will be and, which wi vory committee tion Professors I ministered by th tional Personnel

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The Early Chil gram is designed titative and q shortages in pr young children.

be supported w ers, administrator ship people. The pre-school and but the scope o extend through t years.

Sister James I of directing the er Program of I Rochester. It now ers, 280 pre-sch parent aides.

Each of the C working in an l aided by a pa classes twice a w of 3-and-4 year- any other pre-scl familiar home e dren engage in g develop their

Role o To Be

A Jesuit prie before the U.S. cases concerning will talk on "Ha a Future" at 6 lege on Wednesd ney Auditorium

Father Charles son of law at School and an America magazi sored by the de phy and the Phi college.

Father Whale lawyer and phil discuss the pres abilities for the vate education o school, college a He will talk ab such schools; of laws and of Sup in this area; of s ments of such ble sources of f

He has argued Court and has of publications The Rev. Dr CSB, chairman philosophy, ann will be ope to