

D0249

C. The Christian Religion.

The Christian religion teaches and holds that there is a reality that corresponds to both generically and specifically religious experience, that these experiences have an objective referent named God. The Christian religion holds also that God has made himself known in many ways and through many people in the course of history, but that he has identified himself ontologically with humanity in the person, Jesus of Nazareth.

indeed that he makes himself known available to all people.

The primary way in which God manifests or reveals himself to all human beings is through an inner word of truth and love. Jesus Christ is the outer word that corresponds to the inner revelation of God's truth and love to all people.

Thus what binds together all the phenomena included under both generically and specifically religious experience is the inner word of God's truth and love, available to all men and women in history: the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world, as John's Gospel puts it. This same light of God also lived an individual human life in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Both the inner word and the outer word teach us several things: that the objective referent of religious experience is loving and merciful, compassionate and kind; that human beings are sinful; and that all human beings stand in need of salvation and will find it by accepting the truth and love of God and by acknowledging that this truth and love are to be found in the person of Jesus Christ. Once one has found God, once one has experienced oneself as accepted unconditionally in truth and love, one also knows one is somehow sent to mediate witness to the same experience of God's truth and love for others. The Christian religion is thus a missionary religion.

I have been attempting in very simple fashion to indicate the connection between the religious dimension of human experience and Christian faith. Christian faith contains much more than this, but this is the heart of its connection with ^{the} general religious experience of mankind.

c. Culture. A culture is the operative set of meanings and values that inform a given way of life. Thus there are as many cultures and sub-cultures as there are sets of meanings and values that govern the way people live. Every culture is an expression of a particular way of understanding experience, a particular way of constituting the human world on the basis of that understanding, a particular way of evaluating what is understood. A culture in its roots is the understanding of the world and the extension of that understanding into living and acting on the part of a particular people.

The meanings and values that determine a culture are usually implicit in most of its members. This is just the way things are done. Only education and travel enable one to see that cultures are relative, not normative, particular and not general. To the extent that one is sharing in common operative assumptions of meaning and value that inform and determine a given style of life, one is a participant in a given, particular culture.

This is the strict notion of culture. According to it, there are very many different cultures in the world at any one time. In fact, there are even very many cultures in our own nation or in the state of Wisconsin or in the city of Milwaukee or even at Marquette University.

But there is also a more general notion of culture that, while it satisfies our definition, embraces larger totalities of people and longer periods of time. So, for instance, there is legitimacy in speaking of a dominant American culture informed by a certain set of assumptions that are shared by members of different smaller and more restricted cultural units. Or one may speak of Greco-Roman culture as distinct from medieval culture and Renaissance culture and the culture of the Enlightenment. The word "culture" is here used in a broader or less precise sense, but still fits the definition: the operative set of meanings and values that informs a given way of life.

It is in this broader, more general, less precise sense that it makes sense to speak of modern culture or modernity: certain constituent features of meaning and value that are shared by many, indeed most, of the smaller cultural units in the world today, or that make their presence felt throughout the world today.

If we are to understand the function of theology in mediating religion, and specifically the Christian religion, with modern culture, we must examine these constituent features of the modern cultural scene.

I have chosen eight of them. They are all determinants of meaning and value that affect the modern world. They are:

- 1- modern science
- 2- modern human studies and history
- 3- modern philosophy
- 4- worldwide human interdependence
- 5- secularization and secularism
- 6- atheism
- 7- the broken image of humanity
- 8- the theme of integral human liberation.