

Our Mission: In World, Not Out of It

THEOLOGY OF SPACE

(Eleventh in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

The Saeculum, which means the world is good; Saecularism, or the spirit of the world is not. The ability to distinguish between the two is what constitutes the strength and the weakness of the faithful in the present crisis. Because the word "world" is often used indifferently to describe both, much confusion arises.

"World" may mean:

1. The theatre which God created and on the stage of which He acted out the drama of Redemption.
2. A spirit organized against God and the Church.

As the first, it is what God so loved that He sent His Son into it (John 3/16; 11/27; 1 John 4/14); as the second, it is what Satan claims as his own and offers to Christ if He would give up the redeeming of man from sin. (Matt. 4/8-9)

As the first, it is under the Providence of God Who watches over the birds of the air (Matt. 8/20); as the second, it is pride and egotism set over against God (1 Cor. 1/21) — a disordered thing in the grip of the evil one. (1 John 5/19) As the cosmos, it is the arena into which the disciples are sent to evangelize (Mk. 16/15) to be its light (Matt. 5/14) and to witness to Christ. (Matt. 13/38) As a "worldliness," it is that which brings tribulations to the faithful. (John 16/33)

Our troubled times in the Church are, as stated before, not due to theological disputes, for the day of heresies is over. The crisis today is false equation:

Christianity — the Secular City; Theology — Sociology; Divine Presence — Social Presence; Christ — Neighbor; Authority — Feeling; Church — Structure; Protest — Zeal; The Cross — a Placard; Chastity — Slavery.

But what good does it do to complain against worldliness? What needs to be affirmed today is a Theology of the World which is based on (1) the Incarnation and the Early Church and (2) Vatican Council.

The Incarnation and Early Church

The Incarnation took place in the world — the Saecularism in which Caesar Augustus, the Master Bookkeeper at his desk on the Tiber, sent out a proclamation that the "inhabited world should be enrolled." (Luke 2/1) Christ the Lord grew up in Saeculum where Africa received the first refugee escaping from a Herod whose name might have been Hitler or Stalin. It was a Saeculum where Greeks, fearing violent death was imminent, sought an audience with Him probably to invite Him to Athens which put to death only one wise man with hemlock juice and regretted it ever since; it was a Saeculum where Roman soldiers patrolled streets as they do now in Czechoslovakia; where Roman judges sat on judicial benches and Roman coins jingled in pockets. It was a Saeculum where army sergeants and Syro-Phoenician women had more faith than the People of God; where non-members of the People of God, such as a widow of Sarepta, were publicly praised in a synagogue service (Luke 4/14); where lilies and dancing and weeping children on streets fulfilled Genesis: "God saw all the things that He made; and they were good." (Gen. 1/31)

The saeculum embraced the underground, the earth and the heavens. The Lord took possession of all three: The underground, by being born as the Divine Cave-Man in Bethlehem; the earth, by using some of its dust with spittle to heal the blind. Man was made from the moist earth, and man is restored through it. The heavens, by being last seen possessing them in the Ascension, so that every knee under the earth and on the earth and above the earth should bow at His Holy Name. It was the world that He sanctified and redeemed by His Blood. (Col. 1/19, 20)

After Pentecost, He continued in His new body, the Church which lived in the Saeculum, whether it was in the market place of Athens or the Congress of Senators; He moved among business women who dyed purple in Philippi; and among the first rebel protesters organized by the silversmiths union of Ephesus; and the more compatible Tent Makers Company of Aquila and Priscilla. So much was the Church at home in the world of the Roman Empire that Tertullian, in the year 197, wrote: "We live with you as you do, using the same kind of food and clothing as you do. We do not dwell in the woods, apart from people. We reject none of the fruits of His works. Only we control ourselves from using them excessively or wrongly. . . . We frequent your forum, your market, your baths, your shops and streets, your hotels and your fairs and the other places where business is conducted. With you we go to sea; with you we serve as soldiers and till the earth and do business and exchange the handwork of our skill and labor."

The Church was doing throughout the world what Christ did in the world. As His unworshipfulness provoked a Crucifixion, so the early Christian life, so different from Roman worldliness, incited a persecution: Virgil and Peter were at odds on the streets of Rome. Through the centuries, the faithful repeated the words of Christ: "I am not of the world. . . . the world that knows not the Father." (John 17/16, 23) In their trials they remembered the words of Christ that the world rejoices when the disciples are persecuted. (John 16/20, 22)

In summary, St. James wrote: "Religion pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: To give aid to orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1/27)

The faithful in time of persecution rejoice in suffering with Christ. One old man in Vietnam said to a Communist who had beat him with a rifle to get him to give up his faith: "It is your pleasure to beat me; it is my joy to suffer for you." One recalls how Tertullian spoke of the joy of Chris-

tians in prison: "Its atmosphere is foul, but you are an odor of sweetness. (2 Cor. 2/5) There you are waiting for your judge, but you are to pass sentence on your judges. (1 Cor. 6/2) Even outside the prison the Christian has renounced the things of the world. Inside the prison he renounces even his prison. Where you are in the world matters not for you who are outside the world."

The Vatican Council II

The Church is not a continuously living thing; it dies to live; it has Resurrections rather than Renewals; its agglomerations are Easters, not Transfigurations. The Vatican Council II caused such an uproar because the Church died to something. I think it died to "closed doors."

It will be recalled that even at the time of the Resurrection: "The doors were closed in the room where the disciples were." (John 20/19) What Pope John did was to open those doors to let the world in and the Church out. The world did come in, for at Vatican I, in 1870, there was not present a single bishop from either Africa or Asia. At Vatican I the Church in her thinking was Mediterranean and Latin; at Vatican II it was cosmic.

The gradual acceptance of intimate relationship with the saeculum had dim foreshadowings long before. It is interesting to recall where various Pontiffs were crowned in St. Peter's. Benedict XV, of World War I, was crowned at the far end of the Basilica, about as far from the front door, opening on the world, as one could get. Pius XI advanced about 200 feet and was crowned at the main altar under the great dome. Pius XII walked down the long nave of St. Peter's, up to a small stairs and out into a balcony. When he did this, he literally stepped into the world.

John XXIII walked up the stairs, out into the same balcony, but he did two things Pius XII did not: he threw out his great arms, like fleshy columns of Bernini, and bade the world to come to him. Paul VI, gloriously reigning, walked down the nave, out the front door, into the world, into the Piazza and there in the midst of the Saeculum was crowned successor of a fisherman who made Rome eternal because he died there.

Was it any wonder, then, that the Vatican Council II should define the Church as the "Sign of Salvation to the whole world"?

A Sign of Salvation

A sign is a visible thing with an invisible meaning and power, like a kiss which conceals affection with a physical contact, or a word which is sound waves with meaning which only spiritual beings, like man, can grasp. The Church which is so human, is nevertheless Divine, as Christ was both; she has a God-given mission to restore to mankind and the cosmos the unity it lost. The Church is a convocation before it is a congregation. Its metre is only a sign of its poetry; its bread a sign of an ecstatic love-unity far surpassing the marriage act; its lifted hand in pardon is a sign of something greater than creation, putting something into nothing, namely, sin.

What is a sign of? Not of wisdom, for its wisdom is "foolishness to the world"; not of social concern alone, for the world shows that as well or better, rather it is a sign of the removal of that which makes poverty, prejudice and slums, namely, sin.

Two men are seated alongside one another on a wharf fishing. One, a religious man, the other worldly. The former boasts that he is "the presence of Christ in the Piscatorial Universe", or is a "Witness to the Wharf-Ministry", because he has a hook and line in his hand. But if the worldly man falls into the water and is drowning, the religious man, who plunges in, then becomes to him a sign of salvation, not just a Witness to the world.

That is what the Church is in the Saeculum. It is not so identified with the world that it cannot be seen as different; nor is it so distant that it cannot hear the cry of need. The Church is like a mother who knows that the world, "when it is good can be very good, and when it is bad can be very, very bad."

Sign of Salvation to the World

The Church looks upon the Saeculum as good. This was not always true in the past, but now the Church fulfills her mission as a sign of salvation only in historical solidarity with the world. She conceives herself as moving in a great trajectory having been launched at the moment of creation, illuminating all ages and summoning all people, but not destined to reach its target until the consummation of human history. She sees herself as the Sign.

She is related to the Saeculum as the soul to the body, giving life to the world, yet at the same time drawing life from the world. "Whoever promotes the human community at the family level, culturally, in its economic, social and political dimensions, both nationally and internationally. . . . is contributing greatly to the Church community as well." (Decree on Church #44) The Church also shares the lot of the world: "The Church goes forward together with humanity and experiences the earthly situation which the world experiences" (Church #46)

The Vatican Council II reacted against the two extremes: against those who stressed the evil spirit of the world, she said the world was good; and against those who identified the secular and the Divine, she reminded that Godly restraints and Christ-likeness are the condition of effective secular activity. Eyes that are fixed on heaven must not ignore the world (Acts 1/11), as the Apostles were told as they watched the Ascension. In other words, you have work to do; look to the world. On the other hand God who gives eternal crowns does not take away our tinsel ones. The mortal will not be lost, but will put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15/53, 54; 2 Cor. 4/11)

The Divine Word is at work in humanity, in history, in science, and in social consciousness. Christ

(Continued on Page 14)

LETTERS

to the editor



Help the Aged

The Courier-Journal is performing one of its functions very well — pointing out needs and opportunities for Christian service.

The "case histories" outlined at Christmas time presented individual needs, and the response was great. Part of the apathy of Catholics can be explained by seeing problems in general, and not as one person who needs Christ-like love.

Your latest series on the aged in Rochester was superb and should be a barb in each Catholic conscience. How can a parish ignore the aged in its own neighborhood? Mrs. Rose Dawson of the Volunteer Bureau of the Council of Social Agencies says there are 400 aging people living alone in the Manhattan Street area between the inner loop and the Xerox building.

A Catholic organization could provide effective help. If each Women's Guild president looks at the activities of her Guild in the light of these stories of the aged, perhaps some Guild activities could be steered toward helping people.

A parish Guild could change the whole atmosphere of a nursing home. A college Alumnae group could follow the recent lead of the Alumnae of Rosary Hill College by donating hours each week in a Home for the Aged. What was the challenge of an education in a Catholic school?

I think as I sit at Mass on Sunday and hear prayers for the aged and poor that the Great Listener must hear it as tinkling brass unless we are doing our utmost to lighten that burden.

The Rochester Friendly Home is in Brighton at 3156 East Ave., telephone 381-1600 or 381-3290. A person there — an aging mother — could benefit from your time.

—Mrs. Robert Joynt
Chairman of Volunteers
Rochester Friendly Home

Director Praised

The Wayne County Rural Ministry at its last monthly meeting reluctantly accepted the resignation of Mrs. Robert Taylor of Putneyville as director of the Williamson Come-Unity Center.

Health problems have made it necessary for Mrs. Taylor to withdraw from the active ministry. In recognition of her service, she was named director emerita.

It was Mrs. Taylor's vision which encouraged the growth of the ecumenical center. Formerly a used clothing store, the center now, in addition to clothing service, functions as a social service center, offering emergency counseling, help with referrals to other services or agencies, baby-sitting and "burn-out" needs.

Mrs. Taylor has frequently pointed out that no individual should be content to remain within the comfortable confines of his own group and still fulfill his fullest responsibility as a human being.

Christ Himself belonged to that alienated class, the poor. If we would know about Christ, we must know about the poor. In knowing them, we may find that the things we have heard and been content to believe about them are not true.

We in Wayne County are fortunate, thanks to Mrs. Taylor and the Rural Ministry, to have a school for such communication — the Come-Unity Center.

—James Conner, Ontario, N.Y.

Christian Unity

As an ex-Episcopal clergyman, the cause of Christian Unity is very dear to me, particularly as I have experienced the sin of disunity from both sides of the camp as it were. Also, for the same reason, I am able to view the total situation more objectively.

With eight years of ministry in the Anglican Church behind me I feel that I should point out one particular danger that many Catholics so easily fall into. They should join in all parish ecumenical activities and support their pastor in his efforts to forward Christian Unity. They should NOT associate themselves with the liberal and avantgarde "lunatic" fringe which has such a lot to say in these days of turmoil.

This fringe group ultimately would only have contact with "lunatic" fringe groups in the Protestant churches and would form some form of alliance which will leave the main stream of Christianity, of all churches, including our own, out in the cold.

As a Protestant Minister I viewed with great apprehension the extreme liberal elements in Roman Catholicism — even more so than similar groups within my own church. I believe that most ministers of non-Catholic churches also have similar misgivings. If so-called Catholics are prepared to betray their Church, it is no wonder that others who view the whole situation more objectively from outside, are wary that, after having stretched out the hand of friendship, they might turn round and do the same to them.

Christian Unity involves all Christians and not just a small section of each Christian Community. Those, who in their enthusiasm are prepared to "betray" must learn to wait for those who still cherish loyalty of paramount importance.

—Michael G. Cole,
73 Lazier St.

On School Boards

I had the privilege on Feb. 26 of hearing Rev. Charles J. Whalen speak at St. John Fisher College on the subject of THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION. Father Whalen is a professor of law at Fordham University and associate editor of AMERICA MAGAZINE.

I would like to mention three important points which Father Whalen made:

- 1) He does not see Catholic schools going out of existence in the next 20 to 30 years.
- 2) He advises that by all means we have school boards in parishes — BUT let them be decision-making groups. He said that without the power to establish policy, such boards are of no value and can, indeed, be an "obstruction" to Catholic education.
- 3) He warns us not to place too much authority in any ONE MAN on any parish school board.

As concerned parishioners and parents in parishes where school boards (or boards of education) have been established, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

- 1) Are we allowing our representatives on parish school boards to proceed as if the termination of private schools were "just a matter of time?"
- 2) Are our parish school boards truly "decision-making" groups, or are they "rubber-stamp" organizations?
- 3) Is any member of the board assuming too much authority as an individual board member with divergent goals for various parish organizations?

Those of us who have parish school boards should make every effort to attend the meetings. Our children are involved; our ideas should be represented. Let's make our representatives aware of our position so that they can proceed accordingly.

—Robert H. Gefell,
2514 Oakview Dr., Irondequoit.

Abortion Law Views

Civilized Murder

People who are urging a liberalized abortion law offer this shocking argument: when medical evidence shows that a retarded or deformed baby will probably be born, getting rid of that child in advance will be a good thing for society.

What is the reason for all the worry about the possibility of defective births? We have hundreds of thousands of defective people already born in this State. Killing them would take a tremendous burden off our shoulders.

I know: I work with thousands of them. And hundreds of them are so profoundly retarded that from a purely economic standpoint, they are useless. Why spend millions of dollars a year — and we do — keeping them alive?

There is only one answer to these questions. The reason we do not kill people after birth is because we do not want to "bloody our hands." It is much too messy and gory. It would be a little revolting, would it not, to slaughter everyone with an IQ under 25?

But, consider abortion. It can be accomplished so quietly and privately. You might even call it "Pleasant Murder." Horrifying to think so. Perhaps we should call it "Civilized Murder." It sounds every bit as good to me as "Legalized Abortion."

Oh, believe me, for years I have seen the suffering and sorrow resulting from mentally defective births. It reminds me that I could have been one of the three out of every hundred born that way — and I will be eternally grateful that my mother took the chance!

So will every defective, unwanted child ever born — grateful that he can enjoy eternal life, because his

mother did not snuff out his earthly life.

I hope God will give our Governor and legislators the courage and guidance to make certain that this beautiful State of ours is not cursed with the catastrophe of a "liberalized" abortion law.

—Rev. E. Charles Bauer,
Catholic Chaplain, Newark
State School

News Coverage

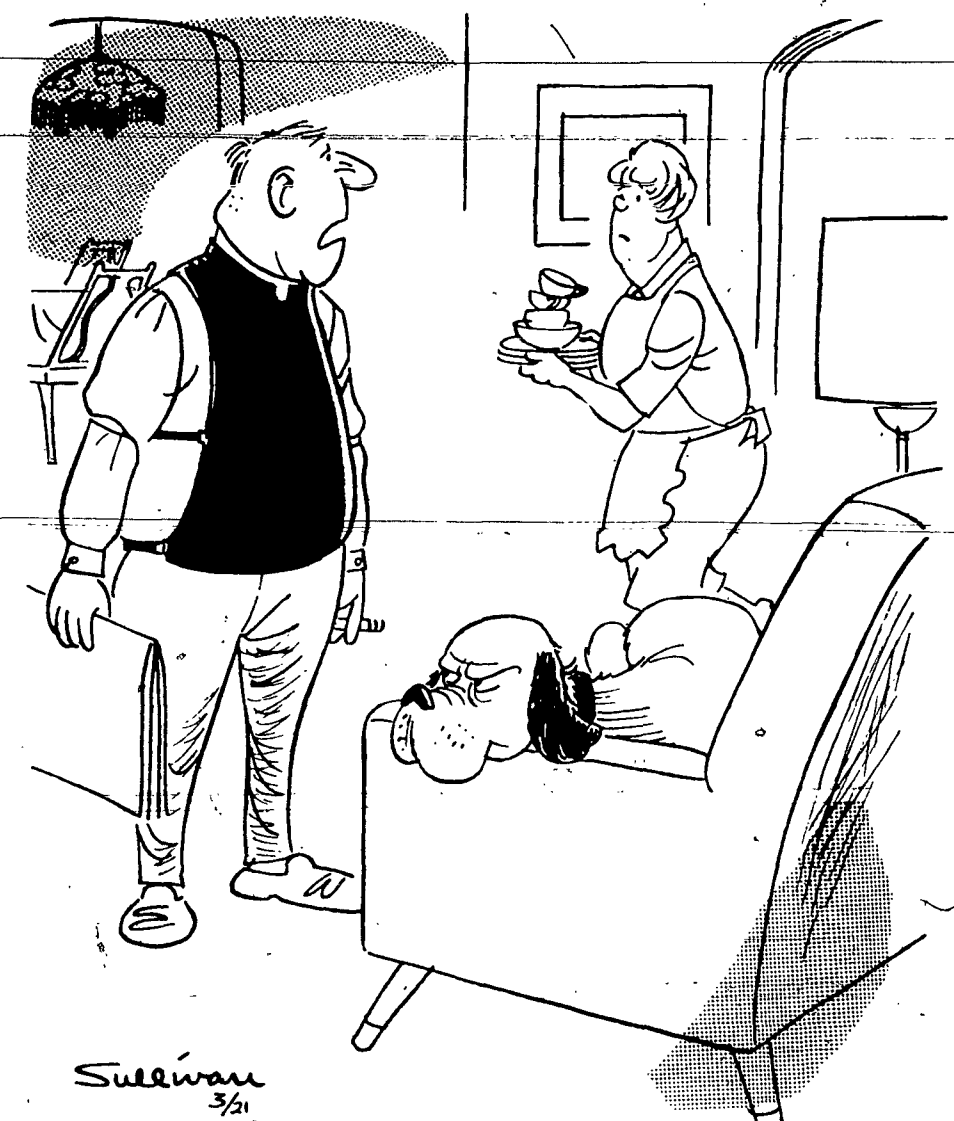
On behalf of the Monroe County Right to Life Committee, we wish to express our appreciation for the coverage the Courier-Journal has given to the activities of our group in opposing the changes in the abortion law. Since the Gannett papers have taken an editorial stand in favor of liberal abortion legislation, it has become almost impossible to get the legal, medical and other objections before the public.

This is precisely the type of situation to justify the need for an independent newspaper, especially one reflecting a moral viewpoint such as the Courier-Journal.

However, this would seem to require a more even-handed treatment than the story in the Feb. 28 issue regarding the recent public hearing on abortion. We realize that our position was excellently reported in the previous-week's paper. But the later report of the same even made not a solitary reference to the seven speakers in opposition to changes in the law.

We hope that you will continue to list the names and addresses of our legislators. It will be vitally important that your readers write to advise them of opposition to changes in the law during the next several weeks.

—Engene R. Cusker,
Co-Chairman, Right to Life Committee



"WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE WORLD, MRS. GARRITY? HE USED TO JUMP RIGHT OFF WHEN I TOLD HIM!"

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Collections for Overseas Aid Fund, scheduled in dioceses March 16.

Proceeds help support self-help projects in Africa and Latin America.

Catholic Relief Service



BISHOP JOINS LISTING second floor Mar. 7-8 at Watson Southern Tier. From Brian Falcone, OFM, Corning; Father John Drew, S.A., I

228 At Ecumenical Workshop

Elmira—Two hundred persons including some from Buffalo and Oneida, were sponsored by the Ecumenical Scripture Workshop Saturday, March 7-8, at Watson near Painted Post.

It was described as most successful events to place in the area in March. It was sponsored by the Formation Board of the Tier vicariate.

Theme of the gathering of the Bible. Conducting sessions was Father Sebastian O'Connell, of St. Bernard's vicariate.

"I confess I didn't think it could be made that intimate one participant. Father Sebastian discussed biblical, literary and the preaches to Scripture as understanding of the Bible included."

"Basic Principles in Scripture," "A Theology Reading the Old and New," "Genesis — Un Message," and "The History of the Bible."

Auxiliary Bishop John ferty addressed the Saturday, urging participants in your pursuit of Christ as we all know, we have to go."

Watson Homestead is and conference center's wooded-hill area three miles Cooper Plains off Rt. Meads-Creek Road. It is of a triangle formed by C and Ithaca.

It is owned and operated Western New York Conference Methodist Church "to serve nominations, and invites educational, social service organizations to use of its facilities."