

Rev. Dr Anthony Abela: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE HUMANISM

A brief “compendium theologic” is the description that imposed itself upon the reviewer as he leafed his way through this dense, slow moving synthesis of speculative and spiritual theology. Its author identifies the literary genre of his work as “una meditazione sul mistero di Dio amore e dell’uomo amore nel Verbo”, generated by reflection on his own spiritual experience within the framework of the Focolare Movement spirituality of Unity (p.5 cfr p.173). Z steers the “poche pagine di questo libro” away from the realm of a “manuale di teologia” or of an “opera scientifica nel senso specialistico del termine” by leaving out “un apparato scientifico” usually required for offering adequate discussions of theological topics. This “testimonianza d’amore” as the book presents itself is nothing less than a profound, thickly written, beautifully printed, deeply theological, essay into the acute crisis that European and Western culture finds itself in. This essay merits close and considered perusal and discussion by anyone with responsibility or pretension of influencing the cultural formation of any country in the western hemisphere.

Contents

Only two of the five chapters of the volume offer explicitly philosophical and theological investigation into the Christian (and Catholic) perception of God. The other three chapters treat related subjects. Reading Z is arduous not merely for the excessively slow pace (generally speaking) of his argumentation, but also for the intimate interlocking of the concepts he builds.

The first chapter focuses on “speaking of God today” (pp.7-41). This reflection is scanned by the recurring motif “How come the European and Western culture has become secularized and atheistic in orientation given its evidently Christian roots?” Z patiently leads his reader to his own “theological” [although other interpretative keys are considered as possible, Z prefers the theological hermeneutics because “mi sembra la più rigorosa” (p.34 note 9)] understanding of this phenomenon, on the way stating that speaking of God is essentially a cultural act (pp.7-11), exposing in details the dynamics of the transformation within European culture of God as mystery into God as problem (pp.11-15), and describing, often relying on contributions from Pope John Paul II, the consequences of this emptying of European culture of its essential element which is man’s relationship to God seen as constitutive to his nature (pp.15-19).

Z's exegesis and hermeneutics of European secularism and atheism, as well as his proposal for rendering theology within such cultural context, reflect Pope John Paul II's conviction that "le crisi e le tentazioni dell'uomo europeo e dell'Europa sono crisi e tentazioni del cristianesimo e della Chiesa in Europa" ("Discorso al V Simposio dei Vescovi europei," *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 7, 1982). Essentially, the process that led to this cultural negative situation was inaugurated when Christianity adopted Greek conceptual categories (in a special manner the term and category 'persona') in order to articulate her understanding of the mystery of the triune God. During this inculturation exercise Christian theology was "hellenized" so that one is justified of speaking "di una eccessiva influenza e di una illegittima penetrazione di elementi estranei" [Here Z quotes Sergej Bulgakov, *Il Paraclito* (Bologna 1971) 186, who, together with other exponents of Eastern theology exercised huge influence on our author and shaped his thoughts]. This excessive influence of Greek thought, and an illegitimate penetration within Christian theology of other pagan elements, led to a mere speculative formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine which remained without the necessary translation into the corresponding Christian praxis. The result of this double negative procedure was the sheer irrelevancy of the Trinitarian dogma for daily life (Kant).

For Z correction of this unfortunate development is possible only through the recuperation of the communitarian dimension of the individual's relationship to God. The community is the "locus" where this relationship can adequately take place and mature. "Questo è sempre il primo sul piano dell'essere: è sempre e solo in Dio che incontro gli altri, è nella sua apertura verso di me (quella per la quale esisto) che posso aprirmi agli altri; sul piano della realtà esistente, però, esso è il 'secondo': è nell'apertura all'altro che realizzo l'apertura a Dio, e maturo in questa nell'apertura all'altro" (p.19 cfr pp.30-31). Z quotes Hans Urs von Balthasar's proposal of "dialogical metaphysics" and Victor von Weizsaecker's hypothesis of "inter-subjective thinking" as entering within this perspective (p.30). "Mostrare Dio è, allora, mostrare se stessi in comunione, e il cosmo tutto vivente in maniera significativa nella comunione tra gli uomini" (p.32). The Christological dimension of this communion is never far away from Z's thought and discussion (p.32). Unfortunately little articulation is offered of what in practice living in communion means; instead Z outlines the outcome of this communitarian living in cultural terms: "La persona può far passare la cultura dell'Occidente e un rinnovato e magnifico umanesimo (offerto in dono alle altre culture), dove la realizzazione di ciascuno non è cercato nella solitudine ma nella comunione, né affidata allo scontro o al confronto, ma all'incontro e al

dialogo” (p.31). One has to read the entire monograph to deduct that Z’s cultural model constitutes the articulation and elaboration in universalistic terms of a lived experience (cfr p.173).

Doing theology anew

In his second investigation (pp.42-71) Z approaches “il parlare di Dio” as theological research; he starts with stating that the Church is in great need of a theological synthesis that would heal theology of the analytical dispersion that characterizes Western thought in general. Z aims here at offering in outline this new type of theological synthesis. His enquiry snakes through the meaning of theology (pp.42-43), the inherent limitations of human language when it comes to deal with the subject of God, and the flowering of theology into contemplation of the divinity. “La punta estrema del parlare di Dio è raggiunta allora nell’amore — dono di sé nel sacrificio, nella preghiera, in cui tutta una cultura si offriva all’Assoluto nella semplicità confidente, nella speranza che Egli si dia a conoscere nel suo Volto nascosto e desiderato” (pp.44-45). Drawing from *Trésors mystiques de l’Inde* (Paris 1968) and *La ricerca di Dio nelle religioni* (Bologna 1980) (In neither is the editor mentioned) Z exemplifies this transcending human language through love “che si esprime nel silenzio orante” (pp.45-46). Christian theology overcame the limits inherent in human intelligence as it searches for God by accepting divine revelation “nella quale Dio si è dato a conoscere nella sua vita intima, trasformando e arricchendo l’uomo cristiano nella partecipazione al mistero della divino-umanità del Cristo” (p.46). Of course it is not natural human love that surpasses the frontiers of human reason and intelligence in order to grasp God in his mystery; rather it had to be love donated by God himself, charity, accepted by man in so far as he is a person. Human love and intelligence should let themselves be crucified (a leitmotif in Z) “perchè l’uomo trovi un rivolgersi a Dio radicalmente nuovo,” where this love/charity bears faith beyond conceptualization and beyond negative theology which consists of discourse on God through concepts.

Z labels his approach to the knowledge of God “theologia mistica” which he describes in some detail through a long citation from John of the Cross (cfr p.50). This mystical theology requires of its practitioner the emptying of his complete self, an event that occurred in man on Incarnation (pp.51-52). In Jesus, the created person, due to his participation in divine nature, “è introdotta nella conoscenza e nell’amore di Dio nel modo di Dio” (p.52; one should read in this context what Z says in note 31 on pp.65-66). “In Jesus” the human person *comes to know God in himself* “nella pericoresi trinitaria.” *This introduction*

of the human person "in Jesus" within the Trinitarian pericoreisis, opens two ways for knowing God: "la persona creata può nello stesso tempo conoscere e amare Dio (e se stessa e la creazione tutta) nel modo di Dio nella relazione con il Padre nello Spirito del Figlio; e può conoscere e amare Dio Signore della creazione, se stessa come creatura, e la creazione tutta, nel modo della creatura" because this person maintained its corporeity (p.53). Jesus therefore, constitutes "il parlare di Dio nel modo di Dio" (p.53). In the last, dense pages of this essay (pp.53-60) Z discusses theology as a science which is the synthesis between "la conoscenza di Dio nel modo di Dio (theologia mistica) e la conoscenza di Dio nel modo dell'uomo (teologia 'naturale')" (pp.53-54). Theology seen as a scientific effort respects both human reason as well as the object of its enquiry, God in himself. And as such it takes place within the Church and must take account especially of the experience of God had by saints (pp.54-55). "Questo è il discorso di Dio, dove la Scrittura si fa carne nelle membra del Cristo. I cristiani con il Cristo risorto tra loro sono la teologia *prima*! Quella teologia che ha la sua radice e la sua espressione massima nell'Avvenimento eucaristico, e la realizzazione 'quotidiana' nella comunicazione esperienziale dell'amore di Dio operante nelle storie 'quotidiane' dei redenti dalla croce del Cristo... È solo nell'esperienza di comunione profonda, la comunione nel Cristo fra noi, che essa si apre intera, e può, senza mortificare, proprio per la sua novità, proporsi come apice di ogni altra esperienza di Dio. Da questa teologia nasce la teologia *seconda*, come coscienza riflessa, coscienza di quell'esistere nel Cristo che è appunto la Chiesa" (p.55).

In the next two chapters Z focuses on God. Chapter three (pp.72-101) is introductory; taking the cue from the *Credo* of Pope Paul VI, the author scrutinizes the propositions of God as Being (pp.72-76) and of God as Love (pp.76-93). His approach is metaphysical while his categories are strictly Aristotelian filtered through thomism. Z's point of departure is "being" as an "act"; without entering the details of the dynamics involved the author states that "being" in creatures leads one to the Being God (p.73) to which human intelligence leans without being able to grasp adequately: "L'ombra del non essere (in man) oscura gli occhi davanti al grande sole dell'Essere" (p.74). Man, however, cannot possibly abandon his search for a deeper comprehension of the Godhead since here lies his dignity. This experience of "dipping God as a Pure Act of Being" is both joyful and "crucifying" "perchè strappa sempre di più l'uomo da ciò che gli è abituale per condurlo di fronte a Dio" (ibid.).

This "attingere Dio come Atto Puro d'Essere" (is this pure metaphor?) takes place within a spatio-temporal framework; it's revelation in history, which reaches its climax in Christ. "Il Cristo diventa, in questa prospettiva, il Rivelatore stesso dell'essere e di Dio come Essere, conducendo l'uomo a una

intensità di comprensione mai raggiunta prima. E questo proprio mediante la Croce, dove ogni pretesa di destoricizzazione dell'essere è respinto e superato: *ora e qui Dio-uomo, l'Essere muore*" (p.75). This is one of the instances in Z of "leaps" within his argumentation: not every intermediary stage between the knowledge of Being in space and time and revelation is properly scanned.

Christian reflection on God as Being reacted to the revelation in Ex 3,14-15. Z chooses to ignore the debate on the textual and form-critical problems raised by this text; he opts to merely consider "come quel Nome è stato capito e le conseguenze che se ne sono tratte" (p.94 note 9), but has not refrained from applying to the text a number of readings which have all the air of being "eisegesis" rather than "exegesis" (p.94 note 10). Once reason discovers God as Being it has reached the "punta estrema del pensare umano" (p.76). Deeper knowledge of God requires the self-revelation of Being itself (Does the citation from St Bonaventura on pp.76-77 fit the present context?), a self-revelation which constitutes an "uscita di Dio da Sé per raggiungere l'uomo nella sua umanità" (p.77). This has taken place in a special manner in Jesus Christ. Again some brisk passages can easily be noted as the author directs his focus from over Being onto Love (pp.76-78). But some high points of theological reflection may be read in these pages as well as in what remains of this study. Just to reproduce one brief passage: "La piaga del Crocifisso, quella della carne nella trafittura del costato e quella dell'anima nella trafittura dell'abbandono (technical term borrowed from the spirituality of the Focolare Movement for Jesus's experience as reported in Mk 15,34 and parallels), è proprio l'appirsi di Dio nella sua Parola, l'uscire di Dio da Sé nell'estasi dell'Amore per entrare nella sua creatura e condurla a Sé attraverso la medesima piaga. Il Cristo è la porta per la quale Dio esce nell'uomo e l'uomo entra in Dio (cf Gv 10,7). È la porta che si apre nella chenessi dell'incarnazione e introduce in sé nell'abbandono sulla croce. La risurrezione è l'essere entrati in Dio" (p.77). This citation from Z's profound meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation requires from the author more than one explanation especially for readers who are not altogether knowledgeable of his code. The same could be said of Z's use of the term "apofatismo" borrowed from Eastern theology (p.78).

In Christian revelation "Being" is not God's ultimate name; this name is rather "Love". Here (p.78) one has to register once more brisk crossing from one essential content of theology to another. Only Love explains Being "... È un essere che non è amore che può diventare problema per l'intelligenza. Il Dio che è Amore non è l'abisso del silenzio che inghiotte intelligenza e tensione degli enti, ma il Silenzio che si apre *tutto*, nella Parola in atto d'amore" (pp.78-79). God's love for creatures is a natural consequence of God being

Love itself (p.79) which is revealed in Godhead being a Trinity (p.80). It is within the framework of this Trinitarian love “che si apre lo spazio per una relazione *reale* fra Dio e la creatura, nel Figlio incarnato. L’Essere come Amore getta un ponte tra creazione e incarnazione” (p.80). Z settles within the “linguaggio degli amanti di Dio” in order to establish that man’s search for God “non dice mai tensione ad una Essenza infinita come tale... ma tensione di persona a Persona, e in questa all’Essenza infinita” (ibid.).

The author then leaves the realm of theological speculation to enter the consideration of Scriptural texts which witness to the progressive understanding within the Jewish/Christian context of God as love. Of course Z does not outline the slow development of the concept within history — he relegates to a footnote (note 23 p.96), for instance, the relationship between God’s *Šdaqah* (justice) and God’s *’ahbāh* (love). Rather he concentrates on the moment of maturity of this development process, the contribution of such prophets as Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and of the Song of Songs. “In essi l’amore di Dio assume il linguaggio, la modalità dell’amore sponsale, culmine degli amori creati e insieme massima compenetrazione naturale di spirito e corporeità” (p.80). Z’s main sources for this part are A. Mattioli, *Dio e l’uomo nella Bibbia di Israele. Teologia dell’Antico Testamento* (Torino 1981) and A. Chouraqui, *Il Cantico dei cantici e Introduzione ai Salmi* (Rome 1980) (The latter author features often in Z’s considerations, but there are times when his terminology may call for some metalinguistical exercise as when he employs the term ‘incarnation’ on p.81). His treatment is deep and insightful especially what he writes upon the “culmine della rivelazione veterotestamentaria di Dio Amore” (p.81), that is, the Song of Songs. On reading these beautiful pages of Z’s book one may remain with the impression that he takes as canonical not only the textual reality of this *m^egillah*, but also its allegorical interpretation; this was not the case though some scholars do believe that such interpretation may have procured its entrance and perdurance into the Hebrew canon — cfr Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (SCM Press; London 1979) 569-579 for a different evaluation — Z’s reading God’s word beneath the female voice (p.81) is probably arbitrary; this reading leads the author to attribute meanings to the leitmotif in Cant 2,7; 3,5 and 8,4 (p.82) which probably were not intended by the original author even if he was envisaging an allegorical agenda for his opus. Which leads to the conclusion that the greater part of what Z writes of God on the basis of the Song of Songs rests more on tradition than on exegesis of Scripture.

His overview of the concept ‘God is love’ proceeds with the NT. “Gesù riassume in sé, nella linea di Israele, la ricerca d’amore di Dio e dell’uomo e la conduce al compimento, introducendola là dove da sempre essa ha le sue

radici” (p.82). In Jesus the Godhead enters man’s spatio-temporal dimension. “Dio cammina con noi verso l’eternità e vive egli stesso l’attesa e dunque il tempo, la restrizione imposta dall’estensione dell’offerta del suo amore. Vive simultaneamente l’eternità nella relazione intratrinitarie e il rapporto temporale con le creature spirituali. È una *kenosi* accettata volontariamente da Dio nell’ordine della creazione, una discesa nel rapporto col mondo, che Dio vive simultaneamente con l’eternità della propria vita trinitaria” (pp.82-83). The Incarnation constitutes the revelation of God’s love and of God’s intimate life (p.85), with Christ becoming ‘testimone e ermeneuta’ of the divine Love, especially through the Cross Event (p.84). A number of NT texts are cited (pp.84-86) with pride of place being given to 1John where the revelation of God as love receives “la sua massima espressione formale” (p.85). Quoting R.E. Brown Z considers the proposition ‘God is love’ as a description rather than a definition of who is God (note 41, p.98). 1John 4,19 leads him to the threshold of the Trinity though the transitus appears elliptical (p.86).

Before venturing into the mystery of the Trinity in the following chapter, Z offers some methodological considerations to the question of evil and suffering in human experience (pp.87-92). His indications for a solution of this ‘most serious problem to faith in God as love’ are basically two: (a) That before conceptualizing this reality one must experience God as love in one’s own life: “la ricerca di una risposta non può essere condotta senza una partecipazione profonda all’oggetto che viene interrogato, sino a porsi davanti ad esso per farsene ‘catturare’” (p.87). A long citation from Chiara Lubich, foundress of the Focolare Movement follows (pp.88-89), wherein she narrates how she ‘discovered’ the love of God. The implications of the citation for Z’s own ‘theologizing’ are not difficult to see. “La comprensione di un Dio che entra nella storia degli uomini e realmente soffre le nostre sofferenze, le nostre angosce, apre una prospettiva diversa. L’Assoluto è *vulnerabile!*” (emphasis his) (p.89). (b) Because man is free “L’uomo deve farsi coinvolgere dall’abisso di Dio, come si fa coinvolgere dall’abisso dell’uomo” (p.90). And the drama consists precisely in this “mancato coinvolgimento dell’amore dell’uomo nell’amore di Dio” (p.90). It is this adventure that Sacred History in Scripture tells (pp.90-91). Had man ventured completely in God’s love, God’s mystery would not have been transformed from a “grembo dell’amore” into a “nulla che inquieta”. Nor would man’s relationship to the universe have been so profoundly changed as Gen 1-11 implies. Here Z resorts once more to the magisterium of John Paul II, his message for the 1990 World Day of Peace where the Pontiff comments on Gen 1-3. Through sin man deliberately opposed the plan of the Creator and brought upon himself and the universe the tragedy (reference to ecological issues) we know of. The next two pages offer in outline

the entire doctrine of redemption formulated in terms that are vaguely Teilhardian. "L'amore di Dio penetra le ferite aperte dell'uomo, le assume e trasforma, facendone dell'incredibile Amore" (p.91). Another long citation from another booklet by Chiara Lubich helps Z spell out the redeeming transformation by God of the universe through Christ whom man 'consumes' at the Eucharist (pp.91-92). "L'amore di Dio sa far diventare amore anche le conseguenze della male usata libertà dell'uomo, sempre, però, che l'uomo liberamente cooperi. *E questo è avvenuto nel Cristo*" (emphasis his) (p.92)

It is in chapter four (pp.102-142), entitled simply 'The Trinity' and introduced by a recapitulating quote from Gregory of Nazianzus, that Z reaches the nucleus of his theological and philosophical reflection. Initially the author peels the mystery rind by rind in a cautious manner, until he reaches the heart of the matter, which for the author is the "kenosis" experienced within the intimate life of the Trinity (pp.115-123). But then rambles freely across a number of related topics which he summarily examines through the prism of his own understanding of the Triune God (pp.123-132).

One may say that Z's meditation on this mystery unfolds within a double delimiting wall: there is first of all the consciousness that human intelligence can but scratch this mystery knowledge of which has been obtained through revelation. A quotation from St. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catecheses*, cfr PG 33,542) that in discussing God it is science confessing one's ignorance, serves our author to perfection (p.109). Later on he describes his own speculation into the inner life of the Trinity as a "cercare di balbettare della Trinità" (p.123). This warns the reader not to expect the book to exhaust the subject-matter in just forty pages. But there is the more serious delimitation for research on the Trinity: Z dedicates the first three pages (102-104) of this chapter to its discussion. For him the *locus theologicus* for any reflection on God is the context of Church life since the "cammino della comprensione cristiana del Dio di Gesù Cristo non è altro che il cammino della comprensione del Cristo stesso e della Chiesa" (p.102). Eph 1,23 is quoted because it defines the Church as Christ's *sōma*, body. This understanding of what theology is would exclude for Z other contexts for theologizing. "Per questo la riflessione trinitaria ha il suo luogo reale *solo* all'interno della Chiesa, la quale può attingerla e maturarla coscientemente nella misura in cui coscientemente della Trinità vive" (emphasis his) (p.102). Is Z's model of what the Church consists of that of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*'s concentric circles?

The direction taken here where trinitarian reflection marries Christian praxis and asceticism — Christian research is not "il tentativo di includere Dio nel pensiero, ma di offrire il pensiero a Dio perchè lo crocifigga vi si esprima

‘umanamente’” (p.104) — would exclude trinitarian studies conceived as mere articulation in language of concepts gleaned from Christian primary and perhaps secondary sources. This elaboration of a Christian doctrine rather than being an intellectual exercise is the “risposta all’offerta che Dio fa di sé nell’incarnazione. Anche la mente dell’uomo deve lasciarsi assumere da Dio” (p.104). But is theology as the ‘science of God’ simply the articulation of one’s own experience with the God of Jesus Christ? Z states his own rules of the game but does not carry his statements to their logical conclusions.

Z’s own Trinitarian reflection opens with a brief though essential exposition of biblical data (pp.104-106). All classical NT passages are included, texts that shed light on Jesus’ divinity, on his relationship to an “Other” whom he addresses as his Father — “È nel rapporto unico con Dio, che gli è Padre, che il Cristo è Dio. Un rapporto di unità assoluta che non cancella la distinzione” (p.105) — and on yet his relationship to “Another” whom Jesus designates as Holy Spirit. These texts are interpreted according to mainstream Christian traditions. For the reading of Johannine texts the author is dependent on the Italian version of R. Schnackenburg’s three volume monumental commentary published respectively in 1973, 1977, 1981. No hint is offered on the history of exegesis of these important Christological texts except perhaps for Jn 1,1 (pp.132-133 note 1) where one may notice an apologetic concern [For a recent discussion I would refer to Robert H. Countess, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses New Testament* (Phillipsburg NJ 1982²1987) 41-70].

Z spends pp.106-115 for explaining the arduous task facing western thought of having to reconcile absolute unity and multiplicity within the Godhead as presented in Christian canonical writings. His real interlocutors in these pages are western thinkers and representatives of the “riflessione intellettuale” (p.107). For the formulation of the philosophical/theological issue involved he borrows extensively from Massimo Cacciari’s paper “Cristologia e teologia nell’Idealismo. Hegel-Scelling” read in Pordenone, Northern Italy, in 1988 (No details of the paper are provided). According to Z we have to “tear” [“squarciare”: the author mistakenly looks towards the Greek version of Jn 19,34 as the source of this metaphor (p.107): the Greek term *nyssō* means ‘prick, stab, pierce’ but not ‘tear, lacerate’ as the Italian verb means. The metaphor derives from a misreading by the Vulgate of the verb *enyxen* as *ēnoixen* which it translated “aperuit”, opened. Cf R.E. brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI* (AB29A; New York 1970) 935]. In a way “l’Unità dell’Assoluto quale è pensata per affermare in esso una circolazione realissima di Soggetti che sono l’Assoluto — che è l’Assoluto” (p.107). Christian thought distinguished in God nature and personhood; these do not

coincide. The discussion on the relationship between the two concepts occupies Z for the following pages (108-112). Christianity's answer to this dilemma ultimately draws on revelation. God is not simply Absolute Being, He is Love by nature (1Jn) "Perchè la Natura divina, l'*usia*, è Amore, essa è allora Trinità di Soggetti, Persone che si danno l'una all'altra in una originaria ed eternamente data distinzione relativa *tra Esse Persone e la Natura*, che è assoluto Essere, ma come Amore. Distinzione nell'unità, unità nella distinzione" (emphasis his) (p.111). Z's terminology and approach in these pages is metaphysical (cfr note 15, pp.134-135). Towards the end of this sub-paragraph (pp.113-115) the author examines briefly how the Son could incarnate and how the Three Persons may participate in human suffering. The more original contribution of Z probably lies in his discussion of the Three as reciprocal love; here he attempts to combine the approach to the mystery of the Trinity that focuses on the processions with the other that concentrates on God as love (p.115).

In this exercise Z marries the concept of mutual love (pp.116-117) to that of *kenosis* by speculatively building on Phil 2,6-11 (pp.117-123). The entire construction rests on the theological principle: "... la Parola di Dio rivela i Tre come reciprocità assumendo la sua condizione umana come icona della sua condizione divina, e promettendo dunque alla tensione umana la possibilità di compimento che pure la conservi nella sua bellezza — un compimento che mentre è in atto, è tutto ancora tensione: le relazioni in cui i Tre sono nella assolutezza dell'Essere, non sono infatti, anche e 'sempre' in atto ma *proprio come relazioni*, dinamicamente?" (p.117) (emphasis his). Z pays special attention to the anthropological implications involved in the revelation of the Triune God. The Three live a relationship of 'reciprocità compiuta' which remains for man "l'approdo offerto alla nostra ricerca d'amore: la certezza che l'amore compiuto non è utopia" (p.117). One feels he has reached the summit of Z's speculative theology as he goes through his description of the *kenosis* experience of the Son within the life of the Trinity (pp.117-120), as well as that of the Father (pp.120-121) and that of the Holy Spirit (pp.121-123). This theme is met once more in the following sub-section (pp.123-132) where creation is read in the light of the trinitarian Mystery: "... dandosi l'un l'altro ciascuno nel suo modo, l'Essere di Dio, *su questa kenosi dell'Uno nelle Persone*, nella libertà di reciprocità dei Tre, 'appare' nell'Uno, nell'Essere, ciò che non è uno, ciò che non è: appare la molteplicità, la (possibile) creatura" (p.125) (emphasis his). Creation came into being "all'interno dell'amore reciproco che è i Tre" (p.123); room for creation was had "nel non-essere relazionale che non sono le Persone divine (p.124). In other words the philosophical possibility of creation (Z writes of "pensabilità" [p.124]) derives from one's acceptance of the "verità trinitaria" because "... è nella libera pericorese dei Tre l'Uno

nell'Altro che trova radice la creazione come libero frutto di questa libertà" (p.126). From this perspective creation appears as "'narrazione' dell'amore reciproco che è i Tre" (p.127).

In the remaining pages Z hops over a selection of related subject -matters: Mary as "l'icona ipostatica della creazione" (p.127), sin and human freedom (pp.127-128), angels (p.141 note 51), redemption (pp.129-131), the Eucharist, and the history of salvation as found in the Scriptures. Worthy of comment are his reflections on Adam's sin: "L'Adamo poteva realizzare, nella comunione iconica dell'uomo e della donna, inclusiva del cosmo, quella immagine di persona che nel Cristo avrebbe la sua verità. E proprio qui Adamo è fallito, come dice la Parola rivelata. Non in assoluto, ma nel relativo del rapporto uomo-donna, e, all'interno di questo, del rapporto uomo-cosmo e uomo-Dio dalla parte dell'uomo" (pp.128-129). My impression is that history flowed in the inverse order according to Gen 3: it was because man failed in his vertical relationship that his horizontal relationships (woman/cosmos) became blurred.

The translation into cultural praxis of the foregoing reflection on the Divinity as "Unitrità" is spelled out in the fifth and last chapter of this book (pp.143-180). One may note Z's habitual tendency to include within the overarching theological framework as many subsidiary themes as are allowed, thus creating the impression of a coherent theological synthesis. As the construction Z builds is deeply biblical and Pauline, the author appears less original in the details of his argumentation and in his handling biblical data, and more his own in the analysis of the crisis of Western forms of humanism. Z puts this crisis at Christianity's door for failing to transform into cultural categories trinitarian metaphysics. For the biblical substratum of his theological synthesis Z depends upon a number of biblical scholars like H. Schlier and E. Lohse; unfortunately some of the stones he quarries from their works need further refinement. For an instance we quote his adoption of the doctrine of the principalities and powers (One would wonder what the significance of his statement in note 8, p.176 could be) somehow expressed in Eph 6,12 and elsewhere in the corpus paulinum without asking whether the author(s) of these NT writings was/were not indulging in a demythologizing process. The operations of these powers within the "spiritual atmosphere" which humans "breathe" (p.146) would seem to conflict with man's liberum arbitrium which is so basic to Christian ethics.

Z's argumentation in this chapter moves quite swiftly. Its linchpin is his motif frequently recurring in chapter one that European culture owes its crisis as well as its self-banishment from the ecclesial community among other things to the fact that "la comunità ecclesiale non è sempre stata capace di tutta la

vastità che dovrebbe tenderla e di quella novità esistenziale e intellettuale che le è stata affidata: l'Assoluto come Trinità" (pp.152-153). This crisis and this divorce between Western culture and Christianity featuring in this context occasions one of the few references to Z's personal involvement (p.152). Z means to demonstrate in this last part of his theological essay that the metaphysics involved in the datum of revelation that God is the Trinity is translatable into culture; this latter he defines "il condensato — qui e adesso e sempre aperto a trasformazioni — di risposte, di strutture, di progetti che nascono dal profondo di ogni uomo che cerca se stesso, posto di fronte al mondo, agli uomini, a Dio" (p.150). As this has to pass through the Church, Z first (pp.143-148) outlines what Scripture (Paul) says on the Church and its relationship to the "world", taken in its negative connotation (note 1, p.175) and on the Church as redeemed humanity and creation (= the Kingdom). At various moments in this reflection (pp.145.147-148) the writer stops to define what the Church is supposed to be. Ultimately "la Chiesa è cultura in mezzo al mondo" (p.149). Z then examines the ingredients of a Christian culture (pp.148-153), focusing on the relationship that passes between culture and Gospel (pp.149-150), the essentially multiple character of Christian culture (pp.150-151), and the presumed vocation of such a culture: "Da una parte la cultura è — è chiamata ad essere — certamente la testimone del Signore risorto; in essa la creazione ritrova la sua voce autentica, in essa i grandi problemi dell'uomo si trascendono nell'unitrinità della vita nuova e sono condotti a soluzione immanente nella luce della risurrezione. Dall'altra parte, però, la cultura cristiana è anche la memoria e la testimone della chenesi e dell'abbandono del Signore in croce. E i due momenti — abbandono e risurrezione — non vanno separati, anche se sono distinti. È l'Abbandonato e morto sulla croce che risorge. La cultura cristiana, allora, è chiamata a rivivere l'atto unitario del Cristo che è morto ed è risorto nell'unico Amore. Una grande cultura cristiana deve essere capace dell'immensa trasmutazione operata dal Cristo" (p.151). The universalistic dimension of such Christian culture is stressed (pp.152-153).

The next nine pages (153-160) offer a discussion on what form of humanism should flower from the Christian culture as conceived by Z. Three types of humanism are first sketched, labeled respectively as the "umanesimo della creazione," "umanesimo della croce," "umanesimo della resurrezione". Z offers a short critique of the three of them and attributes to their failure to effect an encounter and mutual penetration the crisis of European culture. "Ciascuna di queste tre forme ha anche i suoi limiti e le sue derive, sia per la non definitività di ogni attrazione culturale cristiana, sia perchè esse sono state sviluppate storicamente in contrasto l'una con l'altra — il mondo è sempre

nascosto nell'intimo della Chiesa e la sfida nelle sue stesse realizzazioni. Ed è in questo contrasto, in questa mancanza di incontro e mutua penetrazione (che è proprio l'epifania culturale della Trinità!), che si è originata e sviluppata la crisi della cultura dell'Europa" (p.157). For Z the humanism that should flower from a really Christian culture is what he labels "l'umanesimo della persona come comunione" "dove la Trinità può rivelarsi in tutta la sua verità, e l'uomo raggiungere il suo massimo compimento storico — e in tutte le dimensioni della persona — insieme alla massima apertura alla piena maturità escatologica. Nel dialogo vissuto come respiro della persona in un pensare che sia pensare — nell'altra i tre umanesimi possono incontrarsi, integrarsi e trascendersi, custodendo il positivo elaborato, assorbendo in salvezza quanto può essere redento della cultura in rivolta, verso la novità cui lo Spirito chiama: una civiltà dell'amore. Una cultura trinitaria" (p.160). This articulates the aim towards which this essay has been slowly moving.

The concluding pages of this theological monograph constitute a *parenesis* to the Church that she should answer the Spirit's urgent calls "a fare della vita ecclesiale una icona sempre più luminosa della Trinità" (p.161). Z offers three "sentieri" of reflection: (a) That the Church as an institution is essentially the communion among its members, so that its structures and norms should reflect this communion "in quanto essa accade nel Cristo fra le sue membra" (p.163). This aim can be reached by insisting on the *Unum* (Jn 17,20) without forgetting that unity is realized in being *Unus* (cfr Gal 3,28) in Christ (cfr pp.108-109 and note 7 on p.133 for these distinctions). (b) The Church should appreciate better the role of each individual Christian "in ordine alla consumazione nell'unità che è la Chiesa stessa" (p.164). Without preparation of any sort the author introduces us to H. Urs von Balthasar's famous discussion of the four principles of ecclesial unity, petrine, pauline, johannine and marian, which Z reads in its Italian version: *Il complesso antiromano. Come integrare il papato nella Chiesa universale* (Brescia 1974). Z attempts to show that one may view ecclesial unity from a variety of perspectives (pp.164-166). Of the four principles Z privileges the last mentioned and it is to Mary that the author dedicates the concluding pages of his monograph (pp.165-175) "L'oscuramento di lei in tanta coscienza ecclesiale — sia per emarginazione sia per riduzione devozionale — è uno dei segni e delle cause della crisi attuale" (pp.166-167). (c) The Church is to reconsider Mary "come colonna di fuoco che illumina la via nel buio del deserto, come rovetto ardente consumato e mai consumato che rivela l'unità e da intendersi nella luce della Trinità" (p.167). In these pages the author offers an original re-reading of traditional mariology stressing Mary's role as woman and lay person. Z's reflections, rather than focusing on the historical personhood of Mary of Nazareth, reach out to the

Marian principle within the Christian Church; he identifies her lay personhood with the attempt to build “una vita sociale che in tutte le espressioni (culturali e istituzionali) riesca a dire nella storia l’unitrinità” (p.174).

This is, therefore, Z’s cultural and social project which he offers in this essay. He warns us readers, that his considerations will remain abstract and airy unless “ci si riferisce all’esperienza vissuta della comunione delle persone, nella quale ciascuno può cogliere in pienezza il Dio che è in sé e il disegno di Dio (cf Lc 7,30) su di sé, e rendere percipibile la verità degli esseri in tutta la sua ampiezza” (p.173).

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Nicola Ciola, *La Crisi del teocentrismo trinitario nel Novecento teologico*, (Edizioni Dehoniane; Roma 1993) 510pp. ISBN 88-396-0482-0.

The author's main contention in the present study is that modern atheism and the religious indifferentism prevalent in the first part of the present century are now being replaced by a more authentic Christian understanding of God. It had been, in fact, the gradual removal of the authentic trinitarian image of God from theological thought and teaching that has, to a large extent, accounted for the humanistic atheism of the modern era.

The author, for several years dedicated to teaching and research in the field of dogmatic theology at the Pontifical Lateran University, takes up the task in the present scholarly contribution of analysing the thought of the main exponents in the field of secularization and "secularist" theology, thereby showing that the return of the image of the Trinitarian God at the centre of doctrinal theology and of the Christian preaching has indeed accounted for the renewal of theology in general and of Christian living.

This renewed interest in trinitarian theology is attributed by the author, above other things, to the influence of Vatican II which, while being predominantly ecclesiological in content, was necessarily marked by numerous christological insights and hence characterized by trinitarian reflections less structured on abstract

philosophical analogies and deductions and more enriched by the very self-revelation of Triune God in the Person and message of Jesus Christ.

As the author himself admits, one cannot blame secularization alone for the crisis of theocentrism and of trinitarian theology in the modern era. One must accept, however, that the impact of secularization on theology and on religious life cannot be overestimated. This conviction, which one cannot but share, justifies the author in embarking upon a detailed analysis of the writings of some of the main "secularization" and "death of God" theologians such as Bonhoeffer, Gogarten, Altizer and Cox. Their ideas are presented and discussed in a very clear and direct way; this alone, among other things, is a great merit of the present study, as it is well known how difficult it is for the average reader to grasp their diverse and often conflicting ideas.

A good part of the merit for what one might call the rehabilitation of trinitarian theology in our days is attributed by Ciola to today's outstanding theologian Karl Rahner; the latter's deep insights into relationship between the "economical" and the "immanent" Trinity have, in fact, made it possible for all theological treatises, including anthropology and eschatology, to be seen under a different light and hence to be authentically grasped both in their true richness and in their mutual relationship.

The present work, by no means easy to read by the man in the street

but a veritable treasure of deep insights and a mine of information for the professional theologian, gives credit to the author who has succeeded in putting together a wealth of historical analysis and theological reflection around a topic which is usually considered as difficult as it is important. Besides being richly annotated and highly scholarly both in method and presentation, Ciola's outstanding work is enriched by a bibli-

ography of 28 pages. The book is obviously a must for the professional theologian, but should be of great help for students of theology and for those who are in any way committed to Christian living.

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