

Lesson 2: "Profane and Sacred" (1b) " Jesus Christ "

(These notes were taken after watching the online lecture video by Fr. Louis Ha Keloon.)

The issue of "The Profane and the Sacred" is not merely a concept anymore in the second lesson, but rather enters into Christianity, concerning the religious life of Jesus Christ and Christians.

Review of the Previous Lesson

Profane (profanum) ; Sacred (sacer)

Western Middle Ages:

The history of the Western Middle Ages, particularly the development of Christianity during that era in the West, was almost entirely dominated by the sacred. At that time, all things profane were defined by their sacredness. Fr. Louis Ha aims to use the history of the Western Middle Ages to provoke students to reflect on "The Profane and the Sacred".

The Century of Eliminating the Sacred:

The modern era is a century of eliminating the sacred. Modern people feel somewhat passively compelled to accept the convenience brought by technology and its perspectives, and the consequence of this is the desire for freedom. One obstacle to freedom, according to many people, is the sense of the sacred, even the existence of God, which they believe hinders their freedom of development, hence the need to eliminate the sacred.

The Quest of Modern People:

Although modern people live in a century that eliminates the sacred, they still have many quests, a quest for the sacred, a quest to transcend themselves, including those of monks and missionaries. Therefore, the methods they employ can also provoke some thoughts in us.

Defining Religious Faith:

From a sociological perspective, Durkheim believes that the profane and the sacred define religious faith. The profane is the ordinary world, while the sacred is religious.

The Experience of the Sacred and the "Religious Person":

Eliade's experience of the sacred removes the issue of the existence of God discussed in ontology and moves towards religious feelings, then defining a "religious person". A "religious person" can encounter the manifestation of the sacred in ordinary life, in a special time and space. Then, this profane continues to be profane, but it already holds a special sacred significance.

The Theme of this Lesson

- Looking at Christian faith from the perspective of "The Profane and the Sacred".
- Then, take a broader look at what exactly "The Profane and the Sacred" is?

The Objective of this Lesson

- Understand what kind of "religious person" Christians are. Of course, Christians themselves feel very sacred, but if we look at it from Eliade's perspective, what exactly are the "religious people" of past generations of Christians like? Fr. Louis Ha said that he may not be able to provide an answer, but he raised the question nonetheless.
- Then, further understand the general "religious person".

The Content of this Lesson

- Jesus Christ
- What Christians believe, say, and do
- Reflect on "The Profane and the Sacred"
- Discussion

Jesus Christ: The Holy Son Incarnate

The incarnation of the Holy Son is the center of the belief in Jesus Christ himself. In fact, Jesus Christ is not only considered the center of faith because he was born, but more because he expressed the essence of the Word in the world; and also because he had a physical body, so he could die, and then he could also resurrect and ascend to heaven. These are the focal points of Jesus Christ as the center of faith. However, since our course is now about "The Profane and the Sacred", Fr. Louis Ha particularly emphasized the incarnation. Actually, what has just been mentioned is very important.

- Born of the Virgin Mary

When it comes to the incarnation, the most important thing is to have a mother. In the history of Christian faith, there are some beautiful paintings, such as those in the Eastern Church for a long time, followed by the Western Church's expression through paintings, and then there are more modern Eastern Church icons, and now the Western Church also has expressions by artists. Anyway, the son in the painting is always so cute. For example, one painting depicts the baby sleeping with his eyes closed against his mother's chest; another shows the baby touching his mother's face with his hand. These all express the various situations that arise as a result of being the son of a mother, bearing the material and genetic traits of humanity. There is another comprehensive painting that portrays the Virgin Mary, that is Mary, the birth of Jesus, the manger, and two stars, which succinctly expresses the Christian belief in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Son. It is not meant to depict the person realistically, but the spirit has already been expressed. So, Mary's outstretched hand expresses her acceptance of God's will. Even the ox and the donkey have their expressions to express their position in this incarnation.

- Baptism by John

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Son of the Trinity, began with a public display of his divine nature. Of course, this public display is recorded in the Gospels, where those who believed in Jesus recounted what happened at the baptism performed by John the Baptist. In that moment, how the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and the voice of the Father declared him as His beloved Son, those images of Jesus being baptized can reiterate the early Christians' faith. When Jesus appeared at the Jordan River, it demonstrated that, from the perspective of our current theme, he was actually manifesting his divinity within the profane. The river, the scenery, and even the act of baptism itself are profane, yet they reveal true holiness. His ultimate purpose was to elevate the profane to the sacred. Thus, the ultimate goal of the incarnation of the Son was already hinted at when he accepted John the Baptist's baptism, indicating what was to come.

- Proclaiming the Truths of the Kingdom of Heaven

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the first beatitude is "Blessed are the poor in spirit." When Fr. Louis Ha prepared for this lesson, he contemplated on how to interpret "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He thought about the concept of a half-filled cup. When there's half a cup of water (representing our lives), how should we perceive it? The most obvious and intuitive reaction for humans would be to refill the cup, to make it full from half-full. However, Fr. Ha pondered on the idea of being blessed in poverty of spirit. Essentially, what Jesus meant was that when you drink half a cup of water, it's only half a cup; you need to continue drinking until it's finished. "Spiritual poverty" means emptiness, emptying oneself further. This is contrary to worldly thinking, which aims to make things fuller and accumulate more. Jesus teaches that you should empty it, and when you do, you are blessed; you truly grasp the meaning of the cup, seeking the sacred amidst the profane. Many of Jesus' teachings are of this nature, urging us to go against the worldly and reveal the divine within that contradiction.

- The Last Supper

Another crucial moment is the "Last Supper." During the Last Supper, Jesus takes something as mundane as "eating and drinking" (which everyone needs for sustenance) and transforms it into the most sacred and profound connection. Jesus himself says to drink his blood and eat his flesh. When we drink this cup and eat this bread, it's the most tangible way for the sacred to manifest within the mundane of life. Of course, when Christians partake in communion, they directly realize what Jesus said. However, Fr. Ha believes that Jesus' meaning behind the Last Supper is broader, urging us to sanctify ordinary "eating and drinking". Fr. Ha believes that there is ample basis for this interpretation because Jesus said that at the final judgment, he will ask if you fed him when he was hungry and gave him drink when he was thirsty. It is such a mundane way to make a living, which is to treat Jesus Christ and make this sacred connection. So this Last Supper should have this meaning.

- Suffering and Death

As for Jesus' death and suffering, this most profoundly demonstrates his role as the Son's incarnation. Even with the advancements in science and medicine today, humanity has yet to find a way to avoid death. Whether such a method will be found in the future remains to be seen! Until today, we can still say that one characteristic of being human is mortality. Death and

suffering are things many people wish to avoid. The common worldly mindset is to escape pain and death. For a period of time, the Church even forbade the use of painkillers or anesthetics. This was a very one-sided deviation for a time. However, the Church quickly realized that alleviating physical pain, allowing peace, was acceptable. However, Jesus' death and suffering express his complete self-abandonment. His self includes his identity as the Son of God and his immortality. But precisely because he was human, he had to endure suffering and death. His divinity is manifested in the sudden interruption of his life, in sacrifice, and in making the cessation of his life the fulfillment of his life. The completion of life itself can occur in a sudden interruption. Fr. Ha himself feels that this is a very deep sense of sacred within the profane. Therefore, modern faith in Jesus Christ focuses heavily on his death and resurrection. Just now, because we are discussing "the profane and the sacred," Fr. Ha particularly emphasized this incarnation. In fact, it is all because Jesus was born that such death, suffering, and subsequent resurrection could occur.

- Resurrection

In the Gospels, Father finds the scene of Jesus most memorable and profound when the two disciples traveling to Emmaus encounter a man who talks with them on the way. These two disciples going to Emmaus are disappointed because the great man they expected, Jesus, had died, had been crucified. Because the Messiah they were hoping for had not appeared, they were returning home. On that journey of disappointment, they encounter a stranger, someone they didn't recognize. But this stranger was actually an absent divine. It turns out that the Savior they had in mind was this stranger before them. This stranger, as they walked along the road, would eventually get hungry with time passing and need a place to stay overnight. It is in these mundane circumstances that this stranger appears, and then, as he breaks bread, fully opens the eyes of these two disciples to the divine. This is what Elijah referred to as the moment of revelation, a divine suddenly appearing in the details of ordinary life. And after this sacred appearance, the profane life cannot continue as usual. Jesus then disappears, and the two disciples immediately return to Jerusalem to tell the story to the disciples there. So, Jesus' resurrection in Emmaus is the purpose of Jesus' incarnation, to bring light and hope to those walking in anxiety, distress, and despair, and to forever change this profane life. This is how Fr. Ha succinctly presents Jesus Christ. In fact, there are many exciting biblical accounts that are worth reflecting on.

What Christians Believe

【Heidelberg Catechism (1566)】 44-50

44: The incarnation of the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. (Matt 1:20-21; John 3:16-17)

45: Taking humanity and combining it with his divinity, he became one person. (Luke 1:30-35; John 1:14; Romans 9:5)

47: Jesus is God. (Matt 26:63-64; Mark 2:3-12; Matt 12:39-40)

50: He has the true nature of God. (Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2-4)

48: Jesus is human. (Luke 1:30-3; Phil 2:7)

49: He has a soul and a body. (Matt 26:38; John 4:6-7; Matt 4:2; 8:24)

Unless you are not a Christian, as a Christian, you must accept this teaching. Jesus is God and man, with a soul and a body. So, what Christians believe according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church is actually that Jesus Christ is both God and man. He was born into the world, bringing a divine element into this profane world, which makes the profane no longer profane.

Catechism discussion: Fourth

It must be understood that the second person of the Holy Trinity was born as a human, named Jesus Christ, explained as the Savior, willingly suffered and died to atone for the sins of all people, and was crucified. He rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven on the fortieth day.

These doctrines form the belief of Christians. The belief in the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is central to Christians. But if you talk about accepting the belief in the Holy Trinity, you must have the Son, and this Son must be incarnate. The incarnate Son, who is both God and man, is followed by suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension.

What Christians Say

After accepting the beliefs just mentioned, Christians have much more to say. Moreover, it is solemnly convened by bishops in the form of a great council, and even, basically, by rulers and emperors at that time. The years 325, 431, 451, 754, and 843, almost every council was about a hundred years apart. Those Christians had a lot to say. Because the incarnation of Jesus Christ is not simple, they had more to say. What they said, in addition to being about the sacred, was quite complex, because it involved the power of emperors. So, the emperors had to define what is sacred? What is the content of the sacred? They had to define which clergy were legitimate, which were illegitimate, which should be exiled, and which should be appointed.

325, Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea was convened by Emperor Constantine to make Christianity the legal religion of the state, no longer a persecuted religion. This emperor was Constantine of Rome, and for a while, the church may have, due to political power, turned Constantine into a saint, Saint Constantine. However, it seems that now he has been quietly removed, and no one calls him Saint Constantine anymore. But Fr. Ha said, "It is hard to say, because during that time, Roman emperors were basically gods, even before Constantine made Christianity a legal religion, he required people to worship the king as if he were a god, so calling him saint was not surprising." The Council of Nicaea was convened by Emperor Constantine, who used the term "Homo-ousios" (of the same substance) to express the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Father, that Jesus Christ and the Father are both God. At that time, one of the bishops, Arius, was condemned as a heretic.

431, Council of Ephesus

The Council of Ephesus believed that since Jesus was both human and divine, his mother should also be called Theotokos "Mother of God." Until the 16th century when Protestantism emerged,

and even now, many Protestant Christians will say that Catholics worship false gods and worship the Virgin Mary. Their view is: if the Virgin Mary is called "Mother of God," then it means she is God; calling her "Mother of God" is therefore worshiping false gods.

As a result of the Council of Ephesus, Nestorius was condemned as a heretic. In fact, Nestorianism was spread by followers of Nestorius. At that time, while Christians talked about the humanity and divinity of Jesus, they were also using power to influence the teachings of society.

451, Council of Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon declared that the divinity and humanity of Jesus were united in one person, "Prosopon," and one essence, "Hypostasis." In fact, the use of the terms "Prosopon" and "Hypostasis" by the Eastern and Western churches gradually led to a division. Of course, the cause of the division was not purely a matter of terminology but also involved issues of power and even fierce relationships.

The Council of Chalcedon reaffirmed the condemnation of Nestorianism. However, the Catholic Church abandoned this decision in 1994 because it was merely a matter of differing interpretations of terminology.

754, Council of Hieria

The Council of Hieria was not a great council, just a council, which considered attempts to depict Christ in images as heretical: because it denied his divinity (Arianism); because it separated his human and divine natures (Nestorianism); because it confused the two natures of Christ (Monophysitism).

Thus, they wanted to destroy those beautiful images. Such a decision divided Christians at the time, making them incompatible with each other.

843, Council of Constantinople

In 815, the Byzantine Empire again prohibited the worship of holy images. 842 saw a baby inherit the throne, with the empire managed by his mother Theodora.

843, Council of Constantinople, convened by Theodora, reaffirmed the worship of holy images, condemned the two anti-iconoclastic councils, and recalled bishops exiled during the second destruction of images, replacing all bishops who had destroyed images.

Fr. Ha said: "After Christians accept the faith in Jesus Christ, there are many different opinions. And these opinions, in history and in different cultures, can lead to some quite unpleasant events, causing disputes and divisions, which can have long-term consequences."

What Christians Do

What Christians do are sacraments, including seven sacraments. In fact, in the ordinary process of life, the most valuable and memorable moments are made sacred by sacraments, or rituals that

allow the sacred to enter the mundane. These sacraments include baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, matrimony, and holy orders.

Veneration

- Relics

What Christians also do is to establish a close connection with objects that have had contact with the divine in their lives. For example, in Paris, there is a church built by King Louis IX, a very beautiful church. Many people visit Notre Dame in Paris, but in fact, just 10 minutes away from Notre Dame, there is a church. In this church, Louis IX placed the crown of thorns worn by Jesus and the nails from the cross. Why did he do this? It's because these objects had once had close contact with the divine, with the Son of God. So, we also try to physically touch those sacred objects to imbibe their sacredness.

- Icons

Another aspect is icons. The Shroud of Turin (which may not necessarily be an icon) shows the image of a person who was whipped and crucified. This is highly controversial; is this the image of Jesus or just a common criminal? It's hard to say. But many people believe this is how Jesus looked because that's how he was wrapped in the shroud. People associate with this image to connect with the divine.

- Touching

Another way is through touch. In Mauritius, there is a blessed priest, and people go to his tomb to touch the glass coffin covering him, or take home some flowers or candles placed on the coffin. In this way, they feel they are touching the divine.

- Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is yet another way. In Santiago de Compostela, Spain, it is believed that the body of the Apostle James drifted to Spain and was preserved in this church. So, people come here on pilgrimage. In the Middle Ages, many people walked from France, Germany, and England to this church in Spain. In fact, even today, many people walk for months, and some even cycle for over a month to get here. Pilgrimage itself is not only about touching the divine but also about repentance and redemption, symbolizing a new beginning.

Martyrdom

Martyrdom is a practice of Christians, but martyrdom always involves violence. And such violence is sometimes accepted violence, sometimes violence inflicted on others. So, during the Crusades, there was a spirit of martyrdom, meaning either you die or others die, martyring oneself in this way.

Monasticism

As for monasticism, Father Xia mentioned it in the previous session.

Evangelism

Regarding evangelism, Father Xia also discussed it in the previous session.

Reflections on the Sacred and Profane

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Hegel was a philosopher in Germany in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although he advocated for an absolute spirit, he was not truly a person who embraced Christianity, but he analyzed Christianity very carefully. He believed that all existence and all events of the "sacred" and the "profane" are projected into the fundamental opposition of the "sacred" and the "profane." In this projection, they acquire a new content, not something they "possessed" from the beginning, but something gained in this contemplative form, in this mythical "revelation."

The way the sacred appears is always both distant and close, familiar and protective, absolutely inaccessible, and frighteningly mysterious yet fascinating. The result of this dual characteristic is that while the sacred does indeed isolate itself from the experiential "profane existence," the sacred itself does not expel it, but gradually permeates it: even in opposition, it still retains the ability to configure opposition.

Its significance lies in Hegel's influence on subsequent Western existentialism, Marx's historical materialism, fascism, and nihilism. However, because of his Christian cultural background, he considered Christianity to be a perfect religion, an absolute religion. He viewed Christianity from the perspective of that absolute spirit, and then felt that Christianity could not be separated from the opposition between the sacred and the profane, with the sacred permeating the profane. Although he said so, he did not approach it from a theological perspective but from a philosophical one.

Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945)

Another cultural philosopher, Cassirer, believed that everything is allegorical. That is, many things in the world are allegorical, metaphorical. The interpretation of "allegory-metaphor" involves fundamental issues of salvation, and therefore also involves historical issues centered on the Savior.

He also understood Christianity, so he felt that Christianity is the most radiant point in all events and human actions. Therefore, all temporary, natural events, and human actions derive their radiance from this center: he links all events in a meaningful universe and uses the "plan of redemption" as a necessary link. From this center, gradually widen the circle of interpretation. Furthermore, he believes that the so-called "analogy" in church means there are similarities and dissimilarities; it has its original meaning and brings out another deeper meaning. This approach is applicable to the "analogy" of all events in our daily lives. Currently, for Cassirer, the highest meaning of "analogy" lies in the church's understanding of the incarnation of the Holy Son in this

sensory world, thereby transforming this sensory world into a spiritualized, spiritual meaning. Another cultural philosopher said so in the twentieth century.

The highest "analogy" occurs when it can imply the transcendent or suggest the appearance of the transcendent, that is, the deepest spiritual interpretation of church events: all practices that spiritualize natural existence are constrained by the presupposition and contrary motive of "logos (the Word) has descended into the sensory world, has been born in time, and has uniqueness."

Professor Lai Chi Tim:

He earned his master's and doctoral degrees in philosophy from the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is currently a professor in the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, director of the Taoist Culture Research Center, and associate director of the Institute of Chinese Culture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He believes that discussing Christianity and "sacred and profane" like we are doing now is actually from the perspective of an observer. That is, we are all studying what believers are like, what they believe in, why they believe, and how they believe. The attitude of this study is that of an observer. Therefore, he believes that no matter how sympathetically researchers immerse themselves in the experiential world of religious believers, they must not forget that they are always researchers, not believers. The observer identity of the researcher is clearly manifested in the research results of the researcher. When the researcher acts as an observer of religious experience, even if he engages in the experience and consciousness of religious believers, his research results are still viewed from the perspective and values of the researcher as an observer. As a result, we can no longer have the confidence of Eliade, who declares in his works how religious believers think, what they are conscious of, and what they believe; instead, we believe that scholars of religion should understand: any religious study and interpretation is not to pursue and reveal the universal meaning and structure in the world of religious experience, but to humbly acknowledge that the results of our research belong to the researcher's understanding of the experience, structure, and meaning of religion.

Tze-wan Kwan, Emeritus Professor of the Department of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, served in the department for over 30 years. He mainly studied German philosophy and the history of Western philosophy; he also dabbled in areas such as philosophy of language and humanities computing. He is responsible for creating popular web pages such as the "Lin Yutang Contemporary Chinese-English Dictionary - Web Edition" and the "Chinese Multifunctional Character Database." He has a broad-minded way of speaking. Although he is a senior professor of philosophy, he believes that religious sentiment is the most important; whether one has faith or not, one must have religious sentiment. With religious sentiment, the division between philosophy and religion can be resolved. The place where mutual respect lies is that in philosophy, one must respect the religious sentiment of others, and those with religious sentiment should not force themselves to interpret their experiences in a rational way. The essence of this religious sentiment is the combination of the following two principles:

1. Principle of humility: That is, there is a deep understanding of our limitations, including the possibility of error in our knowledge and judgments (fallibility), a deep recognition that man is fallible, and a deep humility concealed in life.

2. Principle of reverence: That is, there is a reverence, admiration, awe, hope, and praise reserved for sublime and sacred things, and there is always a desire to emulate them.

This meaningful religious sentiment enables believers to understand that the religious sentiment shared among people is actually the true "essence" of "faith" while maintaining their own beliefs. With empathy, there is greater understanding, empathy, and tolerance towards other religions.

This meaningful religious sentiment can bring about some transformations in human hearts:

- i) The interaction of the two principles teaches us that although man is finite, he can pursue the infinite, which constitutes the indelible dignity of human humility in humble existence.
- ii) Everyone's dignity for oneself and others is enough to affirm and respect.
- iii) All evils that harm human dignity and bring suffering to humanity will be thoroughly abhorred and vigorously rejected.
- iv) Pursuit of spiritual satisfaction beyond material conditions.
- v) There is a good wish for values such as peace and happiness to be realized in the world.
- vi) There is a love for one's own life or the lives of others, and there should be a sense of dignity.
- vii) Do not do unto others what you would not want done unto you. In extreme situations, it is better to sacrifice oneself than to harm others.

This kind of religious sentiment, or spiritualism, when he can speak like this as a philosopher, as a professor of philosophy, he actually has to pay some price. That is to say, some philosophers may ridicule him, saying that he completely disregards the principles of reason and that his thinking is not refined enough, and so on. However, he believes that religious sentiment is actually a human emotion, and more importantly, it is a noble sentiment. This meaningful "religious sentiment" is not only applicable to ordinary believers, but also serves as a good medicine for those without religious beliefs.

Fr. Louis Ha's Conclusion on Reflections on the Sacred and Profane

After reading the views of these scholars, we can think about the two sessions that have touched on the evangelist Dr. Stanley S. Harakas, who did what he did out of respect for life. This is a kind of religious spirit for him. It is not about rituals of a religion, or those doctrines, but actually about respect for ordinary life, and deepening into it is already a sacred feeling.

As for humans themselves, they are in a limited environment, active in time, their space, material, their health, their abilities, all are limited. In this limited environment, they are striving to transcend this limitation. Of course, it's like what was just said, when facing this problem, Jesus did not ask us to use that transcendent way. It's not about making a full cup from a half cup of water, but rather to completely drink up the half cup of water and turn it into emptiness, a

practice of one's own ultimate concern. The so-called ultimate, in the Church's terminology, is the end of all things. The ultimate is human death, the completion of human endeavors, the end of the world and other such things. That is, we as individuals go from our limited selves to the infinite, including what those ultimate things are.

Fr. Ha readily accepts Professor Guan's spirit, which requires a tolerant attitude and letting go of exclusionary factors. Because when one is egotistical, one will denigrate others and exclude them. How can one respect oneself, respect others, and not exclude oneself, and still preserve one's faith? How should Christians be "religious people"? That's something to consider. In history, we have seen many practices of Christians who have accepted faith. As for how this faith came about, let's not dwell on it. Some were coerced, some were because of vested interests, and there can be seen to varying degrees that Christians use their religious beliefs as a transaction, even bribing their own gods. Is this kind of "religious person" the same as the one Eliade talked about? There are also some people who completely devote themselves to the object of their faith, even feeling that they don't need to take responsibility. Because they are simply following the instructions of their trusted object, what kind of "religious person" is this sacredness in their lives? There are also other so-called "religious people" who actually revere the laws of nature, which exist naturally, or surpass their own nationality, a country, an ideology, a system. Because this is beyond themselves, they put their limitations on that infinity. What kind of "religious person" is this?

Finally, upon reflection, whether Hegel or Cassirer talked about Christianity, they also mentioned the issue of incarnation. Although they explain it from the perspective of a non-believer from philosophy, they propose that the sacred comes into the profane, and Christians are more practical in turning him into a father-son relationship, and turning the journey of this world into a process of returning to the Father's house.

Disclaimer:

This is an unofficial translation of the study note prepared for helping the students who do not understand the Chinese writing. The accuracy of all content shall be subject to the original lecture in Cantonese by Fr. Louis Ha Keloan.