

Liturgy

worship that works - spirituality that connects



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Antonio Rosmini (part 1)

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Antonio Rosmini will be beatified tomorrow (Sunday, 18 November). In the different approaches to the relationship between contemplation and action in varying Christian spiritualities Rosmini presents a particular insight and approach. He stresses the foundation of contemplation. One only leaves contemplation when a particular call from God is received.

Antonio Rosmini (March 25, 1797 - July 1, 1855) was a prodigious thinker and writer, an Italian Roman Catholic priest (at the time when northern Italy was under Austria), founder of two religious orders, the Institute of Charity and the Sisters of Providence.

Rosmini the philosopher

He responded to the philosophical positions of Locke and Hegel, and argued for an epistemology in which the idea of being comes not from external experience but is innate from God. Some of his ideas will now appear quaint. I studied Philosophy of Mathematics at stage 4 at university (there were two of us in the class – the other student audited – I was the only one doing the course for credit!) Rosmini had an interesting response to one of Zeno's paradoxes which I wrote about in a paper about Rosmini's philosophy. This paradox states "In a race, the quickest runner can never overtake the slowest, since the pursuer must first reach the point whence the pursued started, so that the slower must always hold a lead" (Aristotle, Physics VI:9, 239b15). This can be illustrated by a race between the tortoise and the hare.

The hare can run twice as fast as the tortoise. In a race the hare agrees to give the tortoise a head start of half the distance to the finish line. When the tortoise gets exactly half the distance from where he started to the finish line, the hare, logically, is just at the point where the tortoise began. When the tortoise again covers half the distance to the finish line, the hare has reached the point where the tortoise was. This happens again and again. And again. And again. Zeno's paradox is that the hare can never catch up with the tortoise. Rosmini's solution is that the paradox depends on dividing time into smaller and smaller parts for ever. According to Rosmini this is not possible. Just as there are atoms of matter, Rosmini would have there be atoms of time – a smallest part of time which cannot be divided further. Rosmini's approach would now be regarded as quaintly mistaken. My university lecturer returned my paper to have me rework it as I had respectfully presented Rosmini's position without writing a critique such as I casually did here in my previous sentence.

Rosmini the spiritual guide

Rosmini had a profound spiritual life and gathered together a group that resulted in founding an order of brothers and priests, and another of sisters. He wrote prophetically and challengingly of the problems that he saw beset his church. Some of those writings were placed on the Roman Catholic index of

forbidden books and I will write another blog post on these visionary teachings soon (update: blog post on the *Five Wounds of the Church*. Rosmini himself accepted the ruling of his church's leadership about these books unconditionally.

Action and contemplation

There have always been debates about the relationship between action and contemplation in Christian spirituality. Different lifestyles and spiritualities stress different approaches and balances. The Carthusians live a life totally devoted to contemplation. Any active apostolate is totally against their Statutes. Dominicans see a balance of action and contemplation as the highest ideal – with one feeding into and bearing fruit in the other. St Ignatius Loyola and the Jesuits would have a spirituality of contemplatives in action, or maybe better – contemplatives even in action. Thérèse de Lisieux wished to be a missionary – but grew into a spirituality of action even while contemplative.

Antonio Rosmini developed a “principle of passivity”. This is a life that is primarily contemplative. One moves out of contemplative life only if there is a clear call to do a particular action. And this action is always responding to a need with universal charity - physical, spiritual, or intellectual. Such a spirituality may resonate with some for their whole life. For others of us there will be seasons in our life when this approach is the one God calls us to. At other times in our lives the other approaches delineated in the previous paragraph may be more appropriate.

TAGS: SPIRITUALITY, JUSTICE, WORSHIP MATTERS NEWS AND REVIEWS RELATING TO LITURGY

The five wounds of the church - Antonio Rosmini (part 2)

20 November 2007 Filed in: spirituality | justice



On Sunday New Zealand, first after the dateline, was hence first to celebrate Antonio Rosmini's beatification. At the Mass I was at, Rosminian priest, Fr Michael Hill presided. Michael was assisted by Monsignor Charles Drennan, an Ascribed Rosminian Kiwi priest based in the Vatican. After Mass Charles described some of the build up to the beatification in Novara where the venue had to be changed more than once to accommodate the increasing numbers expected – over 10,000. Some of the discussions focused around Rosmini's work *Le cinque piaghe della santa Chiesa* - The Five Wounds of Holy Church (link off this site) a book placed on the Index of forbidden books in 1849.

Rosmini - a twentieth century man in a nineteenth century world

For his book *The Five Wounds of Holy Church*, Rosmini drew the image of the “crucified Church” from Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254). It was published in 1848 and banned in 1849. Rosmini accepted the condemnation totally and humbly.

As you read his list of the wounds you will realise how prophetic they were. There has, more recently been movement on most of these, particularly through the Second Vatican Council. But there is still much challenge here – and not just for those in the catholic tradition (Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Old Catholics,...) but to all of us.

The five wounds of the church



1) The Wound in the left hand of holy Church: the division between people and clergy at public worship.

This has been much remedied since Vatican II and other renewal, but clericalism is still present in many subtle ways, including the denigration of the value of lay ministry (in ordinary daily life) by giving the impression that laity are really ministering when they function robed and in a quasi-priestly role in worship.

2) The wound in the right hand of holy Church: the insufficient education of the clergy.

Need I say more

3) The wound in the side of holy Church: disunion among the bishops

Collegiality of the bishops was the balance that Vatican II brought to Vatican II's approach to the bishop of Rome. This still has a long way to go in Roman Catholicism. But Anglicans, before you

point the finger too quickly, read the wound again and take note!

4) The wound in the right foot of holy Church: the nomination of bishops left in the hands of civil government

For Rosmini, the clergy and the people have a "divine" right to elect their shepherd. Rosmini lived when the thousand year old practice of secular rulers appointing bishops was still active in the Austrian power which ruled his area of Italy. But, the pope also took offence as Rosmini was questioning the more recent practice of the pope appointing bishops. Roman Catholics take note. But Church of England also take note. Many Anglicans, Episcopalians, Old Catholics, Episcopal Lutherans, ... take a bow.

5) The wound in the left foot: restrictions on free use by the Church of her own temporalities

Here Rosmini poses a challenge for a church to be poor and hence free. Rosmini proposed a number of principles which clarifies what the church's possessions may be used for.

It was not until July 1, 2001, that a note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, successor body to the Holy Office (the Inquisition), signed by the then prefect, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, stated that "the reasons for concern" regarding the work of Antonio Rosmini have been surmounted.

The book is not heretical. Now Rosmini is *Blessed* Antonio Rosmini. Much progress has been made in his ideals. But this nineteenth century visionary still challenges our twenty-first century churches.