

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ?

Of course others have faced this problem, and found their answer. It would be wanton, spiritual arrogance for the author in his academic seclusion to suggest otherwise. Yet sometimes, as he lays aside one or other of the various handbooks of Christian reconstruction with which the market is flooded in these days, a horrid doubt crosses his mind which passes into a nightmarish sense of unreality. We draught our charters, we hold our luncheons, we address our public meetings. We go to the world outside the conference-hall door, with a smile, with a handbook, nearly always with a sense of assurance. Again, we search the Scriptures not that we may have life, but that we may find a slogan for a Christian mass-movement, in which the demands of the platform will blunt the sharpness of our truly Christian perception. Our attitude seems sometimes a curiously sorry compact of assurance and desperation. We are assured because we think we have a solution for the frightful torments of the present; we are afraid because we see the dreadful possibility that men will not listen to us, may in fact opt finally for other gods.

Is this altogether unfair? The picture is not intentionally spiteful. But there are moments when it seems hard to escape the conviction that some contemporary forms of Christian social activity are little less than highly subtle forms of escapism. They are 'idealist' in the sense assigned to that term by Marxist writers, for they rest on unconscious desire to escape the pressing demand to wrestle with social actualities in the here and now by passing into a world that analysis points out to be one of ideas only.

In his profound address to the Malvern Conference, Mr. J. Middleton Murry pointed the depth of the problem that we have to face by posing it in terms of spirituality. Our piety so often moves against the background of a sociological setting utterly remote from that of the present. In *La Vie Intellectuelle* for December 25th, 1937,¹ Père Chenu, O.P., faced the same problem in his discussion of *Dimension nouvelle de la Chrétienté*. His words are worth quoting again, and attending to, though perhaps the movement of events compels us to modify his optimism.

'Too long has a magnificent apostolic zeal been expended in "protecting" Christians from their environment, and in creating an arti-

¹ Epitomised and 'extracted' in *Blackfriars* for Feb. 1938, pp. 134 ff.

ficial environment into which they may escape and live in a Christian manner in the devout atmosphere of an enclosed group, far from pagan and perverse surroundings. Perhaps this is an unavoidable *pis-aller* under particular circumstances; but the narrow pragmatism of such a policy leads us to a Christianity of refugees, cut off from life, from its daily realities, from its politics, its classes, and so at last to a Christianity without edge, without courage—a Christianity which holds to the letter without the spirit and which abandons to its miseries the paganised proletariat. Such a policy indicates not merely a tactical error; it indicates a structural error, for it implies an error in doctrine. It is to oppose man's religious psychology against the reality of matter; it implies that the Christian life is extraneous to the work of everyday life, that it cannot thrive unless it barricade itself against that work as against something which is incapable of redemption and sanctification. It is a sin against the realism of the Incarnation . . . What is the use of leaven unless it is put into the dough?'

This passage with its profound testimony to the dynamism of supernatural grace ultimately concerns Middleton Murry's problem. One can pose it perhaps as that of redeeming the time, of relating our historical here and now to the timeless Now of Christ's Yea to his Father's demand, which confronts us in the Mass. It is the theme of Maritain's classical study of integral humanism, the vindication through grace of the status of human persons in a manner proportionate to the actualities of contemporary social forms. We cannot escape from our history any more than the Incarnate Son of God could flee the historical medium of his universal, redeeming work, with all its individual roughness and peculiarity. Though flesh and blood did not reveal the secret of his Messiahship to Simon Barjona, it was in flesh and blood (with all that that phrase conveys of historical relativity) that he wrought out the work of redemption. To deny the necessity of relating that work to the demands of successive historical moments is to ignore the stern reality of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The agents of such action must of course come in the first instance from those whose lot is cast in the midst of those actualities whose transformation is in question. They alone know the situation from within; they are the men on the spot. The implication of Père Chenu's argument is one with the clear-sighted insistence of Pius XI that the apostles of the working-man must be in the first place working-men. But his argument can perhaps be generalised to include within the scope of this apostolate others (trades unions leaders, for instance), who possess a more scientific appreciation of industrial

technique, and the social forms it determines. It is perhaps necessary even to say that the architects of that new Christian society, of which Maritain has given us perhaps our wisest map, must be drawn from the laity rather than from the clergy. It cannot be insisted too often that, if it is achieved at all, its unity with the older Christian society will be by way of analogy, not of univocity. The analogical character of this unity would reveal itself most clearly perhaps in the sphere from which those élites, whose insight would make possible response to the challenge to create it, would be in the first instance recruited. It would of course be further reflected in the actual structure of the society thus formed.

The attitude, enjoined by Père Chenu, is profoundly realist. It demands just that degree of empiricism, of attention to the concrete possibilities and necessities of the situation, which Christian social thought sometimes, through impatience, eschews. Too often such thinking, when concerned with programme, has failed in the elasticity necessary, if it is to portray effectively what those norms it tends to regard as self-evidently authoritative must look like effectively concretised in a novel social relative. This philosophical failure is in part indeed conditioned by the spiritual indolence suggested earlier in the paper; for always for the Christian it is from the *adequate* relating of the supernatural life that is his, in Christ, to the actual demand of the moment wherein he must glorify his Lord, that the intellectual suppleness and adjustment, necessary to see a new Christendom as a possibility, must spring.

Yet, since 1937, we have advanced much further along a road whose end is not yet in sight. The words we have analysed were written admittedly when the Abyssinian War and Spanish Civil War had shown Europe the shape of things to come. The same number of *La Vie Intellectuelle* contains *Christianus'* endorsement of Mgr. Yu Pin's conviction of the justice of China's resistance. Yet it still seemed at least possible that the drift to destruction could be arrested by a sufficiently urgent and realist response to the challenge of the hour. But our task to-day is dominated by the reality of total war; we must vindicate the authority and dignity of personal living as the fullest natural human parable of the mystery of the Triune God in its context. Clearly the rift of the personal and the technical is deepened by its movement, and the former seems sometimes threatened with the choice of creating its own private context, apart from the rush of the conflict, or of absorption in the technical through the very dynamism of the latter.

We must face facts. Is it not the case that, at this moment, we are all of us, in so far as we possess any sensitive awareness of the

issues of the hour, driven to see that we have come to a situation in which life in the personal dimension has become practically non-significant? The places of true, personal interchange, where 'I' meets 'thou' (in Buber's language²) and each is broken upon the other, seem to lie apart from the life in which we now find ourselves. The language of the Press and of the B.B.C., with their strident exaltation of the impersonalities of the moment (the 'war effort' is merely one among a multitude), simply confirms us in our judgment that the logic of 'total war' demands the subordination of personal values to impersonal necessities. Worse, and this as Fr. Victor White has urged is the 'deepest anguish of mind,' we see the inevitability and necessity of this process, if the war is to be won. There is no other way whereby the threat that Hitler's monstrous tyranny presents may be overcome. The actual, conscious assertion of the personal is, by itself, an incomplete vindication in view of the reality of the external threat. We have come to a point where moral action is, by itself, virtually insignificant, if one is thinking in terms of effect on the external course of events. To the 'Coventration' of English cities the 'Rostocking'³ of German seems the only effective answer.

Of course the fissure of the personal and the technical is, at the intellectual level, the dominant, if not always most explicit, concern of the whole post-Cartesian movement in philosophy. Indeed, increasingly the present writer is convinced that the whole development can be rendered intelligible in terms of successive attempts to restate, or to resolve, the central Cartesian puzzle of the relation of man to his world, the last-named being understood increasingly in positivist rather than in materialist terms. Kant bestrides the whole movement like a Colossus; for in him its various tendencies are most explicit, and its problems crystallised. In the security of Victorian England a solution was glimpsed and seized in the Hegelian dialectic, wherein ideas drawn from the development of historical science were used to make concrete the abstractions of the earlier idealisms, but this solution was alike metaphysically untenable and morally intolerable, and to-day the problem is with us again, defined with all the violence congenial to our period in the contrast of the teaching of such men as Martin Buber (and his English followers, Professors Herbert Farmer and John Baillie) with the developed philosophy of science of the logical positivists.

Moreover, the character of our situation makes the issue for us one of practice as well as of theory. It is no fantasy on the writer's

² Cf. also Zundel, *Our Lady of Wisdom* (Sheed and Ward).

³ The past participle of this verb was used in the *Sunday Express* of May 3rd, 1942, p. 2.

part to see a vital connection between the paradigm of knowledge as consisting essentially in the elaboration of a descriptive technique, whereby the course of phenomena may be controlled, and the attitude of mind that the prosecution of total war demands. To both alike mastery is the criterion of value. As Professor H. A. Hodges has said, for the 'scientific attitude' knowledge is power.⁴ The personal is, as it were, peripheral. Its very reality is an inconvenient admission for a certain type of theoretic empiricist.

That is our situation, our 'here and now.' One can understand how the arguments of the champions of the 'Land Movement' possess a new cogency. Murry himself urged at Malvern the necessity and relevance of endeavouring to acquire a right attitude to nature, and painted the significance of what small, rural communities were at present attempting in respect of an ultimate solution of our problem.⁵ But clearly such experiments are for a minority. Indeed, many, for good enough reason, remain unconvinced of their wisdom. What then?

There is, I believe, one contribution that all Christians can make, for it concerns that level at which they are compelled by the very fact of their Baptism to live. In his deeply moving *Scum of the Earth*,⁶ Mr. Arthur Koestler quotes the words of the French Dominican, Père Darrault, 'We can afford to wait a thousand years.' Such a saying can indeed be made the sanction of quietism. But it can also point to the eternity of that act, Christ's response to the Father, in which every Christian by baptism is rooted. Our context is theocentric, our present belongs to an eternal Now.

We must live out all our social awareness *at that level*. However impotent we rightly feel, that demand is inescapable. We can, if we like, regard spiritual life as a way of escape to a purer air. That is to deny the reality of the Incarnation. It is also to abandon the struggle at the only level where it can significantly begin. We must take down into Christ that whole present, rent fabric, of which we, by our natural birth, are part. If indeed we confess the reality of Christ within us, we know that it is in his indwelling alone that the burden of the time is bearable. During the Spanish War, when great souls, like Maritain, thrust upon us the terrible problem of the

⁴ In his *Christian News-Letter* Supplement for Feb. 11th, 1942.

⁵ Dr. K. E. Barlow has urged the relevance of a proper concept of Nature to the solution of our theoretical problem in his 'Discipline of Peace' (Faber, 1942). Unfortunately his epistemology is extremely shaky, and one's confidence in the detail of his argument is therefore a little insecure. His book, however, demands attention.

⁶ Cape, 1941.

means, and the scandal of a Christian compromise with the morality of totalitarianism, one got familiar with a certain shrug of the shoulders. 'It's very terrible, I know—but . . .' That shrug expressed perfectly the spiritually escapist mentality of the Christian *bien pensant*. To-day it is still with us, sometimes expressed by different shoulders. It betokens, of course, a very nearly final repudiation of Christ's commandment of charity.

We can all of us begin at that level to wrestle, in crucial awareness, for the souls and bodies of our fellows. This work of integration must be a hidden work; we must begin, all of us, by learning to be terrified by the reality of our impotence. Yet our hope is set upon a resurrection, when God will make all things new, and, though our labour may often seem vain, it is not truly lost but only awaiting the glory of his appearing for its manifestation. And, if this way is closed to us—what else can we do, anyway?

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WHY EXHIBIT WORKS OF ART¹

WHAT is an Art Museum for? As the word 'Curator' implies, the most essential function of such a Museum is to take care of works of art which are no longer in their original places or no longer used as was originally intended, and are therefore in danger of destruction. This care of works of art does not necessarily involve their exhibition.

If we ask, why should the protected works of art be exhibited to the public, the answer will be made, that this is to be done with an educational purpose. But before we ask, Education in or for what? a distinction must be made between the exhibition of the works of living artists and that of ancient or relatively ancient or exotic works of art. It is unnecessary for Museums to exhibit the works of living artists, which are not in imminent danger of destruction; or at least, if such works are exhibited, it should be clearly understood that the Museum is really advertising the artist and acting on behalf of the art dealer whose business it is to find a market for the artist; the only difference being that it makes no profit. On

¹ An address delivered before the American Association of Museums in May and October, 1941.