

becomes more visible and convincing. The council will then be, in the words of Pope John, 'the presence and participation of the bishops who are the living representation of the catholic, world-wide Church'.

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A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants

THOMAS MERTON

At a moment when all the discordant voices of modern society attempt to exorcize the vertigo of man with scientific clichés or prophetic curses I come to share with you reflections that are neither tragic nor, I hope, fatuous. They are simply the thoughts of one civilized man to another, dictated by a spirit of sobriety and concern, and with no pretensions to exorcize anything. The vertigo of the twentieth century needs no permission of yours or mine to continue. The tornado has not consulted any of us, and will not do so. This does not mean that we are helpless. It only means that our salvation lies in understanding our exact position, not in flattering ourselves that we have brought the whirlwind into being by ourselves, or that we can calm it with a wave of the hand.

It is certainly true that the storm of history has arisen out of our own hearts. It has sprung unbidden out of the emptiness of technological man. It is the genii he has summoned out of the depths of his own confusion, this complacent sorcerer's apprentice who spends billions on weapons of destruction and space rockets when he cannot provide decent meals, shelter and clothing for two thirds of the human race. Is it improper to doubt the intelligence and sincerity of modern man? I know it is not accepted as a sign of progressive thinking to question the enlightenment of the twentieth century barbarian. But I no longer have any desire to be considered enlightened by the standards of the stool pigeons and torturers whose most signal claim to success is that

they have built so many extermination camps and operated them to the limit of their capacity.

These glorious characters, revelling in paroxysms of collective paranoia, have now aligned themselves in enormous power blocs of which the most striking feature is that they resemble one another like a pair of twins. I had not clearly understood from Ezechiel that Gog and Magog were to fight one another, although I knew that they were to be overcome. I knew that their ponderous brutality would exhaust itself on the mountains of Israel and provide a feast for the birds of the air. But I had not expected we would all be so intimately involved in their downfall. The truth is that there is a little of Gog and Magog even in the best of us.

We must be wary of ourselves when the worst that is in man becomes objectified in society, approved, acclaimed and deified, when hatred becomes patriotism and murder a holy duty, when spying and delation are love of truth and the stool pigeon is a public benefactor, when the gnawing and prurient resentments of the frustrated bureaucrats become the conscience of the people and the gangster is enthroned in power, then we must fear the voice of our own heart, even when it denounces them. For are we not all tainted with the same poison?

That is why we must not be deceived by the giants, and by their thunderous denunciations of one another, their preparations for mutual destruction. The fact that they are powerful does not mean that they are sane, and the fact that they speak with intense conviction does not mean that they speak the truth. Nor is their size any proof that they possess a metaphysical solidity. Are they not perhaps spectres without essence, emanations from the terrified and puny hearts of politicians, policemen and millionaires?

We live in an age of bad dreams, in which the scientist and engineer possess the power to give external form to the phantasms of man's unconscious. The bright weapons that sing in the atmosphere, ready to pulverize the cities of the world, are the dreams of giants without a centre. Their mathematical evolutions are hieratic rites devised by Shamans without belief. One is permitted to wish their dreams had been less sordid!

But perhaps they are also the emanations of our own subliminal self!

2

I have learned that an age in which politicians talk about peace is an age in which everybody expects war: the great men of the earth would

not talk of peace so much if they did not secretly believe it possible, with *one more war*, to annihilate their enemies for ever. Always, 'after just one more war' it will dawn, the new era of love: but first everybody who is hated must be eliminated. For hate, you see, is the mother of their kind of love.

Unfortunately the love that is to be born out of hate will never be born. Hatred is sterile; it breeds nothing but the image of its own empty fury, its own nothingness. Love cannot come of emptiness. It is full of reality. Hatred destroys the real being of man in fighting the fiction which it calls 'the enemy'. For man is concrete and alive, but 'the enemy' is a subjective abstraction. A society that kills real men in order to deliver itself from the phantasm of a paranoid delusion is already possessed by the demon of destructiveness because it has made itself incapable of love. It refuses, *a priori*, to love. It is dedicated not to concrete relations of man with man, but only to abstractions about politics, economics, psychology, and even, sometimes, religion. Words and symbols are the only reality which our age respects, though it claims to be absorbed in technology and in progress. Actually no one cares for progress but only for what can be said about it, what price can be put on it, what political advantage may be gained from it. Gog is a love of power, Magog is absorbed in the cult of money: their idols differ, and indeed their faces seem to be dead set against one another, but their madness is the same: they are the two faces of Janus looking inward, and dividing with critical fury the polluted sanctuary of dehumanized man.

Only names matter, to Gog and Magog, only labels, only numbers, symbols, slogans. For the sake of a name, a classification, you can be marched away with your pants off to be shot against a wall. For the sake of a name, a word, you can be gassed in a showerbath and fed to the furnace to be turned into fertilizer. For the sake of a word or even a number they will tan your skin and make it into lampshades. If you want to get a job, make a living, have a home to live in, eat in restaurants and ride in vehicles with other human beings, you have to have a right classification: depending perhaps on the shape of your nose, the colour of your eyes, the kink in your hair, the degree to which you happen to be sunburned, or the social status of your grandfather. Life and death to-day depend on everything except what you *are*. This is called humanism.

Condemnation or rehabilitation have no connection with what you happen to have done. There is no longer any question of ethical stan-

dards. We may have been liberated from idealistic objectivity about 'right and wrong'. This timely liberation from ethical norms and laws enables us to deal with an ever increasing population of undesirables in much more efficient fashion. Attach to each one an arbitrary label, which requires no action on his part and no effort of thought on the part of the accuser. This enables society to get rid of 'criminals' without the latter putting anyone to any kind of inconvenience by committing an actual crime. A much more humane and efficient way of dealing with crime! You benevolently shoot a man for all the crimes he *might* commit before he has a chance to commit them.

3

I write to you to-day from Magog's country. The fact that Magog is to me more sympathetic than Gog does not, I think, affect my objectivity. Nor does it imply a choice of category, a self-classification. Magog and I seldom agree, which is one reason why I write this letter. I must however admit I feel indebted to Magog for allowing me to exist, which Gog perhaps might not. Perhaps it is not to my credit that I half-trust the strain of idealism in Magog, accepting it uncritically as a sign that, for all his blatant, materialistic gigantism, he is still human. Certainly he tolerates in his clients elements of human poignancy, together with an off-beat frivolity which Gog could never comprehend. (Yet Gog, in the right mood, weeps copiously into his vodka). Magog, on the whole, is not demanding. A little lip service has been enough at least up to the present. He does not require the exorbitant public confessions which are a prelude to disappearance in the realm of Gog. The pressure of Magog is more subtle, more gently persuasive, but no less universal. Yet disagreement is still tolerated.

Magog is in confusion, an easier prey than Gog to panic and discouragement. He is less crafty as a politician, and he is handicapped by a vague and uncomplicated system of beliefs which everyone can understand. Hence the whole world can easily see discrepancies between his ideals and actualities. Magog is more often embarrassed than Gog who entertains no objective ideals but only pays homage to a dialectical process by which anything, however disconcerting, can quickly be justified.

Magog is put to a great deal of inconvenience by the fact that he has to believe in his myths and account for them as objectively real. This puts him at a disadvantage, because many of his members are still afflicted with spasms of a vestigial organ called conscience. This puts

them at variance with Magog himself and causes him to become cynically impatient, since he is firmly committed to the position that conscience still exists. I am very much afraid that he will have a hard time with Gog who not only makes a great deal more noise about right and wrong, but has completely divested himself from the embarrassing impediments of moral judgments. As he is never bothered about scruples his movements can be swifter and more effective, and indeed he cleverly exploits Magog's emotions in order to make him torment himself with uncertainty and destroy himself with his own questioning.

Gog, I believe, is fondly hoping that Magog will be driven to despair and ruin himself in some way before it becomes necessary to destroy him. But in any case he is giving Magog every opportunity to discredit himself in the eyes of the rest of the world, so that if he cannot be persuaded to put his own head in the gas oven, his destruction can be made to appear as no crime but as a benefit conferred on the whole human race.

But let me turn from Gog and Magog to the rest of men. And by 'the rest of men' I mean those who have not yet committed themselves to the cause of one or the other of the champions. There are many, even within the power groups, who hate war and hate the slogans, the systems and the official pronouncements of groups under whose dominance they live. But they seem to be able to do nothing about it. Their instinct to protest is restrained by the awareness that whatever they may say, however true, against one implacable power can be turned to good use by another that is even more inhuman. Even in protest one must be discreet, not only for the sake of saving one's skin, but above all for the sake of protecting the virginity of one's own protest against the salacious advances of the publicist, the agitator, or the political police.

4

Let me abandon my facetiousness, and consider the question of the world's future, if it has one. Gog and Magog are persuaded that it has: Gog thinks that the self destruction of Magog will usher in the golden age of peace and love. Magog thinks that if he and Gog can somehow shoot the rapids of a cold war waged with the chemically pure threat of nuclear weapons they will both emerge into a future of happiness, the nature and the possibility of which still remain to be explained.

I for my part believe in the very serious possibility that Gog and Magog may wake up one morning to find that they have burned and

blasted each other off the map during the night, and nothing will remain but the spasmodic exercise of automatic weapons still in the throes of what has casually been termed 'post mortem retaliation'. The supererogatory retaliation may quite conceivably affect all the neutrals who have managed to escape the main event, but it is still possible that the southern hemisphere may make a dazed and painful comeback, and discover itself alone in a smaller, emptier, better-radiated but still habitable world.

In this new situation it is conceivable that Indonesia, Latin America, Southern Africa and Australia may find themselves heirs to the opportunities and objectives which Gog and Magog shrugged off with such careless abandon.

The largest, richest and best developed single land-mass south of the Equator is South America. The vast majority of its population is Indian, or of mixed Indian blood. The white minority in South Africa would quite probably disappear. A relic of European stock might survive in Australia and New Zealand. Let us also hopefully assume the partial survival of India and of some Moslem populations in central and northern Africa.

If this should happen it will be an event fraught with a rather extraordinary spiritual significance. It will mean that the more cerebral and mechanistic cultures, those which have tended to live more and more by abstractions and to isolate themselves more and more from the natural world by rationalization, will be succeeded by the sections of the human race which they oppressed and exploited without the slightest appreciation for or understanding for their human reality.

Characteristic of these races is a totally different outlook on life, a spiritual outlook which is not abstract but concrete, not pragmatic but hieratic, intuitive and affective rather than rationalistic and aggressive. The deepest springs of vitality in these races have been sealed up by the Conqueror and Colonizer, where they have not actually been poisoned by him. But if this stone is removed from the spring perhaps its waters will purify themselves by new life and regain their creative, fructifying power. Neither Gog nor Magog can accomplish this for them.

Let me be quite succinct: the greatest sin of the European-Russian-American complex which we call 'the West' (and this sin has spread its own way to China), is not only greed and cruelty, not only moral dishonesty and infidelity to truth, but above all *its unmitigated arrogance towards the rest of the human race*. Western civilization is now in full decline into barbarism (a barbarism that springs *from within itself*) be-

cause it has been guilty of a twofold disloyalty: to God and to Man. To a Christian who believes in the mystery of the Incarnation, and who by that belief means something more than a pious theory without real humanistic implications, this is not two disloyalties but one. Since the Word was made Flesh, God is in man. God is in *all men*. All men are to be seen and treated as Christ. Failure to do this, the Lord tells us, involves condemnation for disloyalty to the most fundamental of revealed truths. 'I was thirsty and you gave me not to drink. I was hungry and you gave me not to eat . . .' (Matthew 25. 42). This could be extended in every possible sense: and it is meant to be so extended, all over the entire area of human needs, not only for bread, for work, for liberty, for health, but also for truth, for belief, for love, for acceptance, for fellowship and understanding.

One of the great tragedies of the Christian West is the fact that for all the good will of the missionaries and colonizers (they certainly meant well, and behaved humanly, according to their lights which were somewhat brighter than ours), they could not recognize that *the races they conquered were essentially equal to themselves and in some ways superior*.

It was certainly right that Christian Europe should bring Christ to the Indians of Mexico and the Andes, as well as to the Hindus and the Chinese: but where they failed was in their inability to *encounter Christ* already potentially present in the Indians, the Hindus and the Chinese.

Christians have too often forgotten the fact that Christianity found its way into Greek and Roman civilization partly by its spontaneous and creative adaptation of the pre-Christian natural values it found in that civilization. The martyrs rejected all the grossness, the cynicism and falsity of the cult of the state-gods which was simply a cult of secular power, but Clement of Alexandria, Justin and Origen believed that Herakleitos and Socrates had been precursors of Christ. They thought that while God had manifested himself to the Jews through the Law and the Prophets he had also spoken to the Gentiles through their philosophers. Christianity made its way in the world of the first century not by imposing Jewish cultural and social standards on the rest of the world, but by abandoning them, getting free of them so as to be 'all things to all men'. This was the great drama and the supreme lesson of the Apostolic Age. By the end of the Middle Ages that lesson had been *forgotten*. The preachers of the Gospel to newly discovered continents became preachers and disseminators of European culture and power. They did not enter into dialogue with ancient civilizations:

they imposed their own monologue and in preaching Christ they also preached themselves. The very ardour of their self-sacrifice and of their humility enabled them to do this with a clean conscience. But they had omitted to listen to the voice of Christ in the unfamiliar accents of the Indian, as Clement had listened for it in the Pre-Socratics. And now, to-day, we have a Christianity of Magog.

It is a Christianity of money, of action, of passive crowds, an electronic Christianity of loudspeakers and parades. Magog is himself without belief, cynically tolerant of the athletic yet sentimental Christ devised by some of his clients, because this Christ is profitable to Magog. He is a progressive Christ who does not protest against Pharisees or money changers in the temple. He protests only against Gog.

It is my belief that we should not be too sure of having found Christ in ourselves until we have found him also in the part of humanity that is most remote from our own.

Christ is found not in loud and pompous declarations but in humble and fraternal dialogue. He is found less in a truth that is imposed than in a truth that is shared.

5

If I insist on giving you my truth, and never stop to receive your truth in return, then there can be no truth between us. Christ is present 'where two or three are gathered in my name'. But to be gathered in the name of Christ is to be gathered in the name of the Word made flesh, of God made man. It is therefore to be gathered in the faith that God has become man and can be seen in man, that he can speak in man and that he can enlighten and inspire love in and through any man I meet. It is true that the visible Church alone has the official mission to sanctify and teach all nations, but no man knows that the stranger he meets coming out of the forest in a new country is not already an invisible member of Christ and perhaps one who has some providential or prophetic message to utter.

Whatever India may have had to say to the West she was forced to remain silent. Whatever China had to say, though some of the first missionaries heard it and understood it, the message was generally ignored as irrelevant. Did anyone pay attention to the voices of the Maya and the Inca, who had deep things to say? By and large their witness was merely suppressed. No one considered that the children of the Sun might, after all, hold in their hearts a spiritual secret. On the contrary, abstract discussions were engaged in to determine whether,

in terms of academic philosophy, the Indian was to be considered a rational animal. One shudders at the voice of cerebral western arrogance even then eviscerated by the rationalism that is ours to-day, judging the living spiritual mystery of primitive man and condemning it to exclusion from the category on which love, friendship, respect, and communion were made to depend.

God speaks, and God is to be heard, not only on Sinai, not only in my own heart, but in the *voice of the stranger*. That is why the peoples of the Orient, and all primitive peoples in general, make so much of the mystery of hospitality.

God must be allowed the right to speak unpredictably. The Holy Spirit, the very voice of Divine Liberty, must always be like the wind in 'blowing where he pleases' (John 3. 8). In the mystery of the Old Testament there was already a tension between the Law and the Prophets. In the New Testament the Spirit himself is Law, and he is everywhere. He certainly inspires and protects the visible Church, but if we cannot see him unexpectedly in the stranger and the alien, we will not understand him even in the Church. We must find him in our enemy, or we may lose him even in our friend. We must find him in the pagan or we will lose him in our own selves, substituting for his living presence an empty abstraction. How can we reveal to others what we cannot discover in them ourselves? We must, then, see the truth in the stranger, and the truth we see must be a newly living truth, not just a projection of a dead conventional idea of our own—a projection of our own self upon the stranger.

The desecration, the de-consecration, the de-sacralization of the modern world is manifest above all by the fact that the stranger is of no account. As soon as he is 'displaced' he is completely unacceptable. He fits into no familiar category, he is unexplained and therefore a threat to complacency. Everything not easy to account for must be wiped out, and mystery must be wiped out with it. An alien presence interferes with the superficial and faked clarity of our own rationalizations.

6

There is more than one way of morally liquidating the 'stranger' and the 'alien'. It is sufficient to destroy, in some way, that in him which is different and disconcerting. By pressure, persuasion, or force one can impose on him one's own ideas and attitudes towards life. One can indoctrinate him, brainwash him. He is no longer different. He has been reduced to conformity with one's own outlook. Gog, who does noth-

ing if not thoroughly, believes in the thorough liquidation of differences, and the reduction of everyone else to a carbon copy of himself. Magog is somewhat more quixotic: the stranger becomes part of his own screen of fantasies, part of the collective dream life which is manufactured for him on Madison Avenue and in Hollywood. For all practical purposes, the stranger no longer exists. He is not even seen. He is replaced by a fantastic image. What is seen and approved, in a vague, superficial way, is the stereotype that has been created by the travel agency.

This accounts for the spurious cosmopolitanism of the naive tourist and travelling business man, who wanders everywhere with his camera, his exposure-meter, his spectacles, his sun glasses, his binoculars, and though gazing around him in all directions never sees what is there. He is not capable of doing so. He is too docile to his instructors, to those who have told him everything beforehand. He believes the advertisements of the travel agent at whose suggestion he bought the ticket that landed him wherever he may be. He has been told what he was going to see, and he thinks he is seeing it. Or, failing that, he at least wonders why he is not seeing what he has been led to expect. Under no circumstances does it occur to him to become interested in what is actually there. Still less to enter into a fully human rapport with the human beings who are before him. He has not, of course, questioned their status as rational animals, as the scholastically trained colonists of an earlier age might have done. It just does not occur to him that they might have a life, a spirit, a thought, a culture of their own which has its own peculiar individual character.

He does not know why he is travelling in the first place: indeed he is travelling at somebody else's suggestion. Even at home he is alien from himself. He is doubly alienated when he is out of his own atmosphere. He cannot possibly realize that the stranger has something very valuable, something irreplaceable to give him: something that can never be bought with money, never estimated by publicists, never exploited by political agitators: the spiritual understanding of a friend who belongs to a different culture. The tourist lacks nothing except brothers. For him these do not exist.

The tourist never meets anyone, never encounters anyone, never finds the brother in the stranger. This is his tragedy, and it has been the tragedy of Gog and Magog, especially of Magog, in every part of the world.

If only North Americans had realized, after a hundred and fifty years,

that Latin Americans really existed. That they were really people. That they spoke a different language. That they had a culture. That they had more than something to sell! Money has totally corrupted the brotherhood that should have united all the peoples of America. It has destroyed the sense of relationship, the spiritual community that had already begun to flourish in the years of Bolivar. But no! Most North Americans still don't know, and don't care, that Brazil speaks a language other than Spanish, that all Latin Americans do not live for the siesta, that all do not spend their days and nights playing the guitar and making love. They have never awakened to the fact that Latin America is by and large culturally superior to the United States, not only on the level of the wealthy minority which has absorbed more of the sophistication of Europe, but also among the desperately poor indigenous cultures, some of which are rooted in a past that has never yet been surpassed on this continent.

So the tourist drinks tequila, and thinks it is no good, and waits for the fiesta he has been told to wait for. How should he realize that the Indian who walks down the street with half a house on his head and a hole in his pants, is Christ? All the tourist thinks is that it is odd for so many Indians to be called Jesus.

7

So much for the modern scene. I am no prophet, no one is, for now we have learned to get along without prophets. But I would say that if Gog and Magog are to destroy one another, which they seem quite anxious to do, it would be a great pity if the survivors in the 'Third World' attempted to reproduce their collective alienation, horror and insanity, and thus build up another corrupt world to be destroyed by another war. To the whole third world I would say there is one lesson to be learned from the present situation, one lesson of the greatest urgency: be unlike the giants, Gog and Magog. Mark what they do, and act differently. Mark their official pronouncements, their ideologies, and without difficulty you will find them hollow. Mark their behaviour: their bluster, their violence, their blandishments, their hypocrisy: by their fruits you shall know them. In all their boastfulness they have become the victims of their own terror, which is nothing but the emptiness of their own hearts. They claim to be humanists, they claim to know and love man. They have come to liberate man, they say. But they do not know what man is. They are themselves less human than their fathers were, less articulate, less sensitive, less profound, less cap-

able of genuine concern. They are turning into giant insects. Their societies are becoming anthills, without purpose, without meaning, without spirit and joy.

What is wrong with their humanism? It is a humanism of termites, because without God man becomes an insect, a worm in the wood, and even if he can fly, so what? There are flying ants. Even if man flies all over the universe, he is still nothing but a flying ant until he recovers a human centre and a human spirit in the depth of his own being.

Karl Marx? Yes, he was a humanist, with a humanist's concerns. He understood the roots of alienation and his understanding even had something spiritual about it. Marx unconsciously built his system on a basically religious pattern on the messianism of the Old Testament, and in his own myth Marx was Moses. He understood something of the meaning of liberation, because, he had in his bones the typology of Exodus. To say that he built a 'scientific' thought on a foundation of religious symbolism is not to say that he was wrong, but to justify what was basically right about his analysis. Marx did not think only with the top of his head, or reason on the surface of his intelligence. He did not simply verbalize or dogmatize as his followers have done. He was still human. And they?

Ultimately there is no humanism without God. Marx thought that humanism had to be atheistic, and this was because he did not understand God any better than the right thinking formalists whom he criticized. He thought, as they did, that God was an idea, an abstract essence, forming part of an intellectual superstructure built to justify economic alienation. There is in God nothing abstract. He is not a static entity, an object of thought, a pure essence. He has no essence other than his existence itself. He is not object, but act. The dynamism Marx looked for in history was something that the Bible itself would lead us in some sense to understand and to expect. And liberation from religious alienation was the central theme of the New Testament. But the theme has not been understood. It has too often been forgotten. Yet it is the very heart of the mystery of the Cross.

8

It is not with resignation that I wait for whatever may come, but with an acceptance and an understanding which cannot be confined within the limits of pragmatic realism. However meaningless Gog and Magog may be in themselves, the cataclysm they will undoubtedly let loose is full of meaning, full of light. Out of their negation and terror comes

certitude and peace for anyone who can fight his way free of their confusion. The worst they can do is bring death upon us and death is of little consequence. Destruction of the body cannot touch the deepest centre of life.

When will the bombs fall? Who shall say? Perhaps Gog and Magog have yet to perfect their policies and their weapons. Perhaps they want to do a neat and masterly job, dropping 'clean' bombs, without fallout. It sounds clinical to the point of humanitarian kindness. It is all a lovely, humane piece of surgery. Prompt, efficacious, sterile, pure. That of course was the ideal of the Nazis who conducted the extermination camps twenty years ago: but of course they had not progressed as far as we have. They devoted themselves dutifully to a disgusting job which could never be performed under perfect clinical conditions. Yet they did their best. Gog and Magog will develop the whole thing to its ultimate refinement. I hear they are working on a bomb that will destroy nothing but life. Men, animals, birds, perhaps also vegetation. But it will leave buildings, factories, railways, natural resources. Only one further step, and the weapon will be one of absolute perfection. It should destroy books, works of art, musical instruments, toys, tools and gardens, and spare flags, weapons, gallows, electric chairs, gas chambers, instruments of torture and plenty of strait jackets for the insane. Then the era of love can finally begin. Atheistic humanism can take over.

Appeal for Amnesty

PETER BENENSON

It has been said that the 'political prisoner' is the symbol of this second half of the twentieth century. In a sense this is correct, but it is probably truer to say that political imprisonment is the most important social evil which civilization has as yet failed to tackle. In the thirties the predominant social evil was that of unemployment, in the forties it was hunger and in the fifties the immense problem of the homeless refugee. In each case public opinion coalesced to oblige governments to work