

Paul Bouchard

The Civilization of Love
or the Reign of God on Earth

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INTRODUCTORY

I was suffering bitterly. I was desperate. Nothing made sense. The whole earth, it seemed to me, was plunged in such a deep obscurity! The world was sinking in the bloom of an abyss from which it would never rise again.

But from the depths of my distress, a spark. A glimmer was beginning to dawn that would grow, amplify, ignite like a fire destined to consume everything. Beyond absurdity: FAITH! Beyond suffering: TRUE LIFE. Beyond the evil of the planet: a NEW WORLD could still rise from the rubble.

This “new world” could not be a flower of rhetoric, a poetic dream or a social utopia! It was a demand, an absolute necessity that arose from the nonsense of everything to give meaning to everything. So much so that the sufferings of today’s world could be explained by it. Just as the pains of the woman can be explained by the child who, soon, will utter his first cry to proclaim his “yes” to life.

First Rejection

My soul was dazzled by the intuition of a future civilization, worlds apart from 20th century society. This was in 1968. I was 33 years old! I was anticipating a just and peaceful society based on love. However, it had nothing to do with the “peace and love” of the hippy generation that had all the advertising apparatus at its service at the time.

In my enthusiasm, I would have liked to proclaim to everyone that the night of the world is coming to an end. That the marvelous dawn of a new life is already happening: a gap, a breakthrough, a liberation for humanity!

But my hymn to love was not welcomed. For my futuristic speeches made my friends aware of the fragility of the foundations on which they were building their lives. They did not want to hear about a “world to come” when they were trying so hard to settle in the present world. They refused to question their orientation.

By force of circumstance, I resigned myself to keeping my hope secret. In my isolation, I could still learn to become a citizen of the future.

The Prophets

It is in this solitude that, paradoxically, I ended up discovering brothers. I was no longer alone. A multitude before me had predicted the advent of such an ideal society. Since the dawn of time, I understood then, humans have aspired to an order of justice and freedom whenever injustice and oppression forced them to bite the dust.

Did not the prophets of the Bible, I remembered, anticipate this new order? This reminiscence led me to consult their writings to demonstrate the convergence of their visions and my own aspirations.

They too were rejected, I thought to myself. Because to announce the advent of a just world is implicitly reproaching those who take advantage of current conditions for their acceptance of the “system” of injustice. It means unmasking the compromises, the pacts made with evil in order to rise above

the melee of negative conditions in which the human masses struggle.

That is why the prophets were persecuted, I concluded. Their message of hope did not get through to the powers of the world who remain at the top of the social pyramid as long as they know how to crush the poor and violently dominate the peoples. The imperialists do not want to be told that their reign will end with the advent of a completely different social order where the spirit of service will supplant oppression, where peace will heal violence against body and heart, where love will succeed in extinguishing all hatred.

The Prophet par Excellence

The prophets did not only confirm my hope. They were initiating me to a new name of the world to come: the Kingdom of God. Their comforting company made me feel an unwavering confidence in a God who will one day succeed in establishing his Kingdom on earth to fulfill his benevolent purpose in history.

Thus, I came to understand that the Kingdom of God is a necessary component of the act by which God creates the universe. A creative Act not seen as an initial flick of the fingers at the beginning of time but as an active Will, still current, spanning all times.

Only God, I thought, can consume the roots of evil in humanity. In such a way that only good remains of the present world for the unfailing happiness of a new humanity. Only He can wash away the consequences of the transgressions against nature and against Himself accumulated up to our days from the beginning. He alone can hold back the sea of misdeeds that

overwhelm humanity and precipitate it towards terminal catastrophe.

And what he can do, has he not done it by the Blood of the Just? Has he not already purified everything by the Cross of Jesus! O Revelation! O dazzling light! Of all humans who have passed in the world since the beginning, Jesus alone has acquired the power to reverse the inexorable process of degradation and decay since he was stronger than death.

I was incomparably amazed by my discovery. Jesus is the Prophet of Prophets. He is our Saviour, the Messiah of humanity announced by Isaiah.

A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse,
a new shoot will grow from his roots.
On him will rest the spirit of Yahweh,
the spirit of wisdom and insight,
the spirit of counsel and power,
the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh;
his inspiration will lie in fearing Yahweh.
His judgement will not be by appearance
his verdict not given on hearsay.
He will judge the weak with integrity
and give fair sentence for the humblest in the land.
He will strike the country with the rod of his mouth
and with the breath of his lips bring death to the wicked.
Uprightness will be the belt around his waist
and constancy the belt about his hips. (Isaiah 11, 1-5)

Jesus is the Lord of the Lords of the earth. He is the King of the world to come. Should He not return to complete His work in order to offer to God the Father the praise of a creation pacified and glorified by immortality?

And there I jumped from the First Testament to the New with a tenfold spiritual hunger.

After that will come the end, when he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father, having abolished every principality, every ruling force and power. For he is to be king until he has made his enemies his footstool, and the last of the enemies to be done away with is death, for he has put all things under his feet. But when it is said everything is subjected, this obviously cannot include the One who subjected everything to him. When everything has been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the One who has subjected everything to him so that God may be all in all (1 Co 15, 24-28).

Second Rejection

Reading the New Testament has taken me to a new stage in the revelation of the mystery of God. I became aware that it was not only in the distant biblical past that I had brothers. I had brothers today. All I had to do was to look for them... to find the Church.

So, I set out again to conquer my fellow men in faith. And full of the desire for fraternal communion, I exposed my vision of the world to come. But my co-religionists did not listen to me. They did not understand my language. And those who claimed to decode it gave me severe warnings.

Beware! they enjoined me. *“All is accomplished”. There is no need to hope for a “new world”. The Church is that new world. There is no need to wait for a new intervention of God in history. The Son of God intervened once and for all, 2000 years ago.*

Jesus will indeed return in glory at the end of the world, but it will be for the Judgment. In the meantime, there is no hope

escaping some day our present condition. As long as the earth exists, good and evil will confront each other, misery, sin, sickness and death will haunt the destiny of human beings, and the shadow of the cross will spread over the whole earth to remind us of God's justice beyond this life, beyond this world, beyond history.

This language went straight to my heart. Not to make me live but to kill my hope. It extinguished the light that wanted to shine in me.

In vain I tried to explain: If it is true that the Church is the new world announced by the prophets, is it not possible that she is a seed which has not yet developed all its potentialities? Isn't the mature plant all contained in the seed? And cannot this seed of the present Church bear one day the fruit of a "new world"?

And I kept asking impertinent questions: The Church preaches peace but where is peace on earth? She witnesses to justice but who arises to bring justice to the world? In fact, the preaching of peace and justice, is it not implicitly an avant-garde proclamation of the "new world"?

But in its present condition, I kept trying to make myself understood, the Church is persecuted. That is why these seeds cannot bloom. The Church is rejected by the present world as the Son of God was during his time on earth. Is not the fact that she is called to follow him in his death a sign that she is also called to follow him in the resurrection?

I am convinced that the Church will one day, under the leadership of her King, succeed in triumphing over all the negative forces that currently oppress the powers of salvation

deposited within her... these same forces of evil that are leading mankind to the downfall of corruption.

From this perspective, if we do not hope for the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ on earth, are we not refusing implicitly to admit that the world has been saved by Him? Would this not render his sacrifice sterile? Does it not show a lack of love for humanity which cries out for salvation in all the dimensions of its existence?

But by another speech, I was told to keep quiet. Either I was considered a threat to the Church that I love so much, or I was perceived as a dreamer disconnected from reality.

You are losing your way in the labyrinth of illusion. You must believe in man as God believed in him when He became incarnate. Do you not shirk your responsibilities by relying only on the power from On High to do justice?

I kept my mouth shut! The time has not come, I told myself. And I kept my hope as a radiant secret that no one wanted to share. I accepted that it would lie dormant in me until the day it will awaken as a clamour that could no longer be held back.

Listening to Prophecies

Now, the day of awakening has arrived. The proclamation of a Word of hope amidst the world's despair can no longer be postponed. The good news of the joy to come amidst the torments of the present agony can no longer wait. The Scriptures, evocative of an era of unspeakable beauty that already points to the horizon of this dark world, must no longer be reduced to "non-significance".

After this I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people shall see visions.

Even on the slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my spirit in those days. (Jl 3, 1-2)

Has this prophecy already been fulfilled, or does it speak of a coming outpouring of the Spirit in history? If it is true that God sent his Spirit upon the disciples locked up in the Upper Room at Pentecost, did he pour it out *on all humanity*? The prophecy of Joel emphasises the universal character of the event.

We can therefore legitimately expect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit not only on the privileged few of the faith at the time of the Apostles, but on the whole of humanity. To await ardently this day when all human beings will believe and serve one God.

They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war (Is 2, 4).

This is one of the extraordinary effects of this outpouring of the Spirit on the whole earth. At a time of an increasingly destructive global arms race, who could still claim that this prophecy of Isaiah has already been fulfilled and does not refer to a historical period?

Consistent with a certain grid of traditional interpretation of prophecies, one could certainly argue that these passages of Scripture still refer to the Church. Does she not reconcile in her bosom many peoples and nations?

But would this meaning be exhaustive? Are the predictions not specifically directed to the social dimension of humanity, which is currently built on the economy of war and rivalry between nations?

Is it not dramatically far from the brutal realities of today's world, and yet close to the aspiration of humanity, the day when all nations *no longer will they learn how to make war*? Hasn't the time come more than ever to hope for a reversal of man's creative potential? So much so that this admirable creativity becomes a tool for sharing in the service of brotherly love rather than a weapon of destruction in the hands of the powers of the world? Yet, this power has become so great that it threatens the planet with annihilation. Humanity is faced with a choice: either to convert or end up in self-destruction.

This is a sign that the time for a radical about-turn of the world has arrived. The global conversion of humanity has become a survival imperative. This collective about-face – which is not within the reach of humans but is feasible for the God of the impossible – will not only transform social life but will also have repercussions beyond human freedom, that is, on nature.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the panther lie down with the kid,
calf, lion and fat-stock beast together
with a little boy to lead them.
The cow and the bear will graze,
their young will lie down together.
The lion will eat hay like the ox.
The infant will play over the den of the adder,
the baby will put his hand into the viper's lair (Is 11, 6-9).

Would these poetic images simply evoke harmony among the members of the Church? Or should they not also be interpreted as a promise of God to renew nature, disfigured by our faults, a promise of which the bucolic symbols of the prophecy are but a pale reflection?

Certainly, these verses want to demonstrate that the laws to which the earthly habitat is subjected under the regime of violence will be overthrown by laws that will produce harmony under the Messiah's regime of peace and justice.

Let the sea and its richness resound,
the world and all its inhabitants;
that the rivers clap their hands,
that the mountains sing their joy,
in the face of the Lord, for he comes
to rule the earth,
to govern the world with justice
and peoples with righteousness (Ps 97, 4-6).

No hurt, no harm will be done
on all my holy mountain,
for the country will be full of knowledge of Yahweh
as the waters cover the sea (Is 11, 9).

A change of the social structure of the world can be seen here. If I could paraphrase Isaiah, I would say that in the Kingdom of God, human beings will not be able to breathe out of the loving *knowledge* of God than fish can live out of water.

Provisional Conclusion

In conclusion of this introductory, I suggest that the Reign of God, announced by the prophets of the First and Second Testaments, does not symbolize the beatitude promised to the chosen ones in the Hereafter, as it is currently interpreted. Do not the few biblical texts presented here as introduction to the thesis developed in this book tend to demonstrate that this Reign indeed concerns the earthly level?

In the Lord's Prayer, moreover, we do not implore God so that his Kingdom may come to Heaven since He already reigns there. But it is indeed on earth – where the Enemy

currently dominates – that the need for the Reign of God is felt. And if it had already fully reached us in the Church, why would the Bride of Christ continue to plead today: *Thy kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven?*

1- MARTHA AND MARY

“Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Tell her to help me”. But the Lord answered, “Martha, Martha, he said, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part” (Lk 10, 40-42).

For ages, this passage of Scripture has been seen as the figure of two main orientations of spiritual life that the Church has developed in the course of history. In this perspective, Martha symbolizes the active spiritual life in the melee of social struggles, while Mary represents the contemplative option, judged by Jesus as the best choice, safe from the distractions and snares of the world.

But is this interpretation sufficient? Does it not neglect a whole segment of the life of the Church? That is, the spiritual world of the laity, where both the contemplative and the active come together without distinction? The question can be judged even more pertinent in that the two sisters, here staged by Saint Luke, are not stylized as preterm nuns, but as lay people.

Polarity

Behind the symbolism of the two sisters, I see, for my part, two visions of faith developing in parallel during the Church's earthly pilgrimage. The incident reported by the evangelist would then manifest a certain antagonism in the Body of Christ.

A tension which was resolved positively or negatively in different historical moments of the Church. When the relationship between these two currents of commitment following Christ was lived within the context of complementarity, the Church experienced periods of great spiritual fruitfulness. But whenever an imbalance triggered a tendency to exclude one or the other pole, the life of the Church was marked by conflicts, heresies, persecutions, divisions.

An analysis of the character of the two sisters makes it possible to extrapolate the hidden determinisms of these two visions. The contrast between these two types of commitment is reverberated as a pendulum swing between two poles in the Church. This polarity can be described by the terms of pragmatism (of Martha) and prophetism or mysticism (of Mary).

Portrait of Martha

Martha is an organized, efficient, practical woman. She has at heart to solve the concrete problems that arise in societal life. Jesus gently reproaches her for worrying too much about it. She is busy, even at the risk of becoming restless. *Martha, Martha, you are worried and restless about many things...*

One day while Jesus and his disciples were on their way, *he entered a village, and a woman named Martha received him into her house* (Lk 10, 38). The evangelist makes it clear that it was in her house, and not in that of Mary, her sister, or Lazarus, her brother.

Martha is the lady of the house. Undoubtedly, she has taken the place of her deceased parents. Of the three members of this family, she is clearly the responsible person. She knows how to handle the family fortune and has the habit of expediting efficiently the household affairs.

Undeniably, she loves the Lord. She serves him in her own way by anticipating, through her attentions, the material needs that flow from his Incarnation in the world. For she knows who she is dealing with. We owe her one of the most beautiful and explicit proclamations of faith in Jesus reported in the Gospels: *Yes, Lord, I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God, who comes into the world* (Jn 11, 27).

Martha is a woman of service. Saint John emphasizes this when he speaks of Jesus' visit to Bethany before his passion. *They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them*. Placed at the head of two sentences introducing the brother and the sister, this apparently insignificant detail – *Martha waited on them* – takes on its full weight. Of the one *whom he had raised from the dead*, the evangelist merely notes: *and Lazarus was among those at table*. So, he was one of those whom Martha served. Then the evangelist recounts the episode of the perfume poured by Mary on the feet of Jesus (cf. Jn 12, 1-4).

Martha, however, is not a resigned, timid, self-effacing servant. Her devotion to domestic tasks is not to be taken for servility or insignificance. She relies nobly on reasoning to ensure the effectiveness of her service. She knows what she wants and where she is going. She is logical, lucid, decided.

Hence, a strong woman! It is her reasoning that proves it. One can appreciate her subtlety in the way she approaches the Lord with her problem. *Do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?* (Lk 10, 40).

The question suggests a whole path of thought. How can you, *the Son of God who comes into the world*, not be aware of what is happening around you? You have come to save humanity and establish justice on earth, and you do not react to