

THE STATURE OF MAN

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DURING last year's *Life of the Spirit* conference at Hawkesyard it was the sense of the meeting that worship is essentially connected with eating together and working together. Though it is often difficult for the readers of this review to eat together there seems no reason why they should not *work* together. The following article is an attempt to start a common work, in the sense that the author is quite gaily incapable of carrying it to completion, but hopes that others may do so. It is also an attempt to *play* together, because one of the most depressing features of Catholic reviews is their lack of play in expressing opinions: it is as though the shadow of infallibility falls upon any Catholic arguing his point, and he becomes hidden in a cloud of 'bestly earnestness'. Knowing that the shadow of infallibility will not fall upon the following article we can begin the work with light hearts.

The original vision sees the story of Man from Paradise until the end of the world as the building up of the Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; for in him were all things created in heaven and earth. (Col. 1; 15-6.) If we are to understand Man and his story we must do so in the Christ, because in him it hath pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell. (Col. 1; 19.)

Thus the work being wrought in human history has two complementary, parallel aspects. And each of these aspects is shown forth in the Christ. On the one hand we have the stages of human civilisation leading up to the Christ, who takes all the contradictions and conflicts between these different civilisations into himself, so as to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1; 20.) And on the other hand we have the stages of development through which every individual man must pass until he attains the unity of faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, reaching perfect manhood, the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ. When that work is accom-

plished in a man he has attained his full stature, no longer at the mercy of his childish whims. (Eph. 4; 12-4.)

Now it seems likely that the various steps by which the individual man ascends to maturity in the Christ have their parallel in the various stages of human civilisation.¹ For each of them is directed towards the building up of the body of the Christ (Eph. 4; 12)—within the individual in one case, throughout the world in the other.

Whatever else may be true, it is certain that Adam is at the beginning of both these movements—with Eve; man with woman. Within the womb of Paradise Man is one with himself, and one with his emotional, feminine side—his rib. Man's masculine and feminine aspects are wedded, married to each other; his reason protecting his passions, his passions and emotions feeding his rational functions.

When Man falls out of the Paradisal womb he falls apart. He is no longer one with his rib—with Eve—but begins to quarrel with her. Man's masculine functions become tyrannical, trying to hold down his passions and emotions by hard, rational commands. But the play of man and woman, of reason and passion, has been thrown out of joint. Eve won't play ball. She becomes shrewish; before long, now, man's passions will cease to be wedded to him, and will be playing the harlot.

Yet if Adam was to give birth to the Christ, if man was to attain to maturity, the fall from the Paradisal womb was necessary. Indeed, it was a happy fault.

Outside the Garden Man becomes a pastor, a good shepherd. Still not far from the Garden the relationship amongst men is one of lovingkindness, of *hesed*. *Hesed* is that spirit which prevails amongst the Bedouin who practise a kind of communism almost natural to tent-dwellers. The tent-dwellers feel themselves to be blood-brothers; and their love for each other has that masculine quality about it which strengthens a man to stand shoulder to shoulder with his brother to the end, until his own blood mingles with his brother's on the ground before the face of the Enemy. To abandon his brother in the moment of blood—

¹ I imagine there will prove to be seven main steps (cf. the seven mansions of St Teresa, and the seven steps of Kundalini-Yoga).

in the moment of truth—would be treachery sufficient to put out the stars. Moreover, the man who has *hesed* knows that he cannot break his relationship to his brother any more than he can put out the stars; like all relationships that human beings enter upon, it goes on for ever—either as love, building a person up—or as hatred, corroding his very soul.

Not that *hesed* can be maintained without sacrifice. The good shepherd knows how to sacrifice himself for his sheep; Abel makes a sacrifice which is pleasing to God.

But Man had been growing up, becoming cultured; Cain is a husbandman having learnt the arts of agri-culture. And culture is good, because it means fertility and maturity; with his plough man brings mother earth to fruitfulness; with the plough that is sex man brings woman to fruitfulness; and by penetrating into God through sacrifice, through the cult of God, man brings children to birth in God. And so long as the rhythm of sacrifice between these three levels is maintained—the consecration of the first-fruits of mother earth and of the womb—then *hesed* is preserved amongst men.

But culture can be deadly, can kill *hesed*; the communism of the shepherd's way of life can give way to the selfish individualism of the husbandman, who draws his boundary-lines across the ties of brotherly love. And culture *was* deadly. The husbandman's culture destroyed the Good Shepherd. Cain slew Abel. Why? Because he entered upon this new stage in Man's progress in a magical rather than a religious spirit; instead of fertilising his life and land by sacrificing himself he tries to fertilise the land with his brother's blood. Just as Man at a later stage will abandon the religious sacrifice of breaking bread in order to try the magic of splitting the atom. Cain slew Abel because he did not sacrifice properly before entering upon his new stage of life. This is a law of humanity: *If you do not sacrifice, you murder*. This law was again to be illustrated in the descendants of the cultured Cain, those workers in iron and brass and builders of cities. Man's attempt to build a city before sacrificing, before imploring God's strength for the work, resulted in the murderous city of Babel, the harlotry of

Babylon.

'If you do not sacrifice, you murder' is equally a law of the individual's growth. If Man in his youth does not sacrifice his youth before attempting the passage to the next stage of maturity he will murder the Christ who is being born within him. If Woman does not let go of the child she brought into the world, she murders the woman that her child is meant to become. How many people are drawn back into their mother's womb and strangled!

Every passage from one stage of human civilisation or individual growth to the next has to begin with sacrifice, with death to the old self, before a new creature can be born. This Phase is crucial. From the beginning men have sensed the danger of this phase in their lives, the danger of fertility, and so they have initiation ceremonies for it, when the initiate must go down into the darkness of the mystery. The son of man must go out from the father, into the mysterious darkness. But he must go with the father's blessing, as Abraham does. Like Abraham he must be ready to sacrifice his first-born self if another is to come to birth; and he must do so with the blessing of the High Priest who sacrifices for him.

At this Phase Man has to follow the guidance of his dreams, like Joseph going down to the darkness of Egypt, that underworld of man which is full of sorcery and false gods and fertility magic. Here in the underworld of Egypt he must learn to accept his darkness, to know his old self for the idolator that it is, to see the demony of magic that is within him. This is a moment at which the yoke lies heavy upon him, and he is tempted to murder God, to resort to magic in place of religion.

In the darkness, however, God sends an angel to lighten Man's way through the underworld. This is the Passage (the Phase) of the Lord, when man is told to leave his old self behind; for only those born again shall enter the Promised Land. It is only the children of Israel who shall enter Canaan; the old Man has to die on the Mount of Pasgah.

And in the darkness and aridity Man learns not to depend upon any external aids; when he is driven by trial to rock-

bottom he finds the Rock from which the living waters flow (for the Rock is the Christ) (Num. 20, 10). But he has to leave everything contrary to the law of God behind—if there be anything left of the old idolator you shall burn it with fire. To turn back, now that the sea of holy chaos has washed you clean, would be a regression to magic; and to worship the golden image of your past is to bring down the wrath of God—if you do not sacrifice it, there will be murder between brothers.

Yet it is only the false image of self which has to die; all the time, beneath the debris of sin and idolatry, the true self whom God has been seeking to bring to light the whole time has been preserved. Like a lover, God has seen your true self through all the bric-à-brac of your daily life; and just as the lover's mind is constantly throwing up images of what the beloved was like in childhood, so God sees the child within. It is the tenderness of the lover which allows him to reach to the roots of the beloved without harm; and God, in his tenderness, restores to you the child that you were. The Passage of the Lord is a new beginning, the restoration of *hesed*; at the seventh turning of the stair you go back again to your childhood self and embrace your brother—the good shepherd. The seventh year you must stop being cultured, and let the land return to its beginnings, suffering it to rest, 'that the poor of thy people may eat' (Ex. 23, 11). Let your starved passions have something to feed upon for a while.

Indeed the turning back goes further: Man can now embrace fertility again, though lightly and tenderly, not yet in the strong flood of free passion—Woman is still Eve and not Mary. But Adam *can* embrace Eve; he can enter into the land flowing with milk and honey, the fertile land of Canaan, which Cain had tried to embrace prematurely, before preparing himself by sacrifice. Israel must proceed with delicacy; the dread of Eve is too close to allow the fertility pole of the goddess Astarte to remain; it is not until Woman is fully taken into the New Israel, the Catholic Church, that she can be set upon a pedestal once more and receive the title given to Astarte: Queen of Heaven. But the divine lover works another ruse: Israel becomes iden-

tified with Astarte, assuming her tender, feminine qualities. Israel itself becomes the *Bride* of God.

It would seem, now, that all is ready for the marriage, that Man (Adam) can receive his life, his sweetness and his hope. The knower in a sense becomes the thing known, and Man had in a sense now become Woman—the Bride of Jahweh. He is one with himself, as in Paradise . . .? Not yet. Israel is not yet ripe—indeed, has no *conscience* but goes a-whoring after strange gods (1 Kings 8, 8). A conscience might have been awakened in Israel, and the children of God might have come to maturity—God sent Samuel to elevate them to this stage. But instead of a conscience Israel chose subjection to an external power: ‘there shall be a king over us’. (1 Kings 8: 19). And this in face of Samuel’s warnings that the king’s rule would lie heavy upon them, that the king would tax them, their children, their energies and their wealth until they squirmed. A vast bureaucracy would deaden the springs of local life, would rape mother earth.

There is a parallel within the life of the individual. The individual is frightened to awaken to his conscience; he does not want to have the true King reigning in his heart, but prefers a substitute, which we nowadays call the ‘super-ego’. And as Saul’s rule lies heavy upon Israel so the super-ego tyrannises the individual; his life becomes top-heavy, as his passions and emotions are pinned down by a hardened bureaucrat at the centre of his being. And sometimes the super-ego kills the springs of life in Man’s members; it is not unknown for a tyrannical super-ego quite literally to paralyse a man.

But usually the play in a person’s character is not completely destroyed, and his deeper self, the Shepherd within, comes along and lulls the super-ego to sleep, as David lulled Saul to sleep by playing on his harp. And if an individual has not turned utterly from God his conscience begins to replace his super-ego. He begins to make room in his heart for the true King, driving out the substitute of a tyrant, as David liberates Israel by bringing the *shekinah*, the presence of God, into the heart of Israel.

Once more we have reached a critical stage, and Man’s

full stature seems imminent. The shepherd and the husbandman, the priest and the king, have God in their midst; God has come to dwell in the midst of his people. All that remains, when we have acquired a conscience, is to build the City and the Temple around it. All that remains. . . .

We know only too well what happens; Satan moves David to number Israel, and tightens his control over it; Solomon goes even further in assuming control over the destinies of Man. As always happens when Man moves onwards he gets an inflated notion of himself, especially if he is conscious of being one of the elect, God's chosen one. The inflation of Solomon, grown to worldly wisdom, inevitably brings down the wrath of God upon Israel.

This phase which man's history now enters upon bears the same features as the exile in Egypt and the exodus. In this underworld he again learns that it is better to fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are many, than into the hands of man (1 Paralip. 21, 13). He learns the need for repentance and conversion, the folly of trying to cast the burden of his maturity onto Solomon or David, the priest or the psycho-analyst. Nor can he lay his blame at the door of his father in the form of his super-ego; no collective morality can suffice when the Lord will judge every man according to his ways. (Ezech. 18, 30.)

As before, the Passage of the Lord brings forth its angel, its messenger: the Prophet who sees the way forward out of Babylon; as before, the message is to go back to the beginnings. Back to the land, back to the desert, where there was *hesed*. The city is a harlot, setting man against his brother. And God has no need of the temple built by men's hands (in place of that stony edifice, he will give man a heart of flesh). (Ezech. 36, 25.) In the simplicity of the desert man can go back to his simple self and unravel all the knots that have been tied in him by the progress of culture; but he must not do so in fierce despair, in hatred of culture—that would be regression and barbarity. On the contrary, he has to go back hopefully, hoping to re-establish the continuity of growth. This continuity was broken by his failure to sacrifice in the time of crisis, in the transition from one stage to another. Only a man who can go back like this can

rise to his full stature, bringing with him the boy that he was, who paddled his feet in the brook, the young man with his visions and his generous romanticism; not for such a man the disillusionment of middle life or the cynicism of age, for his life now flows free and strong out of boyhood into maturity—his maturity includes eternal youth springing from the source of his being. Life flows from the Shepherd to the Husbandman, to the Priest and the Prophet.

The Prophet is the symbol of the new age that is dawning, and in the darkness of exile God grants the prophets a vision of the city and the temple far richer than the city and the temple which can be built by men's hands. For the culture of the city has not been rejected—in the trials of suffering and evil it has been spiritualised: Sion shall be redeemed in judgment, and they shall bring her back in justice. (Is. 1, 27.) Through meditating upon God's doings towards men, the prophets find an image forming in their minds of One who is more than a prophet, the one Man in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, who reconciles within himself all the sacrifice and pain and longing that each of us feels as we are drawn to perfect manhood. The prophets are granted a vision of the Good Shepherd whose blood speaketh better than that of Abel; (Heb. 12, 24); of the Husbandman who is also the Vine; of the Rock that is a spring of eternal life; of the High Priest who has himself suffered and been tempted; of the King of Kings; of the Prophet who himself fulfils all prophecy. This is the Christ in whom man comes to maturity, for when the Light of the world has come who lightens every man from within, Man no longer has any excuse for sin (Jn. 15, 25); not an angel, but God himself is now with us at this Passage of the Lord. Man has reached his full stature; his conscience is established.

But the Christ is more than all this, more than the consummation of earthly civilisation. It is true that he takes Adam and reconciles him to woman within himself (indeed he had done so from the beginning: He possessed her in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything. The Christ was married to Mary before she became his Mother.) (Prov. 8, 22); Adam is reconciled to Eve within his members—

'Woman, behold thy son'. And in that sense he restores the harmony that was at the beginning, in Paradise, where Man is one with himself. He has preserved and tended the Garden throughout history—but *for the sake of the City*, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11, 20), the New Jerusalem prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband (Apoc. 21, 2).

The Christ is more than all this, for though it is true that the whole of human history is ordered towards the building up of other Christs who are temples of the Holy Spirit, it is also true that within history this Temple is destroyed. And in the heavenly city there is no temple, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple thereof, and the Lamb.



THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

ONE of the Scribes . . . asked him which was the first commandment of all. But Jesus answered him, The first commandment of all is,
 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God;
 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God
 With thy whole heart,
 and with thy whole soul,
 and with thy whole mind,
 and with thy whole strength."

This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' (Mk. 12, 29-34).

We might take the scribe's question literally and interpret it 'what sort' of law (*poia entole*) is this greatest of all laws; for it is in fact, a law of unsuspected universality. Our Lord's answer must in fact have sounded familiar to that Scribe and his contemporaries. They had often heard it read twice daily—even if admittedly they had not always entered into its inward spirit. The famous *Shema* prayer, or confession of faith, seems to have obtained in our Lord's time, if for example we may trust the evidence of Josephus (Ant. 4, 8, 13), 'Let everyone commemorate before God the