

The Sacramental Universe

THEOLOGY OF SPACE

(Ninth in a Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

If a child was given a toy and told it was the only one he would ever have in life, he could not enjoy it to the fullest; he would always be afraid of losing it or breaking it, or even getting bored with it himself. But if he was told that someday he would be given another toy that would never wear out and that it would give him endless happiness, he could even enjoy the first toy more.

The Christian is one who believes that he is going to have another world than this one when it or he wears out; and that with a glorified body and soul he will live in a new heaven and new earth. That is why he can live in hope even with an occasional tear. This aspect of the Theology of Space we treated under the subject of "Emptying and Filling."

As the clouds draw moisture from the sea, so all creation gradually is destined to return to the Creator. But in the present order, it is done so insignificantly that it can hardly be noticed. The final transformation will be catastrophic, involving the judgment of man and the resurrection of his body. But every today has a hint of a tomorrow.

Among the many ways in which the universe is marching toward its Pleroma or Fullness, we mention three:

1. Knowledge
2. Technology
3. Sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

Knowledge

Whenever we know anything, e.g., a tree, we give it a new kind of existence in our mind. The more we know, the more we give matter a new and higher manner of existence. When a housewife makes a pie, she "wraps up" the idea of how to make a pie in flour, shortening, apples, etc. God "wrapped up" His idea of stars and daises, of mountains and molehills in a matter which could be touched or seen, etc. The intellect "unwraps" this envelope of matter, and we go back to something akin to the "idea" God had of them when He made them. That is why our "idea" of a triangle fits every triangle in the world.

The spirit of man thus spiritualizes the universe by understanding it. Theoretical science does this in a preeminent way by seeing the relationship between things and discovering the laws, goals, drives and purposes God put in them originally, as an archer puts direction in an arrow. Our age is blessed with a far deeper understanding of the cosmos than all previous ages put together. As we stated in the opening chapter: God has two revelations: one a Revelation in the strict sense, which is unfolding the mystery of how man and the universe are remade; the other revelation is the unlocking of the mysteries of matter.

Technology

Technology is the practical application of the theoretical knowledge of science. Technology makes cyclotrons which split atoms, which in turn, produce electricity. Very few know the meaning of Einstein's famous theory, but they live by it in their gadgets and medicines and by the elimination of drudgery. It could very well be that as ancient Romans made roads over which Paul and other missionaries evangelized the Empire, so technological civilization brought to India may be to the Gospel that which highways were to the Apostles.

Technology is not in itself evil; it is a humanizing and therefore a spiritualizing influence; it is fulfilling the command of Genesis to make the sub-human serve the human. God is glorified when scientists can discover the molecular architecture of penicillin; and He is also glorified when technologists build factories to make antibiotics to cure human diseases. Despite any abuses in both fields, the fact that the cosmos is orderly is a proof that it is rational, and if it makes sense, some-one put sense in it.

We may, therefore, feel disposed to repeat with the astronomer Kepler when he began to understand the motion of the planets: "I am thinking God's thoughts after Him." The Genesis of creation was when God put laws into everything; the Pleroma of creation begins when science and technology take this gift, tear off its tissue and discover within the mind of God.

Sacraments

All Sacraments, in a secondary way, are prophetic of the redemption of the cosmos. Water used for baptism, and oil for anointing are just a few of the elements that are lifted out of their natural or wild state and made instruments for the communication of the Divine. Water naturally washes the body and oil strengthens it, but in the sacraments they become channels of Christ's redemptive blood unto a purification and a strengthening of the soul.

But the one Sacrament which is truly cosmic is the Eucharist, because once wheat and grapes are first Calvary-ized into bread and Gethsemanized into wine, they then undergo the ultimate transformation by becoming the Body and Blood of the Glorified Christ renewing in us His Life and Death. The cosmos is "groaning for Redemption" or "standing on tiptoes" awaiting the glorification of all who become the sons of God through faith and baptism and the Spirit.

Redeemed Elements of an Unredeemed Creation

Out of this world of space a few "samples" are taken, or "first-fruits," such as the first bundle of a harvest, field; these are offered to Christ the Word "by Whom and for Whom" all things were made. In a laboratory an electric spark is shot through two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen to make water. Though that water may fill only a test tube, yet it is a sign that these two chemicals throughout nature could one day become water.

The product of the field and the vine, in like manner, are lifted out of unredeemed cosmos; the wheat has its life ground out of it in a mill, and the grape surrenders its blood in a press. Then and only then do they become bread and wine that is laid on the altar as "redeemed" elements in the sense that they are ready to become, thanks to the continued power of the Last Supper, the Eucharistic Christ.

Galaxies, comets and radioactive elements in space are not yet gathered up to their Creator, so that God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15/28) But they have sent their ambassadors, wheat and grapes, to the court of the King of Kings as pledges that though there is anti-gravity, anti-creation and chaos spoiling them, the time will come when they too will go back to Him from whose fingertips they dropped in creation.

Bread

Think of the representative character of the host on the paten and the wine in the chalice at the moment of the Offertory. Holy things from an unholy world, they are prepared to be Christified. But how much of the world's groaning for redemption they drag with them!

That little white host has wrapped in it sunlight with its millions of years of atomic fission; the stars and moon which shine on the wheat, at night, the moisture, the chemical world in the bowels of the earth which nourished it; the sowers and reapers, the harvesters and their machine, grinding mills, the sacks into which the wheat was stored; the automobile industry which helped transport it; the stock exchange and money markets which fixed its price; the ovens which baked it, the moulds which stamped it as the Son was sealed or stamped by the Father. All these things from the cosmos and the marts of men play their unconscious role in laying that little loaf on the altar of God. Redemption has put its foot in the door of the unredeemed, and begun theology in space and time.

Wine

And so with the grapes! What John the Baptists they are, what prophets and forerunners they unwittingly become as red wine in a golden chalice! As Epanetus was the first fruit of unredeemed humanity in Asia (Rom. 16/5), so out of the world of commerce, finance, industry and space-travel come these first-fruits of unsanctified creation: "As a little leaven leavens all the dough" (1 Cor. 5/6), so these grapes, plucked from the vast cosmos, take their first stumbling steps back to Christ on the highway of the King.

Like prodigal children, creation begins its return to the Father's House! The Offertory of the Mass is a cosmic spectacle. The faithful indeed are offering themselves when they give that which stands for them: wheat and grapes. As many grains of wheat make one bread, and many grapes one wine, so many who are many are one in Christ. The concern here is with the Offertory in relation to the world, rather than with the faithful, and from this point of view, the universe, through these extracted and sanctified elements, is focused again on Christ the Word Who made them. As a magnifying glass concentrates the rays of the sun in one focal burning, so Christ at the altar unifies that which was diffused, and reclaims that which was errant.

Consecration

But how much more the Christification of the universe continues through the Consecration! What the Incarnation does for humanity, that the Eucharist does indirectly for the universe by becoming the Christian's manna for his pilgrimage in this world.

When God became man, He divinized all humanity potentially. His humanity had no limitation of a human person which so much restricts us. What the nature of George Washington could do was limited by George Washington-ness. But Christ, who was not a human person, did not have His humanity locked and sealed. Being uncapped, as it were, by a human persona, He could embrace all humanity under His Divine Person; the unity of all such persons baptized in His Name would become as cells in His Body which is the Church.

The Eucharist is the Sacrament which most intimately unite us mortals to His Life and Death until His coming. But since it uses the first-fruits of the cosmos as the material medium of our union with Him, the Eucharist indirectly begins the Christification of everything in Space-Time. A true picture of the consecration of the Mass would, therefore, be one Host containing all hearts that are Christ's, as well as the universe which is also His. In the Mass, Christ continues His Incarnation, transforming the faithful into His Body, and incorporating the cosmos into it also, just as He did on earth when He took water from Jacob's well, bitter herbs at the Last Supper, and bread in the house of Lazarus. It is not that the Eucharist is ordained principally to the reordering of the cosmos spoiled by sin, but rather that it is done indirectly through His people in whom He dwells in that most intimate form of Presence through communion.

There are different forms of presence in a home: a husband and wife may be present one to another in memory, in hope and expectation, in conversation, and in admiring one another's work, but there comes a moment of ecstasy when they are two in one flesh. There is also the special ecstatic Presence of Christ in Holy Communion, which transcends all other presences and patterns of love. Little do they know of the spectrum of love who say: "Christ is just as much present in the alley as in the valley, or in a neighbor as in the Tabernacle."

The Host and the Wine gather up the world of astronomy, biochemistry, physics and offer themselves back again to Christ the Word from Whom they became alienated, when "chaos and void" were introduced into creation even before the Fall of Man. And man himself, whose body and blood became alienated from the Word by some abuse of choice, is now reversed by another act of choice

(Continued on Page 8)

LETTERS

to the editor



On Genocide

Editor:

Now that "God is dead," the state must take upon itself the power of life and death with the new proposed abortion-law. With a few more amendments this new law could do away with other unwanted and unproductive creatures.

We can achieve the highest form of civilization by doing away with all crippled, deformed, deaf, blind, retarded, orphaned and unwanted children. Let's include senior citizens with Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, etc., because we can hardly afford this luxury. Science can send them to limbo painlessly.

We also can exterminate all persons with IQs of less than 140 (whether they are wanted or not).

Now we have a perfect state! At this point of perfection may I suggest to those who are left that they take a pill and leave this beautiful world to the animals, for they kill only to survive.

To quote from an article in the

Democrat & Chronicle of Feb. 19: "In great self-admiration we have named ourselves homo sapiens — man, the wise." It should be "homo exterminatorius."

—Joseph M. Czarnecki, Rochester

Editor:

Congratulations for your comment (Courier-Journal, 2/14/69) concerning the Steuben County tragedy and, in particular, the housing conditions of the impoverished in rural areas.

I would like to call to the attention of your readers, however, the fact that only 2,416 out of a total population of 73,837 in Wayne County are black (according to the Wayne County Action Program).

The Times-Union series which you praised was indeed most welcome in that it again reminded us of the most serious poverty all around us here in Wayne County. But, unintentionally perhaps, the newspaper chose photographs of black people. This only further contributes to widespread misconception and serves to substantiate the belief that Wayne County has a "migrant problem."

Richard M. Nixon

Nixon Letter Praises Fr. Hesburgh Action

President Nixon spoke out strongly against campus violence this week, urging that reason rather than violence mark student confrontations.

In a letter to Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., president of Notre Dame, Mr. Nixon praised the forthright stand taken by the university president who last week declared that students who resort to violence would be given "15 minutes to cease and desist." If they then failed to stop using force they would be suspended and expelled from campus life, he ordered.

Following is the text of Mr. Nixon's letter to Father Hesburgh:

Dear Ted: I share your concern over the recent disorders that have paralyzed campus after campus across the country in recent weeks, and I want to applaud the forthright stand you have taken.

As you know, the issues raised by the protesting students range from minor reforms within the academic community to major concerns of national policy. But the means, some students — a small, irresponsible minority — have employed reflect an impatience with democratic processes, an intolerance of legitimacy constituted authority, and a complete disregard for the rights of others.

Violence and vandalism have marked many of these protests, and the rights of the majority of the students have been grossly abused.

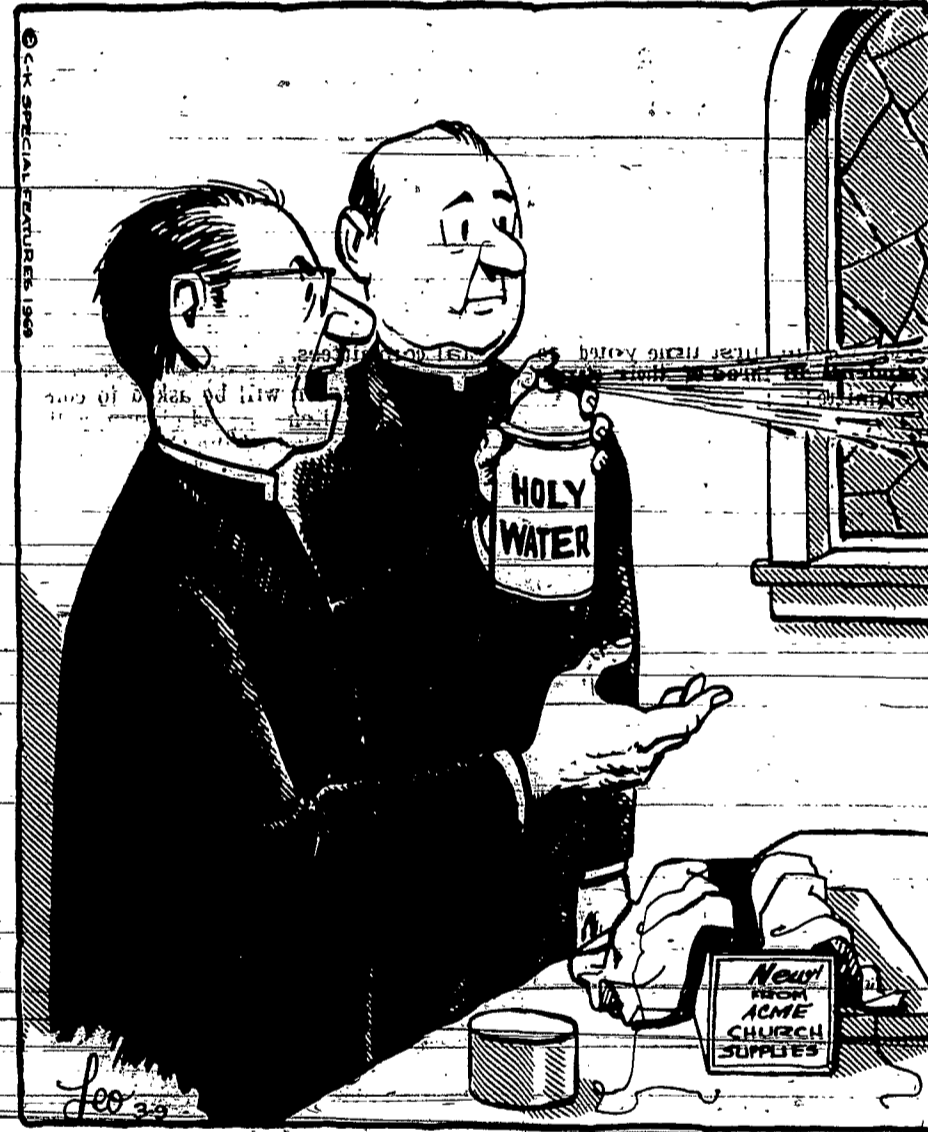
If the integrity of our universities is to be preserved, then certain principles must be re-established and certain basic rules enforced. Intimidation and threats remain outlaw weapons in a free society.

A fundamental governing principle of any great university is that the rule of reason and not the rule of force prevail. Whoever rejects that principle forfeits his right to be a member of the academic community. The university administrator who fails to uphold that principle jeopardizes one of the central pillars of his institution and weakens the very foundation of American education.

I have directed the Vice President in meetings in Washington this com-

ing week with the Governors of the 50 states to discuss what action, consistent with the traditional independence of American universities, might be taken at the state and Federal levels to cope with the growing lawlessness and violence on our campuses. I would appreciate it greatly if you would take the time to give him your views on this matter.

CHURCH HUMOR



Word for Sunday

Good Thoughts Come With Prayer

By Father Albert Shannon

A bevy of beautiful girls was asked what was their secret for beauty. One gave a startling answer. She said, "I think good thoughts. For I have learned that even an ugly thought leaves its mark on my face."

When Christ prayed, it must have shown on His face — so much so, in fact, that one day the apostles said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

One night Christ took Peter, James, and John and went up to a mountain to pray. And sure enough, it showed again. "He was transfigured before their eyes." As a frosted bulb is transfigured by switching it on, so Christ's face dazzled as the sun. His garments became whiter than the snow capping Mt. Hemon.

Man's soul is like a parliament in which debate is going on all day long between good and evil, between what he ought to do and what he ought not. And the face is a bulletin board that constantly indicates what is going on inside.

After Lady Macbeth had talked her husband into murdering King Duncan, the horror his soul felt showed so clearly on his face that Lady Macbeth told him to absent himself from the company of others till he had hold of himself. "Your face, my theme, is a book where men may read strange matters."

Look at a South Vietnamese, victimized by bombing or terrorist action. Anguish of heart disfigures his cheeks and furrows his brow. Look at a Czech, his face tramped as hard as any highway by the hoofs of pain

The Wayne County Action Program publication cited in your article tells us a great deal about the one out of five in Wayne County who may be classified "poor" by the federal standard. Most interesting is the fact that 70 per cent of those surveyed in preparation for this publication are native to Wayne County!

Those involved in efforts to improve housing in Wayne County feel, as Father Hempel does, complete frustration; it has been said that 500 units are desperately needed, immediately.

Thank you for your concern about the rural poor.

—Mrs. Paul T. Rubery, Palmyra

On Father Mullaney

Editor:

Contrary to Mrs. James Gould's impression (LETTERS, 2/21/69) Father Mullaney did not speak on civil disobedience in his homily at Immaculate Conception on a recent Sunday. That was the subject of his lecture the following evening at the Unitarian Church.

To my recollection Father Mullaney took his cue from the two Scripture readings and reminded us that Christians must side with the downtrodden and suffering. "Take sides, not emotionally — but — after study and deliberation. The role of the Christian is by its very nature not easy, nor peaceful."

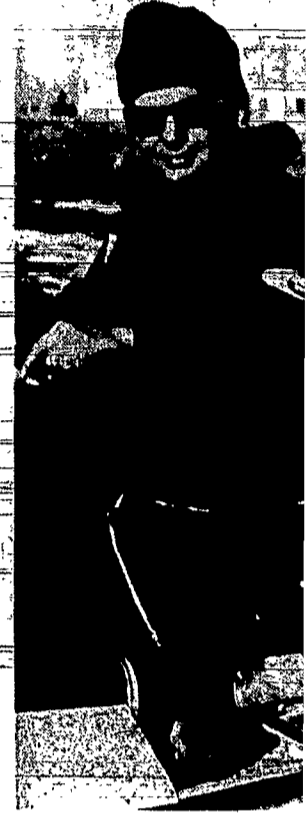
The weekly homilies at Immaculate Conception are singularly well thought out, practical to our problems and well delivered. Father Mullaney as a visitor, did not disappoint — an fact he was outstanding.

We listen each Sunday for inspiration, guidance and formation. What does Mrs. Gould listen for?

—George J. McVey, DDS, Rochester

Cayuga — Poverty in rural areas of Cayuga County disturbing the consciences of the 14 parishes of the area. Father Raymond J. Walsh, Episcopal vicar for the Eastern Vicariate of the Diocese of Albany, said that all the county parishes have asked diocesan officials to seek financial assistance to visiting hardships of the area. Father Wahl noted that

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Kids enjoying a r Among thrills were 1 tors included Carl V Bergeron, 7, of Chri

Fisher S 3 Facul

The faculty of St. John lege has for the first ti on three ing committees.

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On the faculty library lum-instruction commit students will sit as advis sultants. They will be ch from members of the parmental committees w than one student from vision, and at least one inly a junior. The terms one year with the opp re-election.

On the third commi sions, two seniors will s sultants and advisers.

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A RUMOR OF ANGE

By Peter Berger, D

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