What is the Church?—VIII

THE PLACE OF DEATH AND JUDGEMENT

HERBERT McCABE, O.P.

In this series of articles I have been considering different aspects of the Church, in particular seeing how it is constituted by the sacraments. In this final article I shall look at the theology of death, judgement, and the life to come, in order to set out the end for which the Church exists. Christians and humanists are in agreement about so much—at any rate one kind of Christian and one kind of humanist are in agreement about so much, that it is worth while pointing to an issue which absolutely divides them. It seems to me that the opposition between the two views of man is most sharply brought out in their attitudes towards death. You may feel this is an unfair choice of battlefield because in fact humanists hardly have an attitude to death. They haven't thought much about it, whereas Christians have thought rather a lot about it. But this very fact is the first point of difference between us: Christians think that nothing in life matters more than death, whereas humanists don't attach any special significance to it. To the humanist a preoccupation with death is either morbid or romantic. Death is an inevitable natural process; one should neither make a sombre fuss about it as they do in Italy nor a desperate attempt to pretend it hasn't happened as they do in California. Death is or should be essentially a matter of public hygiene: we must be kind to the bereaved relatives and get rid of the body before it begins to smell. That is really all there is to it. Of course a humanist does not have to advocate the clinical dreariness of the crematorium; he may very well feel that the traditional ceremonies of death are of value to society, that they provide an accepted framework within which personal grief can be contained. In this way the *Dies Irae* or *South Rampart Street Parade* are justified by their relation to life, not death. Death is an incident in a man's life which happens to have a great effect on the lives of others; it need have no more significance for the man himself than any other incident in his life. Death is merely one moment among many, it just happens to be the last of the series. As we may treasure the last letter written by a dead friend, so we may pay special attention to his last moments of life, but they have no intrinsic special interest. A man's greatest work may have been over many years before his death. The high

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

point in his life when he was most vital, most *there*, may be long in the past. Death may be simply a tidying up of the remains. I read recently a biography of Florence Nightingale and discovered to my astonishment that she did not die until 1910. Her extraordinary impact on the world was long past. According to her biographer

> In 1901 darkness closed in on her. Her sight failed completely . . . at the same time her mind began to fail . . . she lay for hours in a state of coma . . . After February 1910 she no longer spoke. The iron frame which had endured the cold and fevers of the Crimea, which had been taxed and driven in forty years of gigantic labours, still lived on, deprived of memory, of sensation, of sight, but still alive. The end came on August 13.

Now the humanist will very naturally regard the actual physical death as a relatively trivial occurrence in the life of Miss Nightingale, and this I think is his real clash with the Christian. For the Christian the most significant thing in Miss Nightingale's life was what happened on August 13 1910, far more important than all her labours for the British army, for hospitals, and for India. The Christian will of course admit that the socially significant part of Miss Nightingale's life was finished well before her death, but for him the significance of her life cannot in the end be assessed by reference to her position in this society, only by reference to her position in the community of charity.

A philosophical moralist asked to judge between say Dr Schweitzer and Hitler would weigh up the good deeds of one against the wicked deeds of the other—always supposing he was prepared to pass any judgement at all. He might say that Dr Schweitzer is a good man because in spite of one or two failings here and there and the odd human weakness, his life on the whole has been a record of good works, sincere love for his fellow man and intellectual integrity. His judgement would be arrived at by weighing the good deeds against the bad. This same idea of judging a life by weighing good deeds against sins is sometimes, rather surprisingly, to be found in mediaeval representations of the judgement of a soul—you see a pair of scales with the devil heaping sins into one side while good deeds, or sometimes the soul itself is sitting in the other pan. I say this is surprising because it completely misrepresents the Christian idea of judgement—this is not at all a matter of weighing good against bad. It is fair enough to pass judgement, if you must, on the *life* of a man by assessing his different activities but for the Christian the judgement is not a judgement on a man's life but a judgement on the man himself. This judgement is death.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For the Christian a man's eternal fate depends not on the balance of good and evil in his life but on whether or not he has in him the power of divine love at his death. This seems a shocking doctrine when we first realise what it says. So I want now to try to explain how it makes sense. The whole of life is a preparation for death because it is only from death that eternal life can spring. Death is critical, I suggest, because a man is called upon to make death his act, to make it a sacrificial offering, and this he can only do by the divine power of charity in him. Without this death will not be his own; he will never accept death, and this is damnation. In other words I take *literally* the idea that a man must lose his life in order to save it. What is required of every man is that he should die through love for the Father, as Christ did on the cross. This notion may become clearer later on.

Because of the fall of man the transition from secular to sacred is through death, there is no other way; death which is the punishment of fallen man has become, because of the cross, the way to resurrection and new life. To understand this we must first try to get clear the relation between the old world of corruption and the new world of divine life, the relationship between the corruptible flesh in which Christ became incarnate and which he shared with us, and the glorious body in which he rose from the dead, which we are to share with him.

In the first place we must notice that we have here a genuine passing over, not a substitution. It is the same body that died on the cross and is now in glory, a real human body, part of our race. This is surely part of the point of the strange story about Thomas putting his fingers in the prints of the nails, but in the second place this same body is now transfigured into new life. It is important to hang on to both these facts. What it means is that our flesh, our natural life, is not just the *opposite* of the risen life, for it is this human flesh that is going to be transfigured, it is not going to be wiped out and replaced by something else. This is why traditional Catholic theology resists the identification of nature with sin. It is true that our natural life is sinful—this is what we mean by the doctrine of the fall—but it is not as some Christians have said the same thing to be natural and to be sinful. It was not just from a corrupt affection for pagan philosophers that the Catholic Church stood out against the reformers' teaching that nature is utterly corrupt. She was not resisting the Protestant idea in the name of Aristotle and natural law, but in the name of her theology of the redemption. The transition to the risen world demands that we deny both sin and nature, that we repent and that we die. It is important to see that these are not the same

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sort of denial. Sin is the sheer opposite of grace; it is simply abjured and there is an end to it, it has no root of good in it. In the baptismal ceremony we simply renounce Satan and turn to Christ; there is no sense in which sin is redeemed. But the flesh is not abjured. It is denied only that it may rise again. It is this mortal flesh that puts on incorruption.

Thus because of the fall the flesh is at odds with divine life and it is for this reason that it is through *death* that we are saved. We can see the redemptive act of Christ as a passing-over from the life of perishable flesh to new life, but because of the distortion in the fabric of creation this movement is dialectical; it is not a smooth transition from old to new, and the flesh must be crucified in order to rise again. In St John, Christ refers to his passion as his consecration; he is set aside and made sacred, he is sacrificed. In a fallen world sacrifice implies dying to the profane in order to belong to the sacred.

What is required of the Christian is that he make the same journey as Christ. If he is to live the new life in Christ he must die as Christ did. For the Christian, death is the supreme moment of any man's life just because it was the supreme moment of Christ's life. It was his 'hour', as he calls it in St John, it was the whole purpose of his coming. Everything in his life leads towards his 'lifting up'; throughout St John we are reminded of the approach of this hour which is to give meaning to all he does. If we are to be one with Christ in his mission we must be one with him in death, his death and ours.

There are several senses in which we can be said to unite ourselves with Christ's death. We do so sacramentally in baptism—for as many as are baptised in Christ Jesus are baptised in his death. That is to say we symbolise our death to the world and in doing so share sacramentally, but only sacramentally, in the risen life. Secondly, we can die metaphorically in Christ; that is to say we can deny ourselves, practice mortification (make ourselves dead)—this is what we do in Lent (part of the time anyway). Thirdly and most importantly we can literally and physically die in Christ—it is this that is above all demanded of us.

I should like to say a little more about what I have called 'metaphorical' death in Christ. We do not really die during Lent but we so to speak rehearse for death, we prepare ourselves to accept death. Giving up various things that we want and cling to is a sort of flexing of the muscles to give up the thing we cling to most of all, our lives. Martyrdom comes less easily to the self-indulgent man, and not only to the self-indulgent man but to the man who has not denied himself. But even though we have the authority of St Paul for comparing self-denial with athletic

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

training, it is not this pyschological effect on us that matters first of all. The primary value of mortification lies in the fact that it is a way of uniting ourselves with the suffering Christ. It is because this voluntary anticipation of death is an expression of love that it has its first value. The fact that it leaves us a little more detached from ourselves is a secondary thing—though of some significance, as we shall see later, for the doctrine of purgatory. Let me repeat this to get it clear: penance is first of all valuable as an expression of charity and one by which our love is fostered and grows, but it also has the effect of making us a little less bound up in self. Now it will I hope be clear that the second of these effects is not possible without the first. Penance which is not performed through love of God and man not only does not increase our charity but it does not detach us from ourselves. On the contrary we become even more tied up in ourselves in yet subtler ways. This business of being tied up in oneself is going to be important later. At this point it is probably worth pausing to notice the difference between the Christian idea of self-denial and the philosopher's idea of self-control.

A man who is concerned with the good life will recognise the importance of self-control. It is necessary to strike a civilised mean between over-indulgence in what we like and a harsh and barbarous repression of our desires. The educated man will be moderate in his pleasures and not enslaved by them. This is an admirable ideal that would be accepted by humanists and Christians alike, but it is not what a Christian means by self-denial. It is not, of course, that the Christian disapproves of self-control; it is just that he means something different by mortification. He will also point out that self-control which is not animated by charity will soon stiffen and die, but that is another point. The essential difference is that whereas the philosopher as such is concerned with the good life, the Christian is concerned with death. Whereas self-control has its value because by it a man lives well, self-denial has its value because by it a man dies well.

The point of contact between the philosophical moralist and the Christian is not to be found here. The analogy of the Christian life is not to be found in the philosopher's account of the good life, but in the philosopher's account of what would seem to be a very unusual kind of life, the life of the hero, of the man who gives up life rather than betray his standards. Most people would recognise that there can be circumstances in which the good life involves the choice of death. This is the kind of thing that happens to resistance workers and revolutionaries and other outstandingly heroic men. It is not to all appearances, and so

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

far as the philosopher can see, the common lot of man. Most of us will die in our beds or in street accidents or blasted by the bomb, some few of us will no doubt be hanged, but in any case it will be an unavoidable business; it is a minority who choose death for their convictions.

Now I am saying that according to the the Christian message all men are really required to lay down their lives in this way. The real world as it is revealed in the light of faith is a heroic world. There is no casual death, there is only a choice between martyrdom and betrayal. If this were true then it would be clear why death holds its special significance for the Christian. If the only way to be saved is through physical martyrdom then obviously the actual moment of death is, as the Spaniards say, the moment of truth, deciding a man's eternal fate.

We should now pause for a moment and consider the utter implausibility of what I am suggesting. In the first place not only are very few people actually martyred for the faith, but an actual majority of canonised saints are not martyrs. And whatever we may feel about the right of the Church to declare a man to be a saint, it seems (to say the least) odd to have a Christian theory of sanctity which excludes from heaven not only St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and St Francis but also the Virgin Mary—the fact that it allows in King Charles I is at best a minor consolation. It would seem therefore false to hold that to be saved we must die as martyrs.

In answer to this objection I should say that what essentially makes a man a martyr is not the publicity surrounding his death but the attitude he takes towards it. A martyr is a man who gives up his life for the love of God. The paradigm case of this is the man who is offered a free choice between dying and doing something contrary to the love of God—in such circumstances the nature of the business is clear. It is this sort of case that defines the attitude of mind in question. I mean this: if you had to describe what it is to be someone's friend, you would probably describe the sort of things you would expect a friend to do—the kind of behaviour that would lead us to say: Fred is a friend of Charlie whereas George is not. Now it is of course possible in particular circumstances for Fred to be a friend of Charlie and yet not to show any of this behaviour. Nevertheless what we mean by friendship is described by describing the normal or paradigm case. Now martyrdom is, I am suggesting, the paradigm case of sanctity, and it may be for this reason that the first saints to be honoured in the Church were the martyrs. Martyrs in fact are not a special kind of saint, but every saint is some kind of martyr. What is common to all saints is a certain way of taking death.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A martyr does it publicly, another saint may do it privately. But in both cases there is an actual abandonment of life, a positive willingness to die, and this is required for sanctity. There is, of course, an obvious objection to this view. One afternoon some months ago I found myself being driven at about 50 m.p.h. along the centre lane of the Watford by-pass, and I was interested to see a lorry also occupying the centre lane but coming in the opposite direction. In the two or three seconds before impact I did not decide whether or not I was willing to accept death, instead I was working out the best position for my legs—about which I have come to think I may have miscalculated. Now under only slightly different conditions I should now be exceedingly expert about the next world, though unable to pass on the information. Yet it seems on my theory that since I had no chance voluntarily to accept death as a martyr does, I could not be saved.

There is much to be said about this objection but before dealing with it I should like to look at another point which might be raised. I have said that sanctity demands a positive willingness to die, and it may be asked: does this mean that all suicides are saints? This is not merely a frivolous point, for in the difference between suicide and martyrdom lies a difference between two whole approaches to life and death. The Christian is often accused by people like Robert Graves of rejecting life, of finding no value in transitory and created things, of undervaluing human love and ordinary natural pleasures, of looking with suspicion on beauty and artistry. The true Christian is harsh and monkish, given to smashing statuary and refusing a drink. If in practice the Roman Church does not do this kind of thing it is only because she has been infected with creeping paganism. There are of course cultured clerics who go in for Ingmar Bergmann and Brecht and Millicent Martin, but they don't really like any of this stuff; it is just bait to get you into the confessional.

Now I think the people who believe this about Christianity, including of course some Christians, do so because in a sense they confuse martyrdom with suicide. The suicide chooses death because for one reason or another, and normally I suppose through some mental breakdown, he feels life to be insupportable. Life has become an enemy to be cheated by death. For the suicide life is hostile, and it is this sort of hostility to life that is expressed in what is commonly called puritanism. For the suicide death is a means of escaping from life, for the martyr it is a means of offering his life. The suicide and the martyr have it in common that neither of them think of life as an absolute good. In this they both

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reject a facile humanism, and it is perhaps for this reason that the optimistic humanist, seeing them both as enemies, confuses them together. Christian humanism then implies a delight in the good things of this world combined with a willingness to sacrifice them all for the absolute good. It is just because of their value that the sacrifice is meaningful. It is not just a case of being prepared if necessary to give up what we value—if it comes to the point of choosing. For everyone it does come to the point, everyone actually has to give up absolutely everything, for this is what happens when you die. We have all had experience of minor or major deprivations. Some of us have tried to give up smoking for Lent; those of us who have been in prison will have had similar deprivations. Death is the taking away not just of this or that luxury or necessity, but of everything. It is the loss of the body, the loss of all communion with our fellowmen, the loss of all new experience or imagination. It is a kind of absolute solitary confinement in the dark. Annihilation, you might say, would not be so bad, for there would be nothing left to be deprived, but in fact we have hanging over us the horrible threat of immortality. Death means that we survive deprived of everything. I have spoken of self-denial as a detachment from self; death is the loss of self, total abandonment. What is required of man is that he makes this abandonment his own act, an act of sacrifice in union with the act of Christ on the cross. If he fails to make death his own act, it remains his enemy. If it is his own act he passes through it in Christ to resurrection, if he does not he suffers death as an enemy for eternity.

Let us now return to the objection I put a little while ago: that all this seems to demand a highly conscious and wide-awake approach to death. If I were conscious in my last moments, ideally lying quietly in bed, not distracted by intense pain, and able to collect my thoughts, then no doubt I could accept my death and offer it sacrificially in union with Christ, but in fact most deaths are either quicker or messier than this and quite a lot of people simply die in their sleep. Do I have to postulate that everyone is miraculously given the necessary few moments of consciousness before death (even when they obviously aren't) or do I have to say that everyone who dies suddenly or unconscious is damned?

In order to answer this question we have to see that the act of dying is beyond our human powers. This absolute self-sacrifice requires a self-transcendence of which we are not capable. What is required of us is not just that we die, not even that we die voluntarily, but that our death be an expression of divine love. We must become 'obedient unto death' in charity, and this of course like any other divine act is only possible

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

through the divine life that we share in grace. In other words the act of death is possible to us only through grace; like faith it is something that exceeds our capabilities.

The act of death that I do is then first of all an act of God in me; it is only secondarily my own act. It is first of all a result of the fact that I am in Christ. Now to have the divine life in me normally means to do human acts which are also divine. To share the life of Christ involves expressing divine love in our actions. But what sort of human behaviour will follow from my possession of divine life depends on my human condition. The expression of divine life in a child of six is not the same as its expression in a man of thirty, a man filled with divine love does not behave the same way when he is asleep and when he is awake, when he is sane and when he goes mad—in other words the mere fact that he is asleep or very young or insane does not mean that God cannot act in and through him. The obvious example here is that of infant baptism. Belief in the efficacy of infant baptism depends on the belief that what happens in baptism is first of all an act of God, not an act of man. Adult baptism naturally demands of the adult a proclamation of the faith which it brings him, for he is humanly able to proclaim it. Faith for him is something articulate, something he understands to some extent. In the infant the same faith is present in the way suited to an infant—unconscious, radically present, not yet formulated.

Now I would suggest that when a Christian dies 'in a state of grace', filled with divine love, if he is conscious it is a bit like an adult baptism—the effect of grace will be for him personally and consciously to make the act of self-abandonment, the act of death. But if he is unconscious or frenzied with pain, grace will still take its effect though in a different human mode. The deciding factor is not the conscious effort we make but the work of God in us.

It will be clear then that in death as in baptism there are two things to be considered; the act of God and the act of man brought about by this act of God. When a child has been baptised, because of the act of God he possesses radically the Christian faith, but he needs religious teaching of some kind so that he may come to possess his faith in an adult and fully human way. Education does nothing to the faith but it does something to the child who has it.

Now divine act and human acceptance are in the same way two elements in death. If a man dies unconscious there remains still his human acceptance of death, his human realisation of the self-abandonment that death involves—this I believe is Purgatory. For the man who

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has consciously and absolutely performed his death, given up his life entirely to God, there is of course no purgatory—hence the Christian tradition that purgatory is not for martyrs. But the man who has not been able to do that in this life must do it in death. It is important to see that in purgatory the decision has already been made; purgatory is the vestiges of death, not a new opportunity to die. Purgatory is not an extension after death of the time available for decision, it is the realisation of the consequences of the decision to die, to be totally self-denied. Purgatory is a sort of time of penance, of loss of self. The difference between purgatory and Lent is just this. The penances of Lent are a voluntary anticipation of death, performed for love of God, and as such they help to foster in us the life of love. Lent makes us love God more. Purgatory is not something we take upon ourselves in this way but an inevitability that we have to face, it is not something we do freely and spontaneously and hence it does not lead to any increase in our love—purgatory as theologians say is not meritorious.

Because purgatory means wrenching ourselves away from ourselves, because it means an absolute self-denial, its difficulty will depend on how closely we are bound up in ourselves—it will depend in fact on the sort of life we have led. If when we come to die we are fairly detached from ourselves then the self-abandonment of death will not come so hard—either as a conscious act at the hour of death or, if we die unconscious, as the realisation of purgatory. The thing which will make us detached from ourselves is contrition, sorrow for our sins, mortification. The thing that binds us closer to ourselves and our lives is sin. Every time we sin we choose our own way rather than that of God and every sin makes us in this sense more selfish. Even though God in his mercy comes to us to give us the grace to repent, so that our sin no longer cuts us off from him, the psychological effects of the sin may remain—it is easier to commit that sin again than it was before. We have to do quite a lot of work to undo the damage we have done to ourselves by sin, even after the essential damage to our relationship with God has been repaired. If we neglect this work during life then facing the fact of death is much more difficult.

Thus although the Christian must insist that the vital judgement, the decision between heaven and hell, depends not on how he lives but on how he dies, depends on whether he has in him at the moment of challenge the grace to die in Christ or not, nevertheless he also holds that in a secondary sense his fate in the next world does depend on how he has lived, for the difficulty of purgatory depends entirely on what

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sort of a man he has made of himself—the more self-indulgent he is the more bitter is the self-abandonment required of him.

Now what of hell? I think it is important in trying to present a picture of hell to have some idea of how the picture is to be used, what aspect of the matter it is supposed to illuminate. There are basically two pictures of hell, both of which I think valuable, but valuable in different ways—it is disastrous when one picture is used to do the work of the other. The first picture is of hell as a lake of burning sulphur with devils, pitchforks and the rest of it—a most useful picture. The second is the picture of hell as what I shall call the 'undead', the incapacity to accept death. I have read only one good book about damnation, *Pincher Martin* by William Golding. Those who know it will remember the inability to submit to 'the black lightning'—this is the second picture.

When our ancestors talked of hell they were concerned about the character of man, but when we talk about it we are frequently concerned about the character of God. This is what makes the two pictures. From the point of view of the character of man, the important thing about the picture of hell is that it should be a thing to avoid, and this is admirably shown forth in the notion of boiling sulphur. Most normal people would be frightened of falling into a vat of boiling sulphur and would do almost anything to avoid this. The picture implies that this is a sensible attitude towards hell. If one is setting out to paint this sort of picture of hell, a picture to be used in this way, then it is merely silly to let the sulphur cool a little or give the damned souls a tea-break—the *point* of the picture is its nastiness.

The mistakes begin however when we use this old-fashioned type of picture as a clue to the character of God. God is the kind of person who enjoys pushing people into boiling sulphur, he must be a maniac. This is not adult behaviour at all. And so we have another picture of hell, this time a picture which stresses what was left on one side in the other one, that hell is a state we get ourselves into without any help from God at all. God does not make hell, we do. Let me here repeat the warning about using the pictures in the wrong way. It is no good using the second kind of picture as a substitute for the first, to do the same kind of job. The second kind of picture is not dealing with the nastiness of hell. So if someone says 'hell is absolute isolation' or something of the kind, then we are simply muddled if we say, 'Oh, I'm so relieved, I'm sure I could stand that a lot better than burning sulphur.' If after examining the concept of hell, cutting out the mythological and metaphorical bits, one comes to the conclusion that it may not be so bad after all, then clearly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

one has gone wrong somewhere, for part of the point of hell is that it would be just as bad after all. If we say that we make our own hell then there is the temptation to think that we won't make it so bad for ourselves, and that is why the boiling sulphur picture is a valuable one to have as well.

The fire of hell is God. God is terrible and no man can look upon him and live, he is a consuming fire. To be safe in the presence of God you must be yourself sacred, you must share in God's power and life. To have to come into the presence of God without this protection is damnation. That is one picture of hell, the fundamental biblical one—the other biblical theme is based on the idea of hell as a rubbish dump smouldering away like Gehenna outside Jerusalem.

But hell is also the inability to accept death. The damned man is he who does not die in Christ, for whom death is therefore not a means of resurrection to new life. He is not able to make the act of self-sacrifice required of him. He is unable to see why he should. I picture the damned as spending their time continually justifying themselves to themselves, constantly showing how right they were and why they have no need to repent.

> In the small circle of pain within the skull
> You still shall tramp and tread one endless round
> Of thought, to justify your action to yourselves
> Weaving a fiction that unravels as you weave
> Being forever in the hell of make-believe.

All the souls in hell, I think, are quite convinced that they have been damned unjustly. The analogy I find most useful is that of the child who has lost his temper and is sulking. He wants, of course, to return to the affection of his friends but he is blowed if he is going to apologise, his pride keeps him out even though he wants very much to return. Everybody is fully prepared to receive him back if only he will make the gesture of returning but this he finds himself unable to do. He cannot perform the self-abandonment required. He is unable to die.

Anyone in hell who was sorry for his sin would of course instantly be in heaven; the point of hell is that this does not happen. If it did hell would be nothing more than the prolongation of the life of the sinner, and death would be no judgement at all. Death would not reveal sin for what it is—the paralysis of will which makes love impossible. We must remember that every time we repent of serious sin in this life we do so only in consequence of a special intervention of divine grace. Sin, like suicide, we can do all by ourselves, but once the life is gone we no

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

longer have the power to help ourselves, we can kill ourselves but we cannot come back from the dead ourselves. The very first beginnings of our desire to have a desire to be sorry for our sins is an intervention by God, the beginning of a resurrection from the dead. Life is a countless series of these gratuitous interventions of mercy, none of which we deserve, to none of which we have any right at all. They happen through our union with the body of Christ, our living bodies are in touch with him; when we come to die, the way we are united with him is through dying in him. If we fail to do this the channel of grace is no more. We are left with ourselves and our self-righteousness confronted by God but unable to die into him.

I have spoken of purgatory and of hell, and perhaps I should finally say something of heaven. But in fact I have already done what is possible in those previous articles in which I discussed the sacraments. For in the sacraments our faith is not merely a mental reaching out to what is to come; rather we make contact with what is really present now. In them we are united now to the risen body of Christ. This is what we mean when we say that our sacraments are not just ordinary symbols as were for instance those under the old law, for what they signify is present. Of course heaven is not present to us in the sacraments as it will be after the resurrection. It is, as we say, present in sacrament, in mystery, available to us only in faith—present to us through being symbolised, but none the less present in reality and not merely because we are thinking about it.

If you ask a Christian for his account of heaven, his best answer is to point to the sacraments of the Church:

> Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink
> his blood you have no life in you; he who eats my
> flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I
> will raise him up on the last day.

The eucharist has in intrinsic relationship to the next world, so much so that the next world is best defined as what the eucharist realises and shows forth.

We do not know what the next world will look like, for our sacramental prophecies, like most prophecies, do not tell us that kind of thing. Just as the pasch or the songs of the suffering servant did not foretell what the passion and resurrection of Christ would look like, but rather proclaimed what it would mean, so the eucharist does not show us what the communion of our bodies in the risen Christ will look like. But we do know it will be a matter not of souls or spirits or ghosts

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press

but of real corporeal human beings, though the condition of the body may, as St Paul says, be as different from our present perishable state as is the plant from the seed.

Deterring Independence

TOWARDS A CATECHETICAL RENEWAL IN ENGLAND

CHARLES BOXER, O.P.

English Catholics today are facing a serious balance-of-payments crisis. Publishers' lists carry a large number of translations of theological books from the continent, and it is hard to think of more than a handful of English theological works, except, of course, Newman's, which have been exported. *Honest to God* has just appeared in the German bookshops, and of course one can always buy the novels of Muriel Spark, Graham Greene, and Bruce Marshall. It will take some time before our imports stimulate a spirit of renewal strong enough to produce a comparable movement that can make its own export contribution. But the recent interest in imported books is a welcome sign of the breakdown of English isolationism. In the past we have tenaciously resisted what Kingsley Amis calls 'book-foisting propaganda on behalf of abroad and its inhabitants'. Our deep-rooted national immunity to the influences of abroad can only, happily, go so far in a Church that is Catholic; sooner or later movements generated and developed abroad reach the stage of maturity at which the church adopts them officially; then they become compulsory imports whether we like it or not.

Practically speaking this is a very uncomfortable position to be in. We find ourselves having to accept reforms of which we have had very little knowledge or practical experience, and to which we have made no specifically English contribution. A movement which has developed in a lively Church experience abroad, in theological writing, discussions and experiments, suddenly arrives on our doorstep in its finished form. It takes us by surprise and we have to undergo enormous adjustments in order to incorporate it into our own tradition. It is foreign on two

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269359300001403 Published online by Cambridge University Press