

MATURE CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD TODAY

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A CHRISTIAN is a man who believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In saying this he does not mean that Christ was begotten of 'a god' and a human mother, as the Greeks and Romans conceived of their heroes, or that he was a kind of superman as some Christian denominations seem to think. Christ was-is-God himself, in some mysterious way identical with and yet distinct from the God of the old testament who thundered on Sinai.

A mature Christian is a man or woman who lives the life Christ brought us as an integrated personality. All his powers, intellect, will and heart, are fully developed, working in harmony to do God's will. By the heart I mean that centre of our being which responds to reality as a whole. It is the seat of our response to physical and moral beauty, to all values. It welcomes the goodness in every thing and every man, or shrinks instinctively from their opposites. Alongside our intellectual tradition we also possess in the west a 'tradition of the heart'. It began with Plato and stretches from him to St Augustine, St Theresa of Avila and St John of the Cross. That great intellectual Pascal recognized the mystery of the heart. Surely when he remarked that the heart had its reasons of which our reason knows nothing, he was pointing to a reality that has largely been ignored by our traditional philosophers and theologians. Yet as we grapple with the grave problems of our day, we should bring not only our intellect and will but also our heart to bear on their solution.

We all know it is a fallen world. In order to realize the nature and extent of this fall, we should go back to the garden of Eden. When we read the story of creation, we find the following order: darkness and light; night and day; earth and sea; beasts and man; then come the two states of sleeping and waking, and finally man and woman. That is to say we have two poles between which life can range. This polarity can be traced down to the very diseases we suffer from, which show a masculine and a feminine form. Here lies the basis of all dualist systems. It would seem as though polarity were a condition of life itself. However, it must

not be forgotten that in Eden there were not Adam and Eve alone. There was also God by whose presence everything was held in complete balance.

The devil, the great disruptive force, the great anti-Christ to whom all harmony is abhorrent, destroyed the original balance. He did so by overthrowing the God-given order of things. As a Jewish commentator remarked, our first parents were allowed to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, but not of the tree of knowledge. It is only through living that we are prepared to gain knowledge. Any knowledge won at the expense of life, defeats its own end. By plucking the fruit of knowledge before its time, and thus disobeying a divine commandment, Adam and Eve forfeited paradise.

The immediate effect of this was that the poles which had hitherto been bound together before God were torn asunder. The first thing to be destroyed was the free partnership of man and woman. 'Thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee.' But woman did not accept the verdict. She rebels against man's dominion and seeks to gain dominion over man, and man is often only too glad to hide as 'mother's darling' or 'artistic husband' behind the competence of woman. Life throughout the ages has been tainted by this original defect. The consequences, in the shape of unhappy marriages, divorces, broken homes, and even the way in which one sex thinks of the other, are still with us. So deep is the breach in the original harmony that Christ hallowed marital union by raising matrimony to the dignity of a sacrament.

The curse that was laid on Adam was of a different nature. 'Cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken.' This does not only mean that man must work for his daily bread. Nature itself is no longer benign. Every success must be wrung from it. Even success palls. Everything that might be so beautiful is tainted. The poet laments of 'love's sad satiety'; the *taedium vitae* of the ancients, that weariness which arises out the heart of things, is a familiar experience to unregenerate man. For there is now a veil between man and reality. Everything seems to evade his grasp. There is a constant

conflict between him and everything that is outside.

We know only too well today the tension between the individual and the community. Man has the indisputable right to be respected as a person, to exercise his free will, to be himself. Yet this right is limited by the rights of others and of the community as a whole. The present struggle between east and west is largely one between an individualistic and a communal approach to life and its problems.

Wherever we look we find these opposing poles, from simple contrasts such as rush-leisureliness, silence-noise, to the very complex ones such as form and matter, subject and object. In a very famous book the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, discusses the relationship between subject and object, the 'I' and the 'not-I'. Normally we treat every thing and every person outside ourselves with a certain detachment. Yet in doing so we vitiate a relationship which should exist as between creatures of God. Treating others as an 'it' is wrong. The only real relationship is that between 'I' and 'thou', unfortunately a word which is far less significant than the original German, where '*du*' means the fulness of an intimate relationship. The fact that we can withhold ourselves when faced with another instead of going out to him is a consequence of the fall.

Yet the most harrowing conflict of all goes on in the heart of man himself. St Paul has something to say about this. 'For the good which I will, I do not: but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am . . .' (Rom. vii, 19, 22-24). We are all conscious of the struggle in ourselves. Furthermore, modern depth psychology has shown that we are so twisted that we may be doing what we believe to be right in the wrong way. Many of us have a tyrant who forces us to perform actions which are in reality positively harmful to ourselves, trying to live up to standards which are not meant for us. How many of us are satisfied with performing the religious exercises demanded by the Church really well? Do not most of us try to do far more, and that badly? This is one of those deviations which account for breakdowns and neuroses even in the cloister. All the guilt complexes, anti-attitudes and fixations discovered in our

century only show how grievously our whole being, more especially our heart, has been wounded by the fall. Everywhere in our world there is fission.

At the same time there are also unifying and healing forces in the world. There is time. We can well see in it a benign force through which growth and development, the gradual mastery of a craft, repentance and regeneration are possible. Perhaps it is only when we have lived for a certain time that we realize its power for good.

There is space. Hapless town-dwellers know little of space and its healing power. Yet one need only compare a fully developed oak standing alone with trees that grow closely together in a forest. Breathing space is what a human being needs for full development, on the physical as well as the spiritual plane. Certain views, certain works of art only reveal their full beauty at a distance. In order to get to know a person, one must not be 'on top of them'. One needs detachment, spiritual space if I may say so, to be able to appreciate reality.

Finally there is that which is hinted at in the phrase: 'Underneath are the everlasting arms'. We need not be very old to have found out that 'the bottom does not really fall out of our world'. Even the grimmest situation has its outlet. In moments or periods of stress there is a special grace, whether realized as providential or not, that upholds a man and carries him through. In spite of all the nihilistic philosophers of our day, life is something positive.

These healing forces are, so to speak, traces of God's presence in the world. As for the Christian who knows God, the task facing him is to strengthen these healing forces; to bring the presence of God which is his through the faith and the grace of the sacraments back into the world so that it may be oned with him. This is a work that can only be wrought by the heart, the seat of love.

The heart has been confounded with sentimentality, pure emotionalism, a force not to be reckoned with. Yet we know today that the harm done to our heart (the German *Gemüt* is a much more satisfying, positive word) may be far more disastrous than that done to our intellect and will through the fall. Our modern life tends to deepen these wounds. Our age is witnessing the desperate outcry of the heart.

In desperation we seek to remedy the dullness that creeps into our religion. We are practising Catholics, some of us are daily

communicants, yet somehow the radiant joy of the early Christians seems to evade us. We examine our consciences; 'here is a corner where I could give God a little more—and if I do, I lose my temper or skip my work or forget an important appointment'. Are we trying to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge before we have tasted of the fruit of the tree of life? The strong food of the saints is certainly too much for us. Perhaps we are still at the stage where we need milk like children. Then milk we must have, and it is no use pretending we can eat meat. Nor is it any use pretending we do not like the good things of this world, or giving them up to God with a smirk—'See how much I love you'.

What we need is a virile Christianity, not the prevailing pessimistic brand which is afraid of joy—joy, the fruit of the Holy Spirit—evaporating it to a non-sensual, spiritual state of soul of which one is not consciously aware. 'Over the years I have begun to believe that Catholics are not supposed to be happy if they can possibly avoid it.' These words were written by a convert from Protestantism, and reveal a sad state of affairs. We have had an overdose of negative, not to say morbid, pre-occupation with the wrongly understood ascetic side of Christianity, which is not Catholic at all but Puritan. We are still treated as though we lived in a comfortable world where we must 'pull ourselves together' in order to get to heaven. How often are we still told that if we have the choice between two good actions, the one that hurts us most is the right one, and presumably most pleasing to God. Surely this is to accuse God of sadism.

I am convinced that a great many of us today are stretched beyond our capacity. The first thing to do is to try and relax our tension. Then look around. Here I am in this world of 1959, born to know, love and serve God in this world and be for ever happy with him in the next. How do I put that into practice? What does my Christianity mean to me? Is it the breath of my life? Do I turn instinctively to God in weal and in woe? How do I visualize the world, as God's creation where I can find him in every creature—even the repulsive ones—or as a place where I have to work hard for a living and really only enjoy myself in my off time? What are my gifts and where are my failings? Most practical question of all: How can I help to strengthen the forces of healing in the world? How can I increase, if I may put it this way, the presence of God in the world?

In this age of rush and hurry it is essential that we make the right use of time. So much is already taken up by our work and other duties, that the little that remains must be eked out most carefully. Perhaps we cannot even plan for a day, but we may be able to see that certain things are done during a week. Of course we must pray every day, and here the practice of ejaculatory prayer is most useful. In a bus or tube we can pray for all the other passengers; when we meet an invalid, the sick come to mind. Apart from daily prayer there are several things we should do at the very least once a week. We should exercise our bodies, remembering that they are temples of the Holy Ghost. We should do some spiritual and other serious reading. If possible the intellectuals should do some manual work. We should perform at least one corporal act of mercy. In fact we should ask ourselves what a twentieth-century ideal member of our profession looks like. Then measure our strength and not overdo it, leaving it to God to help us in our weakness.

The peace of mind won in this way is exposed to great dangers. There is the challenge of the news, always disturbing, always titillating. But unrest and upheavals are the marks of a fallen world. There is nothing to be surprised at. We must even learn to close our hearts to too numerous appeals for sympathy, for we are too limited to satisfy them all. And he who does not learn humility and an unbounded confidence in God when he has to do that, is past help.

As we plod on trying in our small way to strengthen the forces of stability and healing in the world, we must beware of further dangers. Modern psychology has taught us that any emotionally overcharged reactions on our part are signs of a latent disorder; and that we are prone to project our inner discontent and maladjustment on people and causes outside ourselves. In this sense all *anti-attitudes* are suspect. We may have noticed that when we meet with even the slightest temporary set-back we are likely to 'take it out of' the next fellow. Many try to get rid of their inner disharmony by staging violent attacks on 'freemasons', 'the Jews' or 'the Communists'. Such attacks are entirely unreasonable, and have nothing to do with a justifiable struggle with anti-Christian and really evil forces.

Instead of casting the blame on others we should look at ourselves and try to discover the seat of the lack of harmony. Has our

intellect developed beyond our will? Are we emotionally mature, or do we still bang the door when we are thwarted? It is so easy to go to extremes, to love our friends and hate our enemies, to see everything in black and white. It is the natural tendency for the poles to separate. The task of the Christian is to bind the poles together through charity. And he must begin with his own unruly self. It is the work of a lifetime to balance the different parts of one's nature, so that the wholeness of mind, will and heart may reflect in some small measure the perfection of him in whose image and likeness we are all created.



ON BEING A CATHOLIC IN THE ARMY

EX-OFFICER

'We may not look to go to Heaven in feather beds.'

ST THOMAS MORE

AFTER twenty-one years' commissioned service in the army, the writer's feelings are largely of regret. Regret at opportunities missed, duties neglected or perfunctorily performed; in short a lively sense of failure.

The failure was in part due to ignorance, and it is in the hope of assisting young officers that this paper is written. *Si jeunesse savait*. . . This is not the place for detailed statistics, even were there any accurate ones available, but this paper is written with the following premises in mind:

1. Catholics are about 14 per cent of the army.
2. Of Catholics in the army, very approximately, one third have abandoned their faith, one third practise intermittently, and one third practise as fully as circumstances and human frailty permit.
3. There is about one priest to two thousand Catholic soldiers.
4. The general religious climate in the services is the same as that in the country at large. Most soldiers would call themselves Christian, though on analysis, as the Incarnation is