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Report on the Joint Conference

Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision

March 4-5, 2015

The Pontifical University of Gregorian, Rome, Italy

The two-day International conference entitled "Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision" was held at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy, on March 4-5, 2015, and generated new interest and enthusiasm among the over 300 participants.

This was a joint effort of The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) and The Pontifical Gregorian University (PUG), with the High Patronage of the Pontifical Council for Culture of the Holy See under Cardinal **Gianfranco RAVASI**.

This joint International Conference was the result of an effort which began with the identification by Professors **Charles TAYLOR**, author of *A Secular Age*, and José Casanova of four disjunctions between Church and People these related to: (a) seekers who have left ecclesial practice in search of the Spirit, and (b) the magisterium charged with pastoral responsibilities; and (c) its contemporary moral guidance, (d) in a world of plural spiritualities. Presently the project has advanced to articulate four emerging conjunctions of the Church as (a) not only listening to the experience of the laity (b) but discerning the path ahead, and hence (c) welcoming the seekers and (d) serving their broad religious needs in a context deeply marked by pluralism and diversity.

Scholars around the world, but particularly in the West, were invited to join the effort of Church renewal which this conference represents, based on the work of more than a dozen research teams in different parts of Europe and North America. The conference was intended to engage the intellectual mind and so better contribute to the universal Church as it faces the many present challenges. As such, the conference was intended also to function as a launching pad for similar initiatives to follow on the impact of secularization across Asia, Africa and Latin America and so contribute to the worldwide renewal of the Church as a communion of Dialogue in search of Truth, Beauty and the Good as the emergence of God's Kingdom in human history.

As a cumulative effort by these research teams mainly from Universities in North America and across Europe, the conference drew on those who have been reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of secularity faced by the various cultural traditions in the West under the project "Faith in a Secular Age". This project, initiated and carried out by the RVP, began in 2009 with a dialogue between Cardinal **Francis GEORGE** from Chicago and **Charles TAYLOR**, and moderated by **José CASANOVA**. Since then, the representatives of the research teams met annually either in Washington or in Vienna, Austria (see the reports of those annual meetings www.crvp.org). These research teams planned with their members personal research, reflection, and writing. This gave founded hope that light would be shed on the crucial issues of our secular age. The teams consisted of leading religious scholars, philosophers, sociologists, etc.

Rather than beginning with the long and rich history of the project on "Faith in a Secular Age" with its multiple facets, times of promise, crisis and renewal, it seems more effective to begin from the recent period of **Pope Francis**. He seems to be putting things right by simple gestures in accord with both the life of the people and the gospel message. But rather than resting with these, it is our task to ask what is missing where a project of scholars might be of help.

Upon reflection one notes that **Pope Francis** is not going deeply into the secular culture in which all are raised. This is inescapable in daily life, and provides the terms of which present events are interpreted and the future is projected.

Hence, the goal of this project has been to support **Pope Francis** in this regard with professional insight drawn by such various competencies as can be provided by the humanities and the social sciences, by philosophy and theology under the light of faith.

What then is the secularity of which we speak? **Charles TAYLOR** in his now classical work *A Secular Age*, spoke of three senses of the term in order to focus on the third: (a) separation of Church and state, (b) decline in Church practice, and (c) the cultural conditions which today often make unbelief seem more easy, more natural and more viable than belief.

This has been exacerbated by sexual and financial scandals. Though these can be seen as tragic chances of timing, in fact they may be rather the inevitable results of structures which overstayed their age till finally they became unsustainable and all seemed to be collapsing.

In view of all this what then are the goals and objectives of this project; namely, what kind of vision is needed in order to contribute to the life of faith in the new cultural conditions which have come to constitute this secular age? Two stand out, namely, an **wholistic vision** achieved through **dialogue and a kenotic vision** in the image of Christ and indeed of the entire Trinity.

The conference program was planned and finalized through the effort of the scholarly community moving from four disjunctions to four conjunctions, with hope that the Church can be developed toward a people's Church as listening and discerning, welcoming and serving.

The spirit of generosity and kenosis was expressed well by the willingness of all those speakers who were invited to speak at the conference. Their special insights and rich experiences provided helpful suggestions to the concern on how to renew the Church in our secular circumstances.

The conference was preceded by a morning closed faculty seminar held at the Gregorian University (9.00am-12.30pm, March 4, 2015) with the 30 conference speakers, moderators and team representatives who joined the morning discussion. It was a brainstorming session before the conference to reflect on the development of the conference thematic from four disjunctions to four conjunctions.

In the afternoon of March 4, 2015, the conference was opened by **François-Xavier DUMORTIER SJ** (Rector of the Pontifical University of Gregorian); remarks by **George F. McLEAN OMI** (President of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy); and an extensive address by **Cardinal Gianfranco RAVASI** (President of the Pontifical Council for Culture). It was moderated by **João J. VILA-CHÃ SJ** (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome).

The *first* panel was on “The Dynamics of Secularity in the West.” **José CASANOVA** (Georgetown University, USA) spoke on «A Catholic Church in a Global Secular World» and **Hans JOAS** (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany) on «The Church in a World of Options». It was moderated by Archbishop **Thomas MENAMPAMPIL SDB** (India) and **João J. VILA-CHÃ SJ** (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome).

The *second* panel was on “A LISTENING CHURCH: Implications of Science and Technology, Imagination, Subsidiarity.” **Louis CARUANA SJ** (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome) spoke on «Nurturing the Human Face of Science»; **Leon Dyczewski OFM** (University of Lublin, Poland) on «New Technologies and Styles of Evangelization»; and **Daniel DECKERS** (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany) on «Being Pope Francis». It was moderated by **Nicolas de BREMOND D’ARS** (Centre d’Études Interdisciplinaires des Faits Religieux [CEIFR], France) and **Richard ROUSE** (Pontifical Council for Culture, Rome).

The *third* panel was on “A DISCERNING CHURCH: the Gospel Experience, and Foundations in Secular Times for Renewed Hope.” Speakers included **Tomáš HALÍK** (Charles University, Czech Republic) on «Discerning the Signs of the Times»; **Juan Carlos SCANNONE SJ** (Colegio Máximo de San José, Argentina) on «Iglesia y Discernimiento Espiritual en una Edad Secular y un Mundo Global»; and **Massimo GRILLI** (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome) on «Tutto è grazia. Rilettura dei macarismi/beatitudine oggi, nella Chiesa». It was moderated by **Philip J. Rossi SJ** (Marquette University, USA) and **Pavel HOSEK** (Charles University, Czech Republic).

The *fourth* panel was on “A WELCOMING CHURCH: Pluralism, Encounter and Dialogue.” **Robert SCHREITER CPPS** (Catholic Theological Union-Chicago, USA) spoke on «Spirituality as Platform and Forum for Encounter»; **Anthony CARROLL** (Heythrop College, University of London, United Kingdom) on «Dialogue with Skeptics»; and **Adriano FABRIS** (Università di Pisa, Italy) on «Rethinking Universality for a True Interreligious Dialogue in a Pluralistic Age». It was moderated by **Helen ALFORD OP** (Pontificia Università San Tommaso, Roma) and **Taras DOBKO** (Ukrainian Catholic University, Ukraine).

The *fifth* panel was on “A SERVING CHURCH: Polarization, Participation and Peace.” Speakers included **Adela CORTINA** (University of Valencia, España) on «Religiones y Ética Cívica Transnacional en el Espacio Público: Un Camino hacia la Paz»; **Peter JONKERS** (Tilburg University, Netherlands) on «A Serving Church: Overcoming Polarization through Participation»; and **William BARBIERI** (Catholic University of America, USA) on «Kenotic Ethics for a Servant Church».

It was moderated by **Staf HELLEMANS** (Tilburg University, Netherlands) and **James CORKERY SJ** (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome).

The *final* magisterial lecture was given by **Charles TAYLOR** (McGill University, Canada) on “Authenticity: The Life of the Church in a Secular Age”; and commented by **William DESMOND** (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium). It was moderated by **Mary McALEESE** (Ex-President of the Republic of Ireland).

The conference concluded with brief notes of thanks by **George F. McLEAN OMI** (President of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy); **Louis CARUANA SJ** (Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome); and **João J. VILA-CHÃ SJ** (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome).

At the end of each session participants from the audience actively engaged the dialogue with speakers and raised insightful issues of common concern. The conference was well attended by participants from all parts of the world, but mainly from the European countries such as Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and United Kingdom, as well as from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cameroon, China, India, Mexico, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Peru, the United States, etc.

On March 6, 2015 late in the afternoon (17.30-19.30) there was a dialogue among **Charles TAYLOR**, **José CASANOVA**, and three Italian scholars **François BOUSQUET**, **Alessandro FERRARA** and **Giacomo MARRAMAO** in a “Cortile dei Gentili” entitled “La Piazza e il Tempio”. It was moderated by **Giuliano AMATO**.

During the conference some 20 reports in the Roman press as well as other news agencies (the Osservatore Romano, Avvenire; Catholic News Service, National Catholic Reporters; Crux; Tracce; Societa per l’Informazione Religiosa; Noticias; Zenit; Roma Sociale, etc.) covered the conference. Live streaming of the conference can be found on the web www.crvp.org.

This conference was made possible with many generous supports: not only the Pontifical University of Gregorian (PUG) and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) co-sponsors of the conference; but also two foundations: the Our Sunday Visitor Institute and the Raskob Foundation; the Oblate community; the staff members of the program office and many volunteer students from the Gregorian University; the persons who designed the poster and who created the online registration service; and all the participants and those who have the same concern but were not able to come to Rome to attend the conference.

The conference papers will be published by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) in 2015. For background materials of the project “Faith in a Secular Age” based on work of the research teams please see the [link](#) or visit www.crvp.org.

Project Publications

The following is the list of books published from the research teams of this project on “Faith in a Secular Age” (for full text visit www.crvp.org under “Publications”):

- 1 *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age, Christian Philosophical Studies, I.* Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 9781565182745 (paper).
- 2 *God's Spirit in the World: Ecumenical and Cultural Essays, Christian Philosophical Studies, II.* Waclaw Hryniewicz. (Poland) ISBN 9781565182738 (paper).
- 3 *Humanity on the Threshold: Religious Perspective on Transhumanism: Christian Philosophical Studies, VI.* John C. Haughey and Ilia Delio, eds. (Georgetown University) ISBN 9781565182882 (paper).
- 4 *Faith and Secularization: A Romanian Narrative: Christian Philosophical Studies, VII.* Wilhelm Dancă, ed. (Romania) ISBN 9781565182929 (paper).
- 5 *Towards a Kenotic Vision of Authority in the Catholic Church: Christian Philosophical Studies, VIII.* Anthony J. Carroll, Marthe Kerkwijk, Michael Kirwan and James Sweeney, eds. (United Kingdom) ISBN 9781565182936 (paper).
- 6 *The Spirit: The Cry of the World: Christian Philosophical Studies, IX.* Waclaw Hryniewicz. (Poland) ISBN 9781565182943 (paper).
- 7 *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age: Christian Philosophical Studies, X.* Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek, eds. (the Czech Republic) ISBN 9781565183001 (paper).
- 8 *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers: Christian Philosophical Studies, X.* Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers, eds. (The Netherlands) ISBN 9781565183018 (paper).
- 9 *Dilemmas of the Catholic Church in Poland: Christian Philosophical Studies, XII.* Tadeusz Buksinski, ed. (Poland) ISBN 9781565183025 (paper).
- 10 *Secularization and Intensification of Religion in Modern Society: Christian Philosophical Studies, XIII.* Leon Dyczewski, ed. (Poland) ISBN 9781565183032 (paper).
- 11 *Plural Spiritualities: North American Experience: Christian Philosophical Studies, XIV.* Robert J. Schreiter, ed. (Catholic Theological Union-Chicago) ISBN 9781565183056 (paper).
- 12 *Seekers or Dwellers: The Social Character of Religion in Hungary: Christian Philosophical Studies, XV.* Zsuzsanna Bögre, ed. (Hungary) ISBN 9781565183063 (paper).
- 13 *French Catholics and Their Church: Pluralism and Deregulation: Christian Philosophical Studies, XVI.* Nicolas de Bremond d’Ars and Yann Raison du Cleuziou, eds. (France) ISBN 9781565183087 (paper).
- 14 *Chinese Spirituality and Christian Communities: A Kenotic Perspective: Christian Philosophical Studies, XVII.* Vincent Shen, ed. (China) ISBN 9781565183070 (paper).

To be published:

- “Seekers and Dwellers,” Philip Rossi, ed. (Marquette University, USA):
- “Historical Ambiguities in Bridging Sources of Revelation and Morality,” William A. Barberie, ed. (Washington DC, USA)
- “Seekers and Dwellers in Quebec, Canada,” Chantal Beauvais and Sophie Cloutier, eds. (St. Paul University, Canada)
- “Participation: Towards a New Theological Paradigm,” Holger Zaborowski, ed. (Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Vallendar, Germany)

- "Commentary on Evangelization in the Ukrainian Context," Taras Dobko, ed. (Ukrainian Catholic University, Ukraine)
- "Remnant Church: A Patchwork of Spirituality," José Tolentino Mendonça and Alexandre Palma, eds. (Portuguese Catholic University, Portugal)