

## Dahlgren Chapel Sacred Lecture Series

On October 19, 2015, Rev. Tomáš Halík gave the opening lecture in the 2015 – 2016 Dahlgren Chapel Sacred Lecture Series. Rev. Halík’s presentation -- Spirituality for the Afternoon of Christianity -- was not recorded, nor was a transcript available, however, he provided us with this draft of a similar talk he gave in 2014. We provide it here so that you may gain a sense of the content of Fr. Halík’s presentation.

---

Tomáš Halík (Prague)

Templeton Lecture

at the Congress of AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

San Diego

November 22, 2014

### **The Afternoon of Christianity**

It has been said on many occasions in the past that Christianity is on its deathbed. Some have claimed, on the contrary, that it is still only in its childhood. It is my opinion that Christianity at the present time (in a large part of Europe, at least) is undergoing “noonday fatigue” and faces the decision about what to do in “the afternoon of its history”.

I found some of my inspiration for using the metaphor of the day for the history of Christianity in the work of Carl Gustav Jung.

Jung uses the metaphor of the day to describe the development of the human personality in the course of a lifetime. The morning of life (youth) is a time for building the external structures of personality. Around the mid-point of life there arrives a “noonday crisis”. It can take the form of shock or loss of previous certainties (crisis of marriage or occupation, financial or health problems, etc.), or “burn-out syndrome”. The noontime crisis is also an opportunity for a major

“sea change”, a chance to tackle the tasks of “life’s afternoon”, to move from outward considerations to the depths.

An attack by the “noonday demon” can provoke a person to avoid wasting the impending afternoon on improving the façade of their life and personality, and clinging to external and superficial things. Since the basic law of life is *enantiodromia* – complementarity, restoring balance – the afternoon of life also rectifies the one-sidedness of the morning’s development. The more one-sided someone has been in their early adulthood, the more dramatic the noonday crisis can be. Unreserved introverts, for instance, can encounter the suppressed extravert pole of their personality and vice versa.

The afternoon of life requires greater simplicity and internalization. It is a journey towards *individuation*: in contrast with the *socialization* phase (finding one’s place in society), it consists of finally finding oneself, moving from one’s *ego* to one’s deeper, inner center (*das Selbst*, self).

xxx

This, in a nutshell, is my thesis: Christianity’s long history up to the beginning of modernity represented its *morning* – a time for building institutions and doctrinal structures. Then, in the West, a “noonday crisis” occurred. The clash with modernity, secularization, the death of God, are all names used to describe this on-going phase. And the crisis will continue until such a time as it will be understood as an opportunity, as a purge, a path to maturity, a turning-point moment, turning away from external structures to the very core of Christianity.

When I observe the controversies among Christians between “conservatives” and “progressives” (and specifically the disputes in the Roman Catholic Church between the “hermeneutic of continuity” and the “hermeneutic of rupture”, when interpreting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council) it strikes me that both sides of the argument have been too concerned with external structures – the “morning

structures”. On the one side the protagonists wear themselves out trying to maintain existing forms (e.g. certain institutional structures, liturgical expressions, doctrinal wordings or disciplinary injunctions) or a return to structures that became extinct long ago or were recently abandoned. Their opponents see the reform of those structures as a way of preserving the church. It occurs to me that in their mutual polemics both camps overlook the truly fundamental issue.

Of course the church must remain “semper reformanda”, constantly renewing itself (to quote St Augustine), but a shift towards the “afternoon of Christianity” would seem to demand an even more radical reform than the simple structural reforms that the “progressives” call for. On the other hand, the legitimate concern about maintaining Christianity’s identity, which motivates the “conservatives”, ought not give rise to extreme endeavors to maintain the status quo, but should lead to a much more profound search for the real essence of that identity, for what truly constitutes the “core of Christianity”.

That core, I am convinced, is *kenosis – transcendence of self, self emptying, giving oneself*, as we read in that key text of the New Testament, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians about Christ: *although He was in the form of God... he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave*. Another word for *kenosis* is love — self-sacrificing and hence self-fulfilling love. The journey to that goal is by no means easy.

xxx

I have designated the process of secularization during the period of modernity in Europe as that “noonday fatigue” – noonday crisis. These days almost every sociological paper about the present religious scene starts with the author distancing him- or herself from previous theories of secularization, by stating that secularization is definitely not a global phenomenon or even the probable

future of humanity, as seemed likely just half a century ago, that it is a term to be applied at most to a certain attenuation of some aspects of a particular social role of a specific type of religion, in one specific culture at one particular period.

Secularizing tendencies can be observed in many European societies with the onset of modernity – the emergence of “religion” as a separate segment of society alongside others, the privatization of religion, the separation of religious institutions from the State, the shift of religion from the sphere of politics to that of culture, a weakening of the supervisory function of religious institutions in society, the questioning of the universal validity of certain religious doctrines, etc.

One of religion’s important functions is to offer a “common language” whereby a given society may express its experience, its vision of the world and the self-image of people of a given culture at a given period. Religion often offers two levels of language – a popular form and a philosophical form, which is more intellectual and abstract and intended for an educated elite. At the threshold of modernity the theology of the time lost the capacity to express man’s new experience of the world and the new sense of the power of man over the world. Just as Latin ceased to be a “lingua franca”, the common language of intellectuals, so also Christian theology began to be regarded as a “dead language”. The Catholic church of the time was capable of accepting Renaissance art – including its return to the pagan past of Antiquity – but it found it very hard to accept Renaissance science. Science had greater success as the language of the educated elite than did theology. Science became its religion.

Later – particularly in the nineteenth century – the Catholic hierarchy suppressed attempts of theologians to offer a more flexible language with which to express the experience of modern man. The church authorities voiced their fear that new theology might have a destructive impact on popular piety and ordinary believers might feel affronted and frustrated. This was to cost the

church dearly because it was the educated who felt affronted and frustrated and a large section of the educated elites were alienated from the church. Shortly afterwards a large proportion of “ordinary people”, the working class, those who had left the “biosphere” of traditional piety – village society – in the course of industrialization and urbanization, were alienated from the church.

Secular humanism seemed to have acquired a monopoly of the interpretation of scientific achievements and thereby become “the religion of the West”. The ecclesiastical form of Christianity began to retreat to a ghetto on the European continent.

xxx

I would like to stress that secularization is neither the end of Christianity nor the end of religion. Rather it is the end of “the Christian religion” or “Christianity as a religion”. It is a sort of *divorce between Christianity and religion*. If we use the word religion in the sense of an integrating force in society (i.e. the thing that integrates society is its religion), then Christianity is no longer a religion, at least not “the religion of Europe”; it is assuming a new cultural form and role.

While religion (in the sense of an integrating force and common language) remains one of the main features of society, its content has changed: the West’s religion became successively science, then – in the Romantic period – “culture”, particularly art, then the nationalist cult of the nation, and then the “political religions” of the twentieth century. Today’s “religion” is most likely capitalist economy and the mass media, the market in information, which is the main commodity of the present time. In the West, the media fulfills a number of roles that were previously performed by historical religions, chiefly Christianity. Nowadays the media interprets the world, offers common symbols and great narratives, and is the arbiter of truth and importance, influencing the way people think and live.

In the course of the modern era Christianity has become one of the “world views” (*Weltanschauungen*) and has so far been seeking a role that will ensure its favorable acceptance by society. Is it to be the protector of a certain cultural tradition, an expert on ethical issues, a spiritual source of “religious experience”, an aesthetic accessory, the political vision of socially-oriented left-wingers or the political ideology of conservative right-wingers, or possibly an institution for the social and charitable care of the poor, ill and disabled?

xxx

Christianity can be said to have engendered two historically unique formations, namely, “the church” and “secular society”. The church as an institution representing religion, yet not identical with a state, ethnic group or territorially-bounded culture is probably unique in history. Similarly, “secular society” would seem to be a unique phenomenon that sprang up (by no means fortuitously) in soil cultivated by Christianity over many centuries. I have called the process of secularization and secular society “the unwanted child of Christianity”. Nonetheless I have always regarded **both** currents – church-based Christianity and secular culture – as *two versions or two branches of Christianity*, living side by side and in some respects intertwined and interacting.

An analogy comes to mind in this respect. Just as the ancient religion of Israel gave rise to two branches of heirs after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (and to two separate hermeneutics of interpretation of the Hebrew Bible), namely, rabbinical Judaism and Christianity, so, after the dissolution of mediaeval Christendom, its two groups of heirs live side by side: on the one hand the ecclesiastical form of Christianity (in the West in two versions, Catholic and Protestant), and on the other, secular society.

The Enlightenment and secular society emerged partly due to experiments in a “third path of Christianity” alongside Catholicism and Protestantism that had been trod by European intellectuals frustrated by religious disputes and the wars of both denominations. Many European intellectuals saw in the Enlightenment a new language in which to express their Christian faith more flexibly than in the language of traditional theology. But for some of them their critique of the churches and the theology of the time led them to reject Christianity and seek a new “religion of reason”.

The schism between traditional ecclesiastically-oriented Christianity and the secular humanism of the Enlightenment came to a head on the European continent when the “religion of reason” joined hands with fanaticism, bloody terror and violence against the churches, during the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution.

But because the English and American revolutions did not take the form of Jacobinism, dialogue between Christianity and secular humanism continued in the English-speaking world. Later that dialogue also spread to Europe. I believe that the great changes in the attitude of the Roman Catholic church to the modern world would not have been possible without the experience of American Catholicism.

Ecclesiastical Christianity has learnt to live in modern society and the dichotomy of the church on one side and modern society on the other no longer applies. The church lives in the modern world and the modern world lives in the church, and not just in the milieu of so-called “modernists”; even “Christian fundamentalism” is in many respects a typically modern phenomenon.

Just as ecclesiastical Christianity, apart from exceptions, is not isolated from modernity and secular culture, secular society, for its part, is by no means as unchristian as it might appear. In a certain respect the opposite is true.

Secularization and secular society are not the end of Christianity, but rather an “*absorption*” of Christianity into modern culture and civilization – an absorption so thorough that it is almost invisible by now. Unlike the Romantic vision of the Middle Ages as the golden age of Christianity and modernity as Christianity’s downfall, modern civilization is in many respects more “Christian” than the Middle Ages.

Many political ideals of the modern era, from the slogans of the French Revolution to the Declaration of Human Rights, as well as hopes for a just future or a future society of abundance, are simply secularized forms of classical concepts of Christian theology. [The modern age has gone much further towards fulfilling many “Christian values” and ideals (including St Paul’s appeals for an end to the barriers and inequalities between cultures, nations, sexes and social classes) than did “Christendom”, the Christian Europe of the Middle Ages. Secular culture contains far more Christianity than the protagonists of secular humanism are willing to admit. And yet we are scarcely aware of the Christian nature of “absorbed Christianity”. The “anonymous Christianity” that Karl Rahner spoke about in respect of “pious pagans”, is an expression that could be used in another sense nowadays to designate contemporary Western society and our secular culture.

Christianity’s absorption into modern society can be described as a success on its part, but that success has been offset by a loss of visibility. But **that** paradox only reveals the fundamental paradox of Christianity that is inherent in the very *kenotic* character of the Gospel: *The success of Christianity is its failure*. The Kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like leaven or like salt. Leaven (yeast) and salt are essential to bread, but if the loaf is good, you don’t notice either the leaven or the salt.

Reflections on the Christian character of secular society recall certain liturgical and theological disputes about the concept of the Eucharist: is the purpose of sacramental bread to be consumed or to be stored, exhibited and venerated?

xxx

Some post-modern thinkers, such as Gianni Vattimo, go as far as to regard secularization – the *kenosis* of Christianity – as the “time of the Holy Spirit” about which Joachim de Fiore wrote in the Middle Ages and which inspired the radicals in the Franciscan movement .

I don't take such a radical position. Instead I tend to support the conclusion that was reached in the celebrated dialogue between Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas at the Catholic Academy in Munich, namely, that secular humanism and Christianity have a mutual need for each other, as a corrective to one-sidedness. And a similar position is adopted in John Paul II's encyclical “Fides et ratio”: belief without reason is dangerous, and rationality without the ethical and spiritual values that stem from belief is also one-sided and therefore dangerous.

If Christian theology is to become a competent instrument for dialog with other, it must inject into our understanding of the church, of truth and of the world a radical openness, a sense of “eschatological differentiation” between what is available to us now and what is the object of our eschatological hope.

Christian tradition distinguishes three forms of the church. Firstly, there is the *ecclesia militans*, the church militant– Christians in this world. Secondly the *ecclesia patiens*, the suffering church – the souls in Purgatory. And thirdly the *ecclesia triumphans*, the church triumphant – the saints in heaven, i.e. the eschatological dimension of the church.

Whenever Christians forget the need for *eschatological differentiation* between the “church triumphant” in the absolute future and the “church militant” here and now, they start to regard themselves as a perfect society (*societas perfecta*), already possessing the knowledge of the entire truth, then Christian triumphalism comes into being with all its tragic consequences. The struggle of the *ecclesia militans* originally meant a struggle with one’s own temptations and sins – including the temptation of triumphalism. If the church forgets the need for patient and humble openness vis-a-vis its eschatological future *it gives rise to a militant religion and a militant church*, battling against *those others*, those who are different, who hold different beliefs – whether in the “external world” or in the church’s own ranks.

If the “noonday crisis” of Christianity results in purification from triumphalism, and the humble realization that the church is a “*communio viatorum*”, a pilgrim community, which in the words of St Paul perceives ultimate truth *only in part, only as in a mirror*, then Christianity will be well prepared for the “afternoon of its history.”

However, our belief in one God, who is the absolute mystery of the eschatological future, also tells us that those who believe in other religions and also the secular humanists are also only pilgrims. We must not be uncritical toward them. They also have not reached their goal and we have the right and duty to remind not only ourselves of that fact, but also them.

I fear that if Christianity and secularism were to go separate ways, or if one of the components were to gain a total victory and displace the other, Europe would jettison its obligation to its own past, as well as its future. In all events, whichever of the components emerged victorious, and whichever of them gained independence from the other, **both** would be the **losers**.

It is in the interest of Christianity and Christians to uphold the secular character of the secular component of European culture, and criticize the tendency of secularism to become a religion. In this way it preserves scope for Christianity and defends the true nature of European culture, whose identity, for centuries already, lies in the compatibility of “secularism” (laicity) and Christianity.

Clearly the Christian and secular components of European culture can never fully coalesce – there will always be a certain tension between them. It depends on a large number of circumstances whether that tension will be fruitful or take the form of “trench warfare” detrimental to both sides.

What Christianity would look like if it really wanted to free itself from the legacy of the Enlightenment and from today’s secularism can be seen in contemporary Christian fundamentalism and traditionalism. What laicism and secularism would look like if they wanted to turn their backs totally on Christianity we can only surmise from the language of such intolerant and would-be totalitarian ideologies as the attempts to impose the newspeak of “political correctness” or to spiritually castrate or lobotomise specific cultures under the slogan of “multiculturalism”.

I fully agree with the words of Pope Benedict on his flight to Portugal this year , and I quote:

“In these centuries of a dialectic between enlightenment, secularism and faith, there were always individuals who sought to build bridges and create a dialogue, but unfortunately the prevailing tendency was one of opposition and mutual exclusion. Today we see that this very dialectic represents an opportunity and that we need to develop a synthesis and a forward-looking and profound dialogue. /.../ So I think that the precise task and mission of Europe in this situation is to create this dialogue, to integrate faith and modern rationality in a

single anthropological vision which approaches the human being as a whole and thus also makes human cultures communicable. So I would say that the presence of secularism is something normal, but the separation and the opposition between secularism and a culture of faith is something anomalous and must be transcended. The great challenge of the present moment is for the two to come together, and in this way to discover their true identity. This, as I have said, is Europe's mission and mankind's need in our history." End of quotation.

I also see the future of Europe in maintaining and enhancing the compatibility of those who profess an "explicit" Christianity on the one hand, and the guardians of specific Enlightenment values, on the other; each side should have an interest in and feel a responsibility for the presence of the other in European culture and society. Christians (as I sense from many of Pope Benedict's statements) also bear responsibility for preserving Europe's "healthy secularism", and those who want a "secular" Europe (and fear clericalism and fundamentalism), should realize their interest in and responsibility for a credible Christian presence in the public life of the united Europe.

xxx

Churches in the future will continue to operate within an increasingly pluralistic cultural milieu and will be characterized by greater internal pluralism. It would seem that in future there will emerge *more ways of being a Christian* than those we have become accustomed to.

One of the salient features of "afternoon Christianity" in contrast to the "morning" of its history, will most likely be a greater detachment from existing institutional and doctrinal structures, and a concomitant emphasis on a third path for the Church's action in addition to classical pastoral or missionary activity. That third path is *accompanying seekers*.

The two predominant “morning-time” activities of the church are targeted at *dwellers*, “*parishioners*”. Traditional pastoral activity has focused inwards, on the ranks of practicing believers and traditional missions have sought to broaden those ranks. The third path, focusing on seekers, does not consist of efforts to “convert” (unlike missionary activity), but to travel part of the journey together in dialogue.

But if accompanying and dialogue are to be appreciated as a fully-fledged service to the church, of equal value to missionary activity, it presupposes a radical shift in ecclesiology, teaching about the church. Inspiration might be sought in the words of the Orthodox theologian Evdokimov: “We know where the Church is, but we don't know where she isn't.” The church's self-reflection in the future will most likely give rise to a broader concept of ecumenism and Catholicity.

Perhaps we have to learn/ to look at the church **that** way/ if we are to proceed/ from the noonday crisis/ into the afternoon of Christianity's history.